

REMEMBRANCE AND FORGETFULNESS:
FEMININE MEMORY AS IDENTITY AND DEATH
IN THE POETRY WRITTEN BY THE BRONTËS

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According to Van Der Moere, "The Brontës were consumed with history and ultimately became chroniclers and creators of it themselves."

Their readings as children [...] consisted of historical or travel narratives. [...] they spent their youths scribbling poems embedded in complicated narratives about fantasy worlds. [...] It is above all the desire for visibility that drives Charlotte and Branwell's fascination for history. [...] preoccupation with fame and ... apprehensions about invisibility and annihilation.[...] ¹

In fact, the early poems of the two older Brontës seem to explore the history of their post-napoleonic imperialist culture and to glorify their own latent nationalism. Although Charlotte Brontë in "Retrospection" envisions the histories of *Angria* that Branwell and she created as a 'web' (a feminine metaphor for creation), she was for a time concerned with a masculinist-based history (battles, insurrections, territory conflicts).

But Charlotte's poems are also capable of shifting from a grand public scale to quieter private contemplations. When she exhausts the military subjects and begins to explore concerns of the quotidian, she is confronted with the female realm, a subject normally overlooked in the writing of history. At these moments we witness the poet's genuine desire to make history more representative of marginalized figures of society, such as women. In Charlotte's poetry the female subject becomes an image of the self that is 'buried' within history; we see only " [...] traces of female lives and pasts that have remained in the parenthesis of standard representations of masculinist linear time and have remained neglected, obscure, or unmarked in the passage of history."²

¹ Toni Linton Van Der Moere, *Brother and Sister Poets: Representation of the Female Subject in the Poetry of Dorothy and William Wordsworth, Christina and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Charlotte and Branwell Brontë, and Edith and Osbert Sitwell*, Doctoral Dissertation, University of Tulsa, 2000, pp. 115-116, 128, 149.

² Van der Moere, *Id.Ibid.*, p.149.

Another particularity of Charlotte's Glasstown and Angrian cycles is that she represents these women in a complicated fashion: they are usually vulnerable and fall into subservient positions to men. These fragile beings recur with obsessive regularity under variations of the maternal name: Marian, Marina, Maria, Mary, Mina. But they

All stand in the same relation to Charlotte's ubiquitous male hero. [...] the charismatic king and lover, the embodiment of power and creative intelligence, the only source of love and even of life for these women who helplessly adore him. His godlike bosom is their home; torn from it they perish.³

In one of the first Glasstown stories, Charlotte depicts her young hero Albion, engaged to his beloved Marina, leaving her to travel with his father (a fictionalized duke of Wellington); when he finally returns to England, he finds Marina's house a deserted ruin and herself dead and buried. The neglected bride could express her sense of outrage only by dying, as she tells us in her poem from the grave, "Marina's Lament": "Long heart-sickness, hope deferred / Cankered my heart./ [...] But now I rest".⁴ Curiously, the fictitious date is June 18, 1815, the date of Wellington's victory at Waterloo, and we suspect that his victory represents Marina's 'Waterloo'.

As we move along these early writings, as Irene Tayler pointed out, we see them "suffused with sinkings."

Her Mary-women sink into the grave, into the sea, into the paternal bosom, in the bondage of a self-annihilating dependence on their hero Zamorna, just as Charlotte saw herself sinking into morbid depressions [...] Buried in earth, sunk in ocean, fettered in sin, her lonely spark of spirit might consume her vitals in tormenting hellfire, or else simply smolder and die out, unseen. Either way she faced mere extinction.⁵

In one of her poems Charlotte describes the way in which Marian predicted the figurative fate that awaited them all: "Ocean will be my tomb, / Sea-sand my pillow." In another, a woman named Maria literally drowns herself when she suspects that her faithless lover has deserted her: "For far under the fairy sea / Slumbers Maria placidly!". Similarly, a comparable death is imagined for Zamorna's wife, Mary Percy: "[...] to see

³ Irene Tayler, *Holy Ghosts. The Male Muses of Emily & Charlotte Brontë*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1990, p. 112.

⁴ "Long my anxious ear hath listened", 12 August 1830; in *The Complete Poems of Charlotte Brontë*, C. W. Hatfield, George H. Doran Company, New York, 1923.

