

THE BRONTË POETRY : A FOUNTAIN OF FAITH



**A
THESIS
SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**By
APENILOTHA
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

**TO
NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY
SHILLONG - 793 014
JULY, 2001**

INTRODUCTION

The three Brontë sisters- Charlotte, Emily and Anne- along with the only brother Branwell, and father Patrick and mother Maria constitute a family of writers. As the members of a close-knit family the children grew and developed under the direct guidance and affection of the parents, especially of the father whose strongly-held principles were to exercise such marks of discipline and determination on the growing children as to give them the distinction of the Brontë children, and later, of the Brontë sisters. The sense of determination and faith they inherited from him was so strong and far-reaching as to drive them against all odds and resistance towards their evolution as women and writers. Even Robert Southey's most deadening and masculine admonition to Charlotte that "Literature cannot be the business of a woman's life, and it ought not be"¹ failed to deter them from their resolve and they held on to the quest of their literary vocation. In the face of dearth, disease and death, and the drudgery of governessing the precocious clergy-man's daughters sharpened their inborn talent with extensive reading and rigorous training whereupon the inspiration they received from their Cambridge graduate father and the stimulus they felt from his books along with those of others lying on the selves contributed significantly towards shaping them into would-be accomplished writers: "The highest stimulus as well as the liveliest pleasure

we had, lay in attempts at literary composition,"² so was Charlotte Brontë to recollect and record the genesis of their literary career.

✓ The three Brontë sisters popularly known as the celebrated Victorian novelists were primarily poets. ✓ Though they published novels³ towards the close of their life, they had been writing poems since their early childhood, with the occasional outbursts of their juvenilia in prose.⁴ The publication of *Poems by Currer, Ellis, Action Bell* by Aylott and Jones, London, in May 1846 is proof enough that the sisters began their career in the belief that they were first and foremost poets. That their first love was poetry is further confirmed by the evidence that quite a lot of the poems of varied length, running into 140 pages, included in the *Publication* together with those excluded, such as Charlotte's 'Retrospection', Emily's 'High Waving Heather' and Anne's 'North Wind', to name only a few, are discovered to have been written as early as in the third decade of the nineteenth-century, i.e., much before the idea of writing novels was to strike their mind, and while they were still teenagers. Charlotte recollects in the following stanza of unique serenity and simplicity the product of their close partnership:

We wove a web in childhood,
A web of sunny air;
We dug a spring in infancy
Of water pure and clear.⁵

The images of weaving and web and consequently of spinning suggest that while the other children of Haworth village were engaged in the process of spinning yarns and weaving them into cloth, the Brontë children as their counterparts engaged themselves in spinning words and phrases to weave them into verses, mostly of faith. While the textile industries in the North of England polluted the air and defiled the water, the Brontë sisters cast in the same mould preserved for the spiritual regeneration of mankind the purity of both the elements, for if the 'sunny air' symbolizes the spiritual essence of God, the 'Spring' embodies in it the attributes of the 'Water of regeneration' or 'living water' or the 'living well'⁶ implying God's redemptive grace through Christ.

The stanza quoted above that begins with 'We' may fairly be viewed as a prologue to the Brontë poetry of faith, and for its 'living-well-like' quality it may rightly be called a fountain of faith, which is perennial and pure; flowing unimpeded, it transcends time and space. Except for some occasional oscillations, Emily also, like her two sisters, was quite assured of the immortality of the soul:

But I'll not fear - I will not weep
 For those whose bodies lie in asleep:
 I know there is a blessed shore
 Opening the ports for me and mine;
 And, gazing time's water o'er,
 I weary for that land divine,⁷

That Emily was weary of the phenomenal world and so she did 'weary for that land divine' is a recurrent theme in her poetry which is well-confirmed by the frequency in it of 'weary' and 'dreary' nearly sixty times. That she was convinced and confident of the 'blessed shore' – 'I know' – characteristically speaks of Emily as a woman of faith, of her belief in a blessed afterlife. It is a strong theistic assertion of personal experience, but whether at all a deity would help her secure the 'blessed shore' or the 'land divine' is not clear. Or would the one, if any, be a Christian one is not evident either. Anne's deity on the other hand is certainly and always Christian and so is her conviction:

Though friends and kindred turn away
 And laugh thy grief to scorn:
 I hear the great Redeemer say,
 'Blessed are ye that mourn'.⁸

This stanza from Anne invites a close comparison with the verse that reads, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). Similarly, Charlotte's vision is explicitly and characteristically Christian:

More I recall not, yet the vision spread
 Into a world remote, an age to come -
 And still the illumined name of Jesus shed
 A light, a clearness, through the unfolding gloom -
 And still I saw that sign, which now I see,
 That cross on the yonder brow of calvary.⁹

