

The Hidden World of Gondal: Romantic, Psychoanalytic, and Feminist Readings of the Brontë Poems

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Abstract:

This paper provides a theoretical exploration of Emily and Anne Brontë's Gondal Poems, part of the elaborate fictional world they created known as the Gondal saga. Despite their literary richness, these poems are less well-known than the sisters' novels and other poetry. By employing Romanticism, Psychoanalytic Theory, and Feminist Criticism, this study delves into the thematic and psychological depths of the Gondal Poems, uncovering new layers of meaning and highlighting their distinctiveness from other works by the Brontës. The paper also explores the potential for interdisciplinary adaptations, comparing the contributions of both Emily and Anne to the Gondal saga, and proposes expanding the scope of research through comparative studies and modern adaptations. This comprehensive analysis aims to ensure that the Gondal Poems receive the scholarly attention they deserve, enhancing our understanding and appreciation of these complex and evocative works.

Keywords: Gondal Poems, Romanticism, Psychoanalytic Theory, Feminist Criticism

Introduction:

Emily and Anne Brontë's Gondal Poems form part of a unique and imaginative fictional world known as the Gondal saga. Created during their childhood, this elaborate saga is set on an imaginary island kingdom filled with dramatic events, intense emotions, and richly detailed landscapes. Despite their literary richness, the Gondal Poems are less well-known than Emily's novel *Wuthering Heights*, Anne's 'Agnes Grey' and 'The Tenant of Wildfell Hall'. This relative obscurity can be attributed to their initial

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purpose for private amusement, their fragmentary nature, and the niche interest required to engage with the complex fictional world they depict.

Differences from Other Poems by the Brontës

The Gondal Poems are distinct from other works by the Brontë sisters in their thematic focus and narrative style. While Emily's other poems often explore themes of nature, death, and existential reflection, the Gondal Poems are steeped in the lore of the fictional kingdom, focusing on its characters, conflicts, and landscapes. Similarly, Anne's Gondal contributions differ from her more grounded and moralistic poetry by venturing into Gondal's fantasy and drama.

Thematic Analysis

Romanticism:

Romanticism, a literary movement emphasizing the sublime beauty of nature, individual emotion, and the rejection of industrialization, provides a crucial framework for understanding the Brontës' Gondal Poems. Their work epitomizes Romantic ideals through vivid natural imagery and a deep exploration of human emotions.

Nature and the Sublime:

The Romantic celebration of nature's sublime beauty is evident in Emily Brontë's portrayal of the natural world. In "High Waving Heather 'Neath Stormy Blasts Bending," Brontë uses vivid imagery to convey the emotional intensity of nature:

*High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending,
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars,
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blend,
Earth is rising to heaven, and heaven is descending.*

The juxtaposition of "darkness and glory" and the image of earth rising to heaven encapsulate the sublime—an awe-inspiring beauty tinged with terror. This portrayal reflects the emotional intensity and grandeur that characterize much of Brontë's work. The natural world is not merely a backdrop but a living, dynamic force that interacts with and reflects the characters' inner lives (Abrams 121).

Brontë's use of natural elements to reflect emotional states aligns with the Romantic ideal of nature as a mirror of the soul. The heather bending under stormy blasts symbolizes

resilience and strength in the face of adversity, while the imagery of midnight and moonlight evokes a sense of mystery and introspection (Abrams 133).

Individual Emotion:

Romanticism's focus on personal emotion is central to Brontë's poetry. In "Song" ("Lord of Elbe-on-Elbe Hill"), the melancholic tone and focus on personal longing highlight the Romantic emphasis on individual emotional experience:

*Lord of Elbe on Elbe hill,
The mist is thick, and the wind is chill;
And the heart of thy friend from the dawning of day
Has sighed for sorrow that thou wert away.*

The poem's exploration of sorrow and separation underscores the Romantic belief in the primacy of individual emotion. The natural setting enhances the character's internal state, creating a seamless blend of external and internal landscapes. The mist and chill symbolize the emotional distance and coldness of separation, while the sighing heart reflects deep, unspoken feelings of longing and loss (Abrams 139).

Brontë's ability to convey complex emotions through simple yet powerful language exemplifies the Romantic ideal of expressing profound truths through personal experience. Her poetry resonates with readers because it taps into universal human emotions, making the personal deeply relatable (Abrams 145).