⁵ Irene Tayler, *Id.Ibid.*, p. 116.

her sinking / [...] through the placid deep / [...] / Calmly subsiding to eternal sleep / Dreaming of him that's drowning her".⁶

It is interesting that, like her predecessor, Mary also speaks to us from the tomb; she recounts her past and examines her present dead self's circumstances in the poem "Is this my tomb, this humble stone?". But her incapacity of expression seems to have been perpetuated in life and in death ("[...] lips that could not with their strain / Break Earth's and Heaven's repose").⁷ The buried female self becomes painfully personal in spite of being evoked as both 'I' and 'it' and "the last stanza illustrates her torment in literally being buried history and not being monumentalized."⁸

Female identity in the early writings is shown to reside, in a very literal sense, in the hands of men, as Sally Shuttleworth has observed:

The landscape of Angria is populated by a whole series of imprisoned women, Zamorna's mistresses, all shut up in lonely houses, pining away, consumed by their own emotions to which they cannot give vent. [...] the self-denying, self-restraining heroines [...] prove their essential femininity by developing morbid nervous systems and dying of emotional exhaustion and consumption.⁹

The only female character to trespass on the male sphere of power is the passionate Zenobia, who combines emotional excess with formidable learning. As 'bluestocking', she represents part of Charlotte's self-reflexive preoccupation with her own role as female author.¹⁰ But even the intellectual Zenobia herself comes eventually to contemplate the prospect of annihilation in "Diving", a deeply symbolic poem: "In the gloom that closed o'er me [...] / I sunk through the void depths so black & profound / [...] through the vast realm of death / [...] The spirit lay dreadless & hopeless beneath."¹¹ What this describes is the pull of depression. To sink into these lethal waters is to lose conscience and consciousness together, to let go of pride, courage, reason – all that defines ego and makes creative life possible.

⁶ "The Chappelle stood and watched the way", 29 April 1836, Hatfield, pp. 197-199. "Well, the day's toils are over with success", 1837, in Tom Winnifrith, *The Poems of Charlotte Brontë*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford and New York, 1984, pp. 311-325.

⁷ "Is this my tomb, this humble stone", 4 June 1837; Winnifrith, pp. 212-215.

⁸ Van Der Moere, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 158-159.

⁹ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 109.

¹⁰ For Shuttleworth, "Brontë's explorations in her early tales of the interface between writing and selfhood, and the symbiotic relationship between character and creation, led to a direct interrogation of the conventions of realism." (*Op. Cit.*, p. 113).

¹¹ "Look into thought and say what dost thou see", May 1837; Winnifrith, p. 211.

In Charlotte's more personal poetry she seems to be raising the same issues. For example, in "Retrospection", she implicitly suggests that the flowering of the young Brontës' art out of the deaths and losses of their childhood (the "shrivelled off-shoot" and "lone grave mound") is a latent concept of the sacred power of art to raise life out of death.¹² Another poem, "Evening Solace", a solitary and silent evocation of thoughts and feelings dearly kept in her memory ("hidden treasures, / In secret kept, [...]"), becomes an exploration of how one uncovers and chronicles one's own past, gaining sight of oneself ("The heart's best feelings gather home. / [...] solemn thoughts that soar to heaven").¹³ In a poetic fragment, known as "Obscure and little seen my way", Charlotte expresses her feelings of isolation and exclusion from the world, illustrating the speaker's search for a place in history: "The crowds I moved unmarked among, / I nought to them and they to me / But shapes of strange variety." She sees the female subject continually seeking visibility and fighting against obscurity.¹⁴

In an age when a woman was exhorted to be 'selfless', Emily Brontë exalted self centredness. [...] To the assumption that male and female were opposites of whom different qualities and capacities should be expected, she assessed them as the same species and gender-differentiation as a social lie.¹⁵

This statement made by Stevie Davies summarizes adequately one of the main differences between Emily and her sister in terms of the gender attitudes present in the poetry written by both. But their respective works still retain many common features in relation to feminine memory. For Irene Tayler, "'Origin' is not lost in Emily's poetry. Memory, or fidelity to a past that has been lost but must not be forgotten, is an obsessive subject in her poetic work."¹⁶ In fact, over the years this matter of fidelity, of self-dedication to memory, had become increasingly urgent for the most reclusive of the three sisters and she renders this treasured content with great poetic richness, as Stevie Davies has also remarked:

¹² "We wove a web in childhood", 19 December 1835; Winnifrith, pp. 184-186.