✓ The vision she had was of Jesus Christ who interceded for man on earth and who is ceaselessly interceding for him with God from heaven above since then. Though the images of the Cross and Calvary ordinarily speak of the crucifixion of Jesus as a historical incident, but the spreading of the vision into a remote world, and the appearance of 'A light' dispelling the gloom speak of something beyond the mere historicity of Jesus Christ. The vision then could have been a historical, mystical vision, because the intense and timeless impact it had on Charlotte- 'now I see' – projects in her heart "a Jesus as spiritually arisen within men,"¹⁰ who is significant and relevant not only for our time but for all time to come. ✓ Unless he is experienced as spiritually born in us, we may remain forlorn. ✓ She reinforces the same theme in the form of a longing for the fleeting vision in the following couplet:

✓ Oh! to behold to the truth – that sun divine,
 ✓ How doth my bosom pant, my spirit pine.¹¹

Protestant daughters of the protestant parents, ✓ the sisters conceived and formed their religious faith "upon a personal apprehension of God" admitting no human mediator to distance the relation between God (in Jesus) and man. ✓ The awakening call to understand and realize God's word, they felt, rests upon the individual with "no appeal to any authoritative body for dogmatic pronouncements."¹² They were then revolutionary; Charlotte makes the claim of her 'searching soul' explicit:

The world advances; Greek or Roman rite
 Suffices not the inquiring mind to stay;
The searching soul demands a purer light
To guide it on its upward, onward way.¹³

She further expresses her detest of 'old faith', and its rituals. It was, as she called it, a rotten faith, inadequate to quench a hungry soul, chiefly because of its dependence on the earthly priest rather than on Jesus Christ:

Our faith is rotten, all our rites defiled
 Our temples sullied, and methinks, this Man,
 With his new ordinance, so wise and mild
 Is come.¹⁴

The sisters were convinced in their heart that the soul could be saved by faith in the atoning death of Jesus Christ rather than by mere observance of the sacraments. The believer should enthrone him as ever-abiding in the heart.

With all its merits the slim *Publication* on its authors' expense could ensure but a very poor reception; despite favourable reviews only a couple of copies could sell. The sisters, however, had the satisfaction of having come to limelight. But their dream of making a fortune by writing proved futile. In all probability it was the complete failure of the slim *Publication* to make any impression on the reading public and the literary world that drove them to try their fortune with the novels. But as the sisters were Christian enough, along

with writing the novels they continued writing poems as well. Once undertaken the quest and identified their vocation, they kept themselves committed to it till death. Regardless of success and incidental failure, to persevere in the quest with God overhead is the “only [Christian] heroism.”¹⁵

Also, with their father’s interest in poetry, the sisters had accepted poetry-writing as a natural and necessary part of life. They could not live without it. It was as inevitable as breathing. It was their support and solacer. Anne in *Agnes Grey*, through the voice of the heroine, says: “When we are harassed by sorrows or anxieties, or long oppressed by any powerful feelings which we must keep to ourselves, for which we can obtain or seek no sympathy from any living creature...we often naturally seek relief in poetry.”¹⁶ With Anne, the end of writing poetry could thus be purgative and therapeutic. Charlotte also means the same when she writes in *The Professor*: “I must cultivate fortitude and cling to poetry. One is to be my support and the other my solace through life.”¹⁷ Poetry was an appropriate channel to relieve themselves of their sufferings and agonies. Emily realizes that poetry “is ever there to bring”

The hovering visions back and breathe
 New glories o’er the blighted spring
 And call a lovelier life from death
 And whisper with a voice divine
 Of real worlds as bright as thine.¹⁸

The following lines from Blake, though of a different context, may be compared with Emily's above, for their fullest import, in the sense that what great poetry does is comparable with what God does:

O, He gives us His joy
 That our grief He may destroy
 Till our grief is fled and gone
 He doth sit by us and moan.¹⁹

As for Blake, so also for Emily, "God and the Imagination are one,"²⁰ that is, God is the creative and spiritual power in man, and it is this power which creates great poetry which in its turn gives us a divine world opposed to the temporal. So in the world of the imagination Emily experiences the 'benignant power' of God with all His healing and solacing attributes, giving 'glories over the blighted spring', and 'life for death', and 'His joy' for 'our grief'. Emily would then naturally pledge to

...Welcome thee, benignant power,
 Sure solacer of human cares,
 And sweeter hope, when hope despairs!²¹

The complete bulk of poems that we now have from the sisters (excluding those from Branwell) testifies to the fact that the sisters did not care for the nonchalance shown to their meritorious poems included in the

Publication. As a result of rigorous researches of such Brontë lovers as T. J. Wise, Alex Symington, and of Clement Shorter made in the 1920s and '30s, of Tom Winifrith in the 1980s, and of C. W. Hatfield in the 1940s, we have 142 poems running into 388 pages from Charlotte Brontë, 54 poems running into 150 pages from Anne Brontë and 192 poems running into 227 pages from Emily Brontë.