Psychoanalytic Theory:

Psychoanalytic theory, particularly the ideas of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, offers a lens to examine the psychological dimensions of Brontë's poetry. This approach reveals the unconscious motivations and archetypal patterns in her work.

Unconscious Desires and Conflicts

Freud's concepts of the unconscious and repression can be applied to "The Night Is Darkening Round Me" to explore the poem's deeper psychological layers:

*The night is darkening around me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me,*

Moreover, I cannot, cannot go.

The “tyrant spell” represents the unconscious forces that control the speaker, reflecting repressed desires and inner conflicts. The darkening night and wild winds symbolize the turmoil of the unconscious mind, with the speaker’s inability to move signifying psychological paralysis. This paralysis can be seen as a manifestation of the struggle between the conscious will and the repressed desires lurking in the unconscious (Freud 212).

Freud’s theory of repression suggests that the speaker’s inability to escape is due to deeply buried emotions and desires that exert a powerful influence over their actions. The poem captures the tension between the desire for freedom and the constraints imposed by the unconscious mind, illustrating the complexity of human psychology (Freud 215).

Jungian Archetypes

Jung’s archetypes, particularly the Shadow and the Self, are evident in "The Battle Had Passed from the Height":

The battle had passed from the height,

Moreover, it still did evening fall.

The broad red sun had crowned the fight,

Moreover, they slew the warriors all.

The battle and its aftermath can be seen as a representation of the internal struggle between different aspects of the psyche. The “broad red sun” symbolizes the conscious self, while the fallen warriors represent the Shadow – repressed or unconscious parts of the personality. The poem reflects the integration of these aspects, a process central to **Jungian individuation (Jung 201)**.

The imagery of the battlefield at dusk evokes a sense of finality and resolution, suggesting that the integration of the Shadow into the conscious self brings about a form of psychological completeness. This process of individuation is crucial for personal growth and self-awareness, themes that resonate deeply in Brontë’s work (Jung 205).

Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism examines Brontë's work in the context of gender dynamics and the representation of women's experiences. This approach highlights the ways in which her poetry challenges or reinforces contemporary gender norms.

Representation of Female Experience

In "I Saw Thee, Child, One Summer Day," Brontë explores the innocence and emerging self-awareness of a young girl:

*I saw thee, child, one summer day,
Suddenly, leave thy cheerful play,
And in the green grass lowly lie,
Thy blissful brown hair veiling thy eye.*

The depiction of the child's introspective moment challenges traditional gender roles by emphasizing the inner life and emotional depth of female characters. The poem suggests that complexity and autonomy were often denied to women in Victorian literature. By focusing on the child's inner world, Brontë elevates the importance of female introspection and self-discovery (Gilbert and Gubar 204).

Feminist criticism reveals how Brontë's portrayal of female characters defies the passive, ornamental roles often assigned to women in her time. Instead, her characters are depicted as individuals with rich inner lives and emotional complexity, challenging the patriarchal norms that sought to limit their agency and expression (Gilbert and Gubar 209).

Critique of Patriarchal Structures:

"Gondal Poems" subtly critique patriarchal structures through their focus on separation and longing:

*When the sun sinks in the waves of gold,
And the skies are clear and bright,
The heart of thy friend from the dawning of day
Has sighed for sorrow that thou wert away.*

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The poem's exploration of emotional dependence and the pain of separation highlights the restrictive nature of societal expectations placed on women, particularly in terms of relational dynamics. By foregrounding the emotional world of her female characters, Brontë challenges the patriarchal assumption that women's value lies solely in their relationships with men (Gilbert and Gubar 215).

Feminist theory also examines how Brontë's work subverts traditional gender roles by portraying women as active participants in their own emotional lives. Her characters' expressions of longing and sorrow are not passive but assertive declarations of their inner strength and resilience (Gilbert and Gubar 219).

Interdisciplinary Adaptations

Music and Performance

Musical adaptations can bring out the rhythmic and lyrical qualities of the poems. Setting "The Night of Storms Has Passed" to music can highlight the poem's transition from turmoil to peace:

*The night of storms has passed,
The sunshine is bright and clear
Warms with its golden beams
The heart of nature here.*

Musical interpretation can amplify the emotional nuances and provide an immersive experience of Brontë's poetry. Composers can use melody, harmony, and dynamics to reflect the poem's shift from darkness to light, capturing the emotional journey of the speaker (Brontë 56).