¹³ "The human heart has hidden treasures", not dated but probably written around 1843; Winnifrith, pp. 58-59.

¹⁴ "Obscure and little seen my way", written around 1837; Winnifrith, p. 328. See also Van Der Moere, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 151-152.

¹⁵ Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë. Heretic*, The Women's Press, London, 1994, pp. 27 and 29.

¹⁶ Tayler, *Op.Cit.*, p. 74.

Throughout her life Emily Brontë wrote with incomparable beauty of echoes and mirrorings, those resonances bred of memory and yearning which remain in the mind when their source has vanished [...]¹⁷

In one of her earliest personal poems, Emily describes how the contemplation of a calm summer day inspires her with an uncontrolled torrent of thoughts from her past or childhood: "[...] my heart bowed beneath their power / [...] Visions by ardent Fancy fed / Since life was in its morning prime".¹⁸ In another composition, she implies that the remembrance of that personified 'dream' can also be rather painful for her at times: "[...] thy memory / Would yield me nothing but care!".¹⁹ As with Charlotte, the imaginative torrent is associated with the memory of a happy, but now irrecoverable, past: "[...] Those words they awakened a spell / They unlocked a deep fountain whose springing / Nor Absence nor Distance can quell."²⁰ Occasionally, Emily hesitates about what path to follow, that of the memory of her homeland or of the fantasy of *Gondal*: "Where wilt thou go my harassed heart? Full many a land invites thee now".²¹ These opening poems set the terms for all the spiritual history contained in her pages; as Tayler has noticed, "[...] although Emily's art reveals no historical details, it is highly suggestive concerning her emotional or spiritual history, the biography of her imagination."²²

Emily's poetry reflects as well this period's efforts to manage the distresses associated with remembering and forgetting past feelings, especially those associated with the dead. The many poems titled "Remembrance" invoke the passing of years and seasons, the loss of childhood or youth, and the absence of the beloved dead.²³ Reading Emily's poems in the context of her century's fears of both remembering and forgetting the dead seems a more likely route to understanding them. As Janet Gezari has remarked, "Death and dying are the main subject of Emily's nearly two hundred poems" and "*Wuthering Heights* is the nineteenth-century's greatest novel about mourning".²⁴

¹⁷ Stevie Davies, *Op. Cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁸ "Alone I sat the summer day", August 1837; in *The Poems of Emily Brontë*, edited by Derek Roper with Edward Chitham, Clarendon Press, Oxford and New York, 1995.

¹⁹ "O Dream, where art thou now?", 5 November 1838; Roper & Chitham, p.66.

²⁰ "Loud without the wind was roaring", 11 November 1838; *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

²¹ "A little while, a little while", 4 December 1838. *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

²² Tayler, *Op.Cit.*, p. 107.

²³ The title "Remembrance" was familiar in the nineteenth century. Poets like Shelley, Byron, Letitia Landon and Southey had used it. Many poems with this title were published in the annuals in vogue from 1822 (the *Forget Me Not*, *The Remembrance* were some of the suggestive publications).

²⁴ Janet Gezari, "Fathoming 'Remembrance': Emily Brontë in Context", p. 981, in *ELH*, vol.66, Number 4, Winter 1999, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 965-984.