While most of the poems of Emily and Anne give expression to their agonies and religious faith, a few of them celebrate the theme of unfulfilled love which ultimately sublimates itself to love celestial. With Charlotte the case is somewhat different. While a larger number of her poems are on nature and on the frustration in love, a select few explore her religious crisis and faith. And it is the theme of faith fraught with crisis and agonies that give an identity to the Brontë poetry. It is in this sphere of their poetic activity – where they complement and supplement each other – that they are seen at their best, expressing the quintessence of their religious life and experience. "No wonder that their religion should be part of the fibre of their being."²² It is then only natural that Anne should write such hymns that express the grimness followed by brightness on the ascent a Christian makes:

Believe not those, who say
 The upward path is smooth,
 Lest thou shouldst stumble in the way,
 And faint before the truth.

It is the only road
 Unto the realms of joy;
 But he who seeks that blest abode
 Must all his powers employ.

Bright hopes and pure delights
 Upon his course may beam,
 And there, amid the sternest heights,
 The sweetest flowerets gleam.²³

While in the stanzas above Anne suggests persistent efforts, Charlotte in the following stanza prescribes prayer and meditation, but the goal to be attained is the same, with the employment of courage, conviction and confidence in common, equating 'the realms of joy' and 'the blessed abode' with 'a life and world to come':

Feel no untold and strange distress –
 Only a deeper impulse given
 By lonely hour and darkened room,
 To solemn thoughts that soar to heaven,
 Seeking a life and world to come.²⁴

Anne and Charlotte talk of 'pure delights' and 'solemn thoughts' without any reference to the punishment for iniquity. Though Emily does not refer to the punishment, in no way does she exclude its possibility, and yet she

is sure of salvation because the stern judge who could condemn is also the merciful God who forgives and absolves:

What fortune may await thee there
 I will not and I dare not tell,
 But heaven is moved by fervent prayer
 And God is mercy – fare thee well!²⁵

Emily comes closer to such Protestant writers who believe with Tyndale that the law and gospel are inseparable. This belief became the most dominant factor in their writing to such an extent that Anne propagated what was to be called the doctrine of universal salvation.

With faith in God and in the immortality of the soul, together with an undeterred trust in His mercy, the Bronte poetry was written in an age of unfaith and doubt created by the advancement of such sciences as Botany and Zoology, in particular. The impact of the scientific advancement brought a sea-change in men's attitude to Christian faith, questioning the existence of God and the divinity in man, as a result of which there emerged a controversy, called the Victorian Controversy, which "finds well-known expression in Tennyson and Browning."²⁶ Browning begins the final section of his *Pauline* with shuddering questions on the dehumanising effect of science that gives rise to doubt opposed to faith:

O God, where do they tend - these struggling aims?
 What would I have? What is this 'sleep' which seems
 To bound all? Can there be a 'waking' point
 Of Crowning life?²⁷

The 'struggling aims' for mad pursuit, the poet experiences, drug us into sleep of spiritual darkness, and the 'Crowning life' is denied. If faith fell asleep, the fallen humanity might tumble in the Godless abyss beyond recovery and redemption, and therefore the poet shrieks in agony for help from above – 'O God'.

For many men and women of Tennyson's and Browning's generation as also for the Brontës' generation, it seemed an awful time when human life due to the conflict between science and faith could be viewed meaningless as though the grave appeared to be the end of all, and the sky above the universe a dead expanse from which God himself had disappeared.²⁸ Though Tennyson expresses the Victorian spirit of adventure, exploration and expansion in one of his classic utterances: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield"²⁹, he does not support this terrestrial spirit in its exclusiveness from the spiritual. The absence of belief in God and afterlife makes meaningful life absolutely impossible. So while he desires the advancement of knowledge, he also suggests in *In Memoriam*³⁰ a harmonious concurrence between the mind (the intellectual) and the soul (the spiritual):

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
 But more of reverence in us dwell;
 That mind and soul, according well,
 May make one music as before.³¹

Tennyson's preference for 'reverence' for the spiritual is characteristic of his love for God, but his use of 'us' in the stanza also imposes on the poet Laureate a social responsibility that he should inculcate in people the same preferential love for God. The Brontë sisters, unlike Tennyson, did not experience any conflicting controversy between religion and science, faith and unfaith, nor did they feel any need for working out a compromise either for themselves or for people around them.

Not that the sisters lived in intellectual isolation, nor were they unaware of what was going on in the world beyond their Haworth parsonage. They read sciences, specially the life sciences, and were regular subscribers of magazines and newspapers available then. Over and above, Mr. Patrick Brontë had provided them with a library of their own, and helped them "improve their scientific knowledge cheaply and conveniently." If the study of "sciences" and "secular books" exercised "an impact on their intellectual development", "the Bible, prayer books, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* remained the lasting influence on them."³² Though as writers of religious sensibilities, they realized that the satisfaction of spiritual hunger was the deepest human need, they could also discern that "there is an underlying

conflict between scientific and religious mentalities, the one dealing in testable, the other deserting testability for faith, the one relishing change as scientific understanding advances, the other finding solace in eternal verities.”³³ As is evident from their poetry, the sisters welcomed ‘eternal verities’, and avoided the prevalent, underlying conflict, for their sole concern and quest was for a poetry of faith. And therefore, theirs is a poetry with a difference.