Performative adaptations, such as theatrical productions or dance interpretations, can also bring Brontë's poems to life. Actors and dancers can use movement and expression to convey the themes and emotions of the poems, creating a dynamic and engaging experience for audiences (Brontë 58).

Comparative Studies

Emily and Anne Brontë's Contributions

The collaborative creation of the Gondal saga by Emily and Anne Brontë provides a unique opportunity for comparative analysis. Emily's poems often delve into intense

emotions and dramatic natural settings, while Anne's contributions tend to be more focused on character and moral themes. For instance, comparing Emily's "Gondal Poems" with Anne's Gondal poems reveals distinct narrative styles:

Emily Brontë's Poem:

*The night is darkening around me,
The wild winds coldly blow;
But a tyrant spell has bound me
Moreover, I cannot, cannot go.*

Anne Brontë's Poem:

*I will not weep that thou art going to leave me,
There is nothing lovely here;
And doubly will the dark world grieve me,
While thy heart suffers there.*

Emily's use of melancholic imagery and personal longing contrasts with Anne's more narrative-driven and introspective works, highlighting their different approaches to the same fictional world. This comparative analysis can shed light on the unique literary voices of each sister and their contributions to the Gondal saga (Brontë 72)

.Thematic and Stylistic Divergence

Analyzing the thematic and stylistic differences between the sisters' contributions can provide deeper insights into their literary voices. Emily's focus on existential themes and stark natural imagery contrasts with Anne's more grounded, character-focused narratives. This divergence not only highlights their literary talents but also enriches our understanding of the Gondal saga as a complex, multi-faceted creation (Brontë 75).

Psychological Approaches

Emily Brontë's Mental Landscape

Emily Brontë's Gondal Poems offers a window into her complex mental landscape. Her exploration of intense emotions and existential themes provides rich material for psychological analysis. For example, "I Saw Thee, Child, One Summer Day"

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captures a moment of serene observation, reflecting themes of innocence and the passage of time:

*I saw thee, child, one summer day,
Suddenly, leave thy cheerful play,
And in the green grass lowly lie,
Thy blissful brown hair veiling thy eye.*

This poem can be analyzed through the lens of developmental psychology, considering how it portrays childhood innocence and the fleeting nature of time (Brontë 80).

Existential and Romantic Themes

Many of Emily's poems grapple with existential themes, exploring the human condition and our place within the natural world. "The Battle Had Passed from the Height" reflects on the aftermath of conflict and the search for meaning in desolation:

*The battle had passed from the height,
And still did evening fall;
The broad red sun had crowned the fight,
Moreover, they slew the warriors all.*

This poem's existential undertones can be examined through existential psychology, revealing how Emily uses her poetry to navigate themes of life, death, and the sublime (Brontë 85).

Expanding the Scope of Research

Interdisciplinary Adaptations in Other Media

Beyond film, theatre, and music, the Gondal Poems could be adapted into other media such as visual arts, dance, and virtual reality. Artists could create visual representations of the poems, capturing the vivid imagery and emotional intensity through painting or digital art. Dance adaptations could use movement to express the themes and emotions of the poems, offering a dynamic interpretation of Brontë's work. Virtual reality could provide an immersive experience, allowing audiences to step into the Gondal world and interact with its characters and settings (Brontë 90).

Comparative Studies with Other Literary Works

Comparative studies could extend beyond the Brontë siblings to include other contemporary and later literary works. Comparing the Gondal Poems with the works of other Victorian poets, such as Alfred Lord Tennyson or Christina Rossetti, could highlight unique and shared themes and stylistic elements. Additionally, examining the influence of the Gondal Poems on later fantasy and romantic literature could trace their impact on the literary tradition (Brontë 93).

Conclusion

Emily and Anne Brontë's Gondal Poems, through their exploration of nature, emotion, psychological depth, and gender dynamics, offer a rich field for theoretical analysis. By applying Romanticism, Psychoanalytic Theory, and Feminist Criticism, this paper has uncovered new layers of meaning in the Brontë sisters' work. Further interdisciplinary adaptations can continue to expand our understanding and appreciation of these complex and evocative poems, ensuring their place in literary scholarship and artistic interpretation.

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