[...] Brontë expresses contradictory ideas about material continuity and the relation of body to soul or spirit. She sometimes imagines the body as a weight or enclosure, most famously in her poem "The Prisoner (A Fragment)", [...] sometimes as the site of radical metamorphosis or transmutation, as in "Death", [...] and sometimes as inseparable from identity, as in Catherine's dream of her expulsion from heaven [...].²⁵

In the poem "Shall Earth no more inspire thee", Emily seems to have a pantheistic or naturalistic approach to death as a fusion of the body with nature itself: "[...] on thy kindly breast / Let us be laid in lasting rest / Or waken but to share with thee / A mutual immortality".²⁶ In "A Day Dream", this idea is reiterated through the revelation that death is nothing more than a natural step in the transition from this world to another, a harmonious continuity: "Thou wouldst rejoice for those that live / Because they live to die".²⁷ In "Anticipation", Emily seems to wish ultimately for death, for that which only can impart eternity to her soul: "[...] looking for What is to Be. / [...] to anticipate / rewarding Destiny!".²⁸ And, finally, in "No coward soul is mine", she postulates her creed that "there is not room for Death" and defines herself as "Undying Life".²⁹

If in Emily's personal poetry death can confer immortality, in her fictional poems, death is more closely associated to the act of remembering. In "A Death-Scene", Augusta (or A.G.A.) witnesses her beloved Alexander Ælbe's end by the margins of lake Elnor and returns many years later to his grave to recall the tragic event ("when years have past / My weary feet return at last").³⁰ Also in "Written in Aspin Castle", memory returns in the form of a ghost to haunt an ancient mansion; Alfred Sidonia's spectre ("a spirit ...shut from heaven / An outcast for eternity") is there to recall his cruel beloved Augusta ("idol queen / So loved – so worshipped long ago").³¹ Similarly, after abandoning her illegitimate daughter to the harsh elements in "A Farewell to Alexandria", Emily's elegist recalls in a small poetic fragment the site of her hideous deed ("beneath that spectre ring / Unmoved and undiscovered lay / A mute remembrancer of crime / long lost concealed forgot for years").³² In another composition, it is another of Augusta's doomed lovers, Fernando de Samara, who makes

²⁵ Gezari, *Op.Cit.*, p. 973.

²⁶ "I see around me tombstones grey", 17 July 1841; Roper & Chitham, pp. 123-124.

²⁷ "On a sunny brae alone I lay", 5 March 1844; *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 148-150.

²⁸ "How beautiful the Earth is still", 2 June 1845; *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 173-175.

²⁹ "No coward soul is mine", 2 January 1846; *Id. Ibid.*, pp. 183-184.

³⁰ "There shines the moon, at noon of night", 6 March 1837, *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 32-34.

³¹ "How do I love on summer nights", 6 February 1843, *Id. Ibid.*, pp. 131-133.

³² "What winter floods, what showers of Spring", 27 March 1839, *Id.Ibid.*, p.75.

an effort in captivity not to forget his moments of happiness ("All Heaven's undreamt felicity / Could never blot the past for me / [...] golden days left long behind").³³ Finally, the tragic A.G.A., haunted by the memory of those who died consumed in the fire of her passion / ambition, expresses a desire of self-annihilation ("The shadows of the dead / [...] Surround my bed / [...] My only wish is to forget / In the sleep of death").³⁴ This desire is unexpectedly materialized in the next poem, "The Death of A.G.A."; and in "Song", a faithful friend of hers laments many years later the 'forgetfulness' to which the proud Augusta has been condemned: "And where are all their tears? / [...] The Dweller in the land of Death / Is changed and careless too".³⁵

Janet Gezari establishes a pertinent distinction between *recollection* and *remembrance*: while the first is conscious or voluntary, the second is unconscious or involuntary; another difference is that the first is used for "memory's consoling powers" while the second for "chronic or protracted grief". She believes that in Emily's poems "only that which never ceases to hurt survives as remembrance, not recollection".³⁶ This seems to be the case of the famous poem titled "Remembrance", in which Rosina Alcona returns to the place where her beloved Julius Brenzaida had been buried fifteen years before in the mountains of Angora ("Far, far removed cold in the dreary grave!"). Although she asks him to forgive her apparent long neglect ("[...] forgive if I forget thee / while the World's tide is bearing me along"), at the same time she declares her constancy in her love for him ("No later light has lightened up my heaven") and the long suffering his loss has caused her ("All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee"). As the word 'remembrance' does not occur in the poem, we can conclude that Emily was not concerned with the consoling recollections of mourning but rather with forgetting mortal grief.³⁷

The commitment to a lost past that is affirmed in Rosina's lament is reaffirmed in the poem that follows it – "Death that struck when I was most confiding". This poem

³³ "Written in the Gaaldine prison caves", 6 January 1840, *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 100-102.