The young Brontes thought it an artistic necessity to create for them their own imaginary worlds as substitutes for England; Charlotte and Branwell founded the Kingdom of Angria, and Emily and Anne of Gondal as the scenes for their poems. These Kingdoms, unlike England, could be free from what Tennyson was to call “ever-broadening Commerce” and “ever-brightening Science.”³⁴ Congenial to the heart and soul, the twain Kingdoms are generative of peace, tranquillity and serenity. I quote a Gondal poem from Emily:

Cold clear and blue the morning heaven
 Expands its arch on high
 Cold clear and blue Lake Wernas water
 Reflects that winters sky
 The moon has set but Venus shines
 A silent silvery star.³⁵

While on one hand, Emily, by an avoidance of punctuation, ensures uninterrupted internal rhythm in the lines, on the other, she makes them reveal

a mind that was calm and content and could produce such tranquil moments of uninterrupted solitude. The following lines from Anne depict a typical Gondal scenario of brightness and beauty:

Brightly the sun of summer shone
 Green fields and waving woods upon,
 And soft winds wandered by;
 Above, a sky of purest blue,
 Around, bright flowers of loveliest hue.
 Allured the gazer's eye.

The scene depicted in Anne fails to sustain a comparison with the one in Emily. Perhaps finding it deficient in its impact on the spirit, as it "allured the gazer's eye" only, Anne rejected it and withdrew within from without:

... And called my willing soul away,
 From earth, and air, and sky,³⁶

The withdrawal was not so much from Gondal as from a world of the senses, of change and decay. Similarly, the inclination to withdrawal is a dominant theme in Emily's poetry, because "The world within", she says, "I doubly prize", for it is a world

... Where guile and hate and doubt
 And cold suspicion never rise;
 Where thou and I and liberty

Have undisputed sovereignty.³⁷

✓ “The world within” opposed to “the world without” is God’s space in us wherein dwell undisputed “thou and I and liberty.” ✓ This is a space she explores, and which she believes can ensure her release from the confinement of the hostile phenomenal world. Whether in Gondal or in a non-Gondal world, Emily believed with Patrick Brontë in the sovereign existence of such a space in man, for “The mind is its own place.”³⁸

Anne also in a Gondal poem called ‘The North Wind’ seeks liberty for her exodus into the world beyond the world here and now, and thus desires to break open her dungeon-like captivity, in order to overcome her spiritual agony

Confined and hopeless as I am,

Oh, speak of liberty!

Oh, tell me of my mountain home,

And I will become thee!³⁹

✓ Both the sisters strive for liberty from the visible world; while Emily experiences it in ‘the world within’, Anne cries for it to reach her from above.

Like Emily and Anne, Charlotte also looks into her kingdom of Angria (which she believes is fair and intact from the murky England) for spiritual joy.

In an Angria poem, called 'The Vision' she expresses her spiritual realization of what could be to others mere physical sensation:

I heard sweet voices, not like human sound,
 But tuneful of articulate harmony,
 I saw no shape, but oft their floated round
 A zephyr soft, and breathing from the sky
 As if some unseen form in light wings flitted by!⁴⁰

The voices she heard were spiritual, and though tuneful of articulate harmony, yet in essence, of no tune (to others), coming from above and audible only to the spiritual ears of the poetess. The incorporeal nightingale is always singing, but only Keats could hear her sweet song. Charlotte's experience compares well with Keats's, and thus we may see in her a truly romantic temperament, inclined to seek beauty and truth in mysterious realms of experience, and able to find the same without any straining or forcing of herself. She could have been a purely secular poet, so strong were her gifts for unravelling and enjoying the truth beyond external nature. But her love for this world was countered by a strong belief in God, and this broke into her life and gave her work a new direction and special distinction:

O God of Heaven! What now is Earth to me –
 What all the power, the grandeur, she can give?
 But for the joys of sweet tranquillity
 I care not now to live.⁴¹

In the 'Lines written Beside a Fountain', Charlotte's conception of Christian faith in the joys of sweet tranquillity with God in Heaven, defying death, could still be a flickering experience only, for though she seems to have forsaken the earthly attraction, she in fact was not yet immune from it.

It is appropriate to cite here a romantically exciting incident from her fifth novelette, *Caroline Vernon*.⁴² It was Zamorna's creed that all things bright and beautiful live[d] for him, and Miss Caroline was such a thing for him. He said what remained to be said to her, "If I were a bearded Turk, I would take you to my Harem." Her guardian was gone, something terrible yet acceptable sat in his place. The silent lonely library, far away from the inhabited part of the house, was getting a deeper shade in all its Gothic recesses. She grew faint with dread, she dared not stir. "You are Zamorna", cried Caroline, "But let me go." He entreated "I have a little home, somewhere near the heart of my own kingdom, Angria... it is a plain house outside, but has some rooms within as splendid as any saloon in Victoria Square."

He smiled as Caroline looked at him with wonder and fear mixed. His face changed to an expression of tenderness more dangerous than the fiery excitement which had startled her before. He then caressed her fondly, and lifted with his fingers the heavy curls which were lying on her neck. She no longer wished to leave him, she clung to his side, infatuation was stealing over

her. The thought of separation or return to Eden was dreadful. The man before her was her guardian again, but he was also the Duke of Zamorna. She loved, she feared; Passion tempted her, Conscience warned her. But in a mind like Miss Caroline's, conscience was feeble opposed to passion. The fatal man began to reign supreme in her heart.

Passion and Conscience were the two opposing forces in Charlotte's life. During her youthful days, especially due to suppression, passion was naturally stronger in her literary utterance, which was the expression of her real life. Conscience was a warning guardian, but finally gave way to passion. Caroline is the replica of Charlotte herself. By the way of catharsis Charlotte was trying to dislodge passion from her so that she could wake up to the call of conscience and devote herself to the cause of faith in her personal life. But the exodus was to be full of agonized anguish:

My love is almost anguish now,
 It beats so strong and true;
 'Twere rapture, could I deem that thou
 Such anguish ever knew.⁴³

But before she could ease herself of the Romantic agony, she fell into another; this time she developed Romantic passion for her teacher, M. Heger who taught her German and French in Brussels in Belgium. Her infernal passion for the young magnetic married man was so irresistible as to drive her

into a sexual relationship with him. To her, he was now another Zamorna, of course, Brusselized, not Angrian. Madame Heger impeded and the passion remained unrequited, which Charlotte Brontë was to romantically transform and celebrate as the dominant theme in her two autobiographical novels – *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*. The same theme pervades some of her poems, as for example, ‘Frances’:

‘Unloved – I love; unwept – I weep;
 Grief I restrain – hope I repress:
 Vain is this anguish - fixed and deep;
 Vainer, desires and dreams of bliss.’⁴⁴

Though Charlotte had to court defeat and sustain the agony of emotional frustration, the eventful incident changed the course of her life. She confessed that she had lost “sight of the Creator in idolatry of the creature,”⁴⁵ and therefore she longed for “the pure fountain of Mercy” and further hoped that “I might one day become better, far better than my evil wandering thoughts, my corrupt heart, cold to the spirit and warm to the flesh, will permit me to be.”⁴⁶ This is an honest expression of a Christian heart in agony, which discloses her religious crisis and her consequent resolve:

Come Reason – Science – Learning – Thought
 To you my heart I dedicate;
 I have a faithful subject brought:
 Faithful because most desolate.’⁴⁷

'Reason' awakes conscience, 'Science' relates to theology, and 'Learning' to God and good thought; they all constitute what the disillusioned Charlotte calls the 'faithful subject' – the study of the relationship between God and man – she would dedicate herself to with all her heart and soul. Sexual aberration is reprehensible, but if the lover sublimates his passion of love to God he realizes Him in him, for He is not an object of dread as an ireful judge, but the embodiment of undying love, allowing forgiveness and comfort and grace:

Now, Heaven, heal the wound which I still deeply
 feel;
 Thy glorious hosts look not in scorn on our
 poor race,
 Thy king eternal doth not iron judgement deal
 On suffering worms who seek forgiveness,
 comfort, grace.

He gave our hearts to love: He will not love
 despise,
 E'en if the gift be lost, as mine was long ago;
 He will forgive the fault, will bid the offender rise,
 Wash out with dues of bliss the fiery brand of
 woe.⁴⁸

Charlotte's poetry as well as Anne's confirms the fact that the source of regeneration and redemption lies ultimately in God's love and grace, freely

vouchsafed on men who are moved to pray and repent and be obedient, with conscience as their guide, even towards the close of their life at least.

Gentle and pious Anne did not experience any conflict between passion and conscience, for the passion she had for William Weightman was as immaculate as herself, the non-fulfilment of which, because of his sudden demise, rent her heart. Then she re-seizes her love as wish-fulfilment in *Agnes Grey*; the emotional agony of lost love remained an indelible mark on her impressionable consciousness. The sense of loss of what had been and would never be finds its pathetic expression in her sweet memorial verses:

Yes, thou art gone! and never more
 Thy sunny smile shall gladden me;
 But I may pass the old church door,
 And pace the floor that covers thee.⁴⁹

The need for emotional relief is expressing itself as a need for spiritual direction. She is therefore led to feel in the heart of her hearts that the loving God saves even those who could believe in Jesus as their Redeemer, even in the death-bed, experiencing the purgatorial fires of hell: "Lord Jesus, save me, lest I die: / Christ hear my humble prayer."⁵⁰ With her faith in the doctrine of universal salvation opposed to eternal damnation, she is confident that if despaired and defeated Cowper could be saved by his service to God that he

rendered in his poetry, then the Rev. William Weightman, a devout lover of God, must have been saved. And therefore,