³⁴ "Sleep brings no joy to me", November 1837, *Id.Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁵ "The linnets in the rocky dells", 1 May 1844, *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 152-153. "We can trace in the A.G.A poems [...] a kind of progression as Brontë works out, but by no means resolves, her anxieties about her gender's seemingly close kinship with death, anxieties triggered in part by her childhood losses of mother and sisters (...). Moreover, the entire saga, [...] displays Brontë's impressive versatility as an emphatic artist who can take on a number of identities [...]" (Teddi L. Chichester, "Evading 'Earth's Dungeon Tomb': Emily Brontë, A.G.A., and the Fatally Feminine", *Victorian Poetry*, Morgantown, 1991 Spring, 29, 1-15, p. 11).

³⁶ Gezari, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 966-967.

³⁷ "Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee", 3 March 1845, *Id.Ibid.* pp. 166-167.

calls even more insistently for "death" and introduces different imagery for addressing both death and reunion. Emily seems to have associated 'disbranching' with the sin of faithlessness or forgetting; therefore, death is of two kinds – of the spirit and of the body. But to pass into the 'night' of death is really to be born again into the "glorious morn" of the spirit.³⁸ This same idea is conveyed in "Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle", in which an imprisoned woman describes the experience of visionary ecstasy that regularly takes her to the very borders of eternal release ("A messenger of Hope comes every night to me / And offers, for short life, eternal liberty").³⁹ That Emily could now describe so vividly the ecstatic journey suggests how fully she felt herself prepared to undergo it. Here lies the difference between her vision and her sister's: For Charlotte, woman (herself) is led by her delusive yearnings to an annihilation, not to a liberation.

Anne Brontë was described by her eldest sister as a woman who "covered her mind, and especially her feelings, with a sort of nun-like veil".⁴⁰ Such label reveals one of the ideas most essential to her writing: *identity* as a problem of self-fashioning. Much of her poetry shows an ongoing exploration of the effort of apprehending and crafting identity. Most often, the women of Anne's poems struggle to repress emotions that agitate the placid exteriors they strive to maintain. But for Anne, in the same way as for her sisters, this process of self-understanding and self-representation is inseparable from the workings of memory or from the act of remembering itself, especially the one of remembering the beloved dead. The experience of isolation, both situational and self-imposed (decurring from death or from physical distance), is transferred to her poetic personas and fictional heroines, who (like Charlotte's) are often women who feel physically and psychologically confined.

But in spite of Anne's quest to represent truthfully the dilemmas experienced by 19th century women, personally she found hope and fulfillment in a variety of ways:

[...] she believed childhood could offer a lifelong sense of confidence; that memory could provide one with unlimited access to past securities; that the imagination could offer temporary escape from a hostile environment; that nature could remind one of the

³⁸ "Death, that struck when I was most confiding", 10 April 1845, *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 167-168.

³⁹ "Silent is the House – all are laid asleep", 9 October 1845, *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 176-181.

⁴⁰ Charlotte Brontë, "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell", 19 September 1850, preface to the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights and Agnes Grey*.

possibility for transcendence; that a benevolent God offered the possibility and promise of salvation to even the most sinful of people; [...] ⁴¹

In her work, we find an innovative interplay between fictional and autobiographical modes and materials. What enabled her to represent selfhood was this intermingling of fact and fiction, that which is experienced and that which is imagined. Through this interplay, Anne Brontë made the idea and ideal of femininity problematic in several ways.

Her earliest poem, "Verses by Lady Geralda", is a fictionalized illustration of Anne's journey from childhood innocence to adult experience, in which the speaker monitors the changes in her heart; she realizes that "What gave me joy before / Now fills my heart with misery" and is forced to conclude that "My heart is changed alone"; she has become another person.⁴² Anne's interest in self-scrutiny is noticeable again in "Self-Congratulation", in which a dialogue explores not only the way the individual changes over time and how these changes are manifested ("Each year its own new feelings brings"), but also the struggle to repress emotions ("the inmost workings of the soul") and to keep a placid semblance.⁴³

The themes of war, imprisonment and captivity are also used by Anne