It must be so, if God is love,
 Answers fervent prayer;
 Then surely thou shall dwell on high,
 And I may meet thee there.⁵¹

Her faith in the love of God was an epiphany, as Grace was so strong on her as to inspire her soul-winning poem, 'The power of Love' which brings her home the realization that

'Tis not, my own strength has saved me,
 Health, and hope, and fortitude,
 But for love,⁵²

As an Evangelistic believer who believes in the religion of the heart, Anne's love and devotion to God convinced her to reject the adamant convention of her day that hell is an abyss, not of temporary, but of eternal punishment. The heroine of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, who lives by the sure existence of the Christian God of love, asserts that the threatened fires of hell are purgative rather than everlasting, and therefore even her dying sensualist husband must ultimately be saved, for

how could I endure to think that the poor

trembling soul was hurried away to everlasting torment? It would drive me mad! But thank God, I have hope – not only from a vague dependence on the possibility that penitence and pardon might have reached him at last, but from the blessed confidence that, through whatever purging fires the erring spirit may be doomed to pass, whatever fate awaits it, still it is not lost, and [the loving] God who hateth nothing, that he made will bless it in the end.⁵³

This is Anne's firmest "espousal of the doctrine of universal salvation" opposed to "eternal damnation"⁵⁴, - a good example of how she combines an instinctive and personal philosophy of love with the dictates of her Christian conscience. With this doctrine she was perhaps a revolutionary, in advance of her times, who wounded the sentiments of the Anglican clergy, for it was not until 1877, i.e., thirty years after Anne's novel that Dean Farrar in his book *Eternal Hope* startled the ranks of the orthodoxy by suggesting that salvation was an appointed goal of all.⁵⁵ But then Anne had to answer the enraged clergy and the laity:

What matters who should whisper blame,
Or who should scorn or slight? –

What matters – if thy God approve,
And if, within thy breast,
Thou feel the comfort of His love,

The earnest of His rest?⁵⁶

Whether or not the enraged were assuaged could well be a matter of concern for the historians of theology, but Anne as a devotee stands firmly assured in her relationship of love and trust to her God. And her biographer Edward Chitham stands by her when he observes, "Her heart... opened to the sweet views of salvation, pardon ... and peace ... and welcome to the weary and heavy-laden sinner."⁵⁷

Emily Brontë does not seem to have experienced the passion of love for a lover outside herself. She is the inscrutable member of the Brontë family. "It is undoubtedly disappointing that no lover can be found for Emily Brontë, orthodox or unorthodox."⁵⁸ But the one who wrote *Wuthering Heights* is also the one who wrote the poems, some of which are due to come under our discussion. As such, though it may be speculative yet not far from being authoritative that her ideal object of love is Heathcliff. Catherine tries to express her feelings to Nelly (Catherine is about to marry Linton):

My great miseries in this world have
 been Heathcliff's miseries; and I watched and
 felt each from the beginning: my great thought
 in living is himself. If all else perished and he
 remained, I should still continue to be; and if all
 else remained, and he were annihilated, the
 universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I

should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like a foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself.⁵⁹

As the matter-moulded forms of speech cannot accurately describe spiritual experiences, she is taking resort to symbols. Opposed to the perishable foliage-like temporal love of Linton, Heathcliff's is eternal like the rock, the imperishable essence, of which she is an intrinsic part. Away from him she is in a state of alienation. It is the state of de-alienation she is craving for, which she believes may make in him her immersion possible. Till such time as she remains estranged from him who is her essence, she suffers in agony as if in prison, for she is ultimately 'Heathcliff'. Relieved of 'the dreary dungeon', she declares, "I am happiest when most away." Identifying herself with a free bird caged, she implores, "In dungeon dark I cannot sing". The dreary dungeon implies the corporeal body and the phenomenal world. She wishes for wings, "If I should break the chain, my bird would go." She would therefore turn to the Gondal milieu which in fact is the vast, open moorland aspiring in solitude after an ascent into the sky. It is here that she would enjoy the liberty to think and sink to wake in a sort of mystical vision:

But first a hush of peace, a soundless calm descends;
 The struggle of distress and fierce struggle ends;
 Mute music soothes my breast – unuttered harmony
 That I could never dream till the earth was lost to me.

With the senses suspended, the visible world with all its unrest and sensuous manifestations ceases to exist to the mystic. S(he) experiences perfect peace which gives rise to the inward silence and soundless music of harmony to her spirit which establishes contact with the Eternal who is the Indwelling God in man. And so she continues in the same vein:

Then dawns the Invisible, the Unseen its truth reveals;
 My outward sense is gone, my inward essence feels –
 Its wings are almost free, its home, its harbour found;
 Measuring the gulf it stoops and dares the final bound!⁶⁰

Freed from the senses, the individual soul remains only the essence pure. The imagery of 'wings' is again a reminder that the soul is a bird imprisoned in the cage-like body, but that when liberated it finds its harbour.

Wordsworth also talks of "that serene and blessed mood". When absolved of the burden of the "prison house", we experience:

... even the motion of our human blood
 Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
 In a body and become a living soul.⁶¹

Unshackled from the body, the soul lives awakened which otherwise remains dormant. This spiritual experience could be more a state of aesthetic contemplation, and less a mystic vision. But the spiritual realization by the liberated soul of 'the Invisible' or 'the Unseen' is the result of mystical vision. But though the verb 'reveals' may lead us to believe that Emily's mysticism is Christian, yet it could also be called a "religious ecstasy" in a larger sense where the spiritual hunger of the soul is satisfied, or at times it could be called "the spiritual marriage or mystical union where the soul is the "bride" and God the "bridegroom". And here it is the bride that negates her 'self', for "Mystical love unites by negation of the self."⁶²

If the mystical union or the spiritual marriage is a participation in the divine life, alienation from it gives the soul intense agony:

Oh, dreadful is the check – intense the agony
 When the ear begins to hear and the eye begins to see;
 When the pulse begins to throb, the brain to think again,
 The soul to feel the flesh and the flesh to feel the chain!⁶³

But faith or union in love would cease to be what it is, if it is not followed by separation. Perpetual possession would mean certainty, not faith. Participation and separation in turn vitalize and revitalize faith.

Such utterance is representative of a soul neutrally culturally awakened, or if it could be viewed as having come from a culture precisely Christian, Emily's culture is then on its peak of progress. Such an awakening so powerfully expressed is nowhere in Charlotte or Anne. Also, not that Emily is overtly not Christian in her poetry as the two sisters; she definitely is as we have seen and may like to see:

If thou hast sinned in this world of care,
 'Twas but the dust of thy drear abode –
 Thy soul was pure when it entered here,
 And pure it will go again to God.⁶⁴

But when she would be at the height of her conviction, she would not mind ignoring conformity and going for deviance. And if her deviance, personally so passionate to her, was not relished she would be bold enough to come out with her defence:

Let me be false in others' eyes
 If faithful in my own.⁶⁵

Perhaps, she could never forget the metaphysical relationship that she experienced existing between Heathcliff and Catherine, which is the expression of the one existing between herself and God. And so she sums up her undying faith in her God in the following most powerful stanza that she ever wrote:

O God within my breast
 Almighty ever-present Deity
 Life, that in me hast rest
 As I Undying Life, have power in Thee.

And then she sums up:

Though earth and moon were gone
 And suns and universes ceased to be
 And thou wert left alone
 Every existence would exist in thee,⁶⁶

He existing, everything exists. The sun shines not, nor does the moon, nor do the stars, but it is He who alone shines and exists and all that which is seen as living and lighted is lighted by Him alone. This can be viewed as a strong monistic belief in the existence of God who is though thought of as transcendent is in fact immanent in us. Emily's conviction that God is supremely present in human nature is nowhere as strongly expressed as here.

That such a monistic belief was shared by Wordsworth might be taken as confirmed if we consider the import that informs the following lines:

A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought
 And rolls through all things.⁶⁷

And if we go back to Coleridge he provides us with another philosophical parallel when he writes:

✓ O! the one Life within us and abroad,
 ✓ Which meets all motion and becomes its soul.⁶⁸

✓ In spite of the thematic similarity that we find in the three poets, one thing supremely goes into the credit of Emily Brontë, that while the two poets talk philosophy more and poetry less, Miss Emily Brontë talks poetry more and for the same reason she talks philosophy all the more convincingly. The spiritual vision she projects is more powerful and moving. There is a sweep in her poetry that carries us all into the bosom of her vision. It is religious and yet it transcends religion. It is universal, it is infinite. And so it is culturally neutral, not belonging to any particular religion or culture whatsoever. Though neither Charlotte nor Anne alone could ensure such universality, neutrality and intensity, yet it is this excellence of spiritual strength experienced and expressed by Emily Brontë that gives the Brontë poetry an identity of its own.

If such is the spiritual content of the Bronte poetry written in an age shaken by "unfaith" when "The sea of faith,"⁶⁹ as Arnold was to experience, was receding, the Brontë sisters writing in the isolated Brontë parsonage had to keep their fountain of faith intact. Charlotte declares its own immortalizing and savouring effect on the reader:

The fountains sweet of poesy,
 That nectar of the sky,
 Where wreaths of immortality
 In hallowed beauty lie.⁷⁰

This is what can be called a theocentric view of poetry sustaining a theocentric view of life. Its origin as well as its function, Charlotte Brontë believes, is Godly. It is that nectar which has been flowing incessantly from the perennial fountain(s) since time immemorial. And those who write it and also those who read it experience in them its immortalizing effect, with the addition that especially those who write it are deified with the wreaths of immortality shining so beautifully on their head. Shakespeare also seems to be saying something of the same substance in the following couple of lines from one of his sonnets:

When all the breathers of this world are dead;
 You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen.⁷¹

This study is finally broken up into the following chapters:

Chapter I – Introduction

This chapter deals with the birth and parentage of the Brontë children, their hopes and aspirations that led them to their quest for identifying their vocation of writing, with special reference to their poetry. The novels they

wrote are also referred to in the appropriate context, to trace their evolution as
writers.

Chapter II – Quest

This chapter dwells on the efforts the sisters made against all odds to see themselves as accomplished writers, especially of poetry. Because the efforts they made to overcome the odds find their adequate expressions in the lives of the characters in the novels, I have supported my discussion on the quest with suitable illustrations from the novels as well. ✓

Chapter III – Agony

This chapter takes special care in detail of the emotional and religious agonies and crisis the sisters experienced as women as well as writers of poetry of faith. An enormous amount of agonies the sisters suffered are reflected in the lives of the heroines in the novels. I have, therefore, tried to augment my discourse on agony by drawing references from the novels.

Chapter IV – Fountain of Faith

Here I dwell on their concept and conviction of faith which like a
fountain flooded on in an age of unfaith and doubt, unimpeded, with special reference to their belief in universal salvation. Since the Brontë sisters were basically writers of faith, their concept and conviction of faith are also well-

embodied in their novels. As such, I have drawn on the novels as well in this chapter.

Chapter V – Vision of Life

This chapter discusses some of their poems which significantly contribute to their optimistic vision of life. The optimistic vision of life the sisters project in the poems is the vision we find also in their novels. I have, therefore, gone into the novels also where necessary.

Chapter VI – Conclusion

Here at the end I attempt a summing-up of the discussions made in the preceding chapters, and offer a conclusion.

Though this humble endeavour of mine aims at an integrated study of the Brontë poetry, yet it excludes the poetry of the sisters' father, Patrick Brontë, and that of their brother, Branwell. Their father's poetry, though considerable in terms of its voluminosity, mainly consists of his preachings to humble the sinners, to exalt the Saviour, and to promote holiness. His prose writings also mainly do the same. His writings, therefore, do not constitute poetry the way the sisters' do. Branwell's is poetry. But it talks much of unfaith and a sort of sad predeterminism, and thus does not agree with the spirit of the sisters' poetry. No doubt, part of his poetry celebrates his love of nature almost in the Wordsworthian spirit. But this again is something different

from what the sisters collectively do. So for one reason or the other the father's and the brother's poems do not find room in this study. And so for the same reason they deserve independent, adequate studies.

Also, it is not merely the title 'Brontë' that binds the members of a family together as writers, but the thematic togetherness, a sameness in thought and experience and expression that binds them together as poets of faith. Moreover, only things Brontëana could seat the sisters together.

Since the main title of the thesis is set against the background of unfaith experienced and expressed by Tennyson, and also against the background of the recession of 'The Sea of Faith' felt and expressed by Arnold, it has been my sincere effort to invite comparative references from the two great Victorians. Though most of Arnold's poems of 'faithlessness' were composed in the 1850s, the scene of the erosion of faith was already obtaining ground when the sisters were writing poems and novels. Unaffected by the sense of loss, Browning also finds his place in this study.

Sometimes an aching heart creates a great work of art. And so *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Tenant*, and a considerable number of poems from the three aching hearts constitute great art need not be doubted, though their greatness may be debated by the critical reader and the scholar, for taste and standard differ. The question of greatness therefore may be set

beside the point. But what remains important for us to take into account is the fact that their aching is the genesis from which their writings, be it poetry or fiction, spring. We can praise the subjectivity of the Brontë sisters, that is, the quality of their perpetual presence in their poetry. And so it has been naturally irresistible for me to refer to their 'suffering' and 'frustration', 'dearth', 'disease', and 'death'. Such expressions and the like force their way in all the succeeding chapters. But this is not to say that the poems to come under our discussion do not in themselves form independent structures. They do. And quite a few of them do breathe their own life. Yet a large number of them depend for their life on the subjective concern of the poets. This may be a limitation of the Brontë poetry. But this could also be its strength as well.

The related critical and theoretical works have helped me understand the poems, and have stimulated me to go to the poems time and again, yet the conclusions that I arrive at are chiefly based on the poems, for final authority I believe is the creative text. As it needs to be done so, the study has been broken up into individual chapters. Every chapter opens with a brief, befitting introduction to itself, and conclusively closes with a link integral to the chapter to commence. Yet, I would like to admit that at times they tend to coalesce into each other. With all its commissions and omissions the thesis is humbly open to scrutiny ^{ok} my esteemed Examiners. And finally, I supplicate myself to my Lord for my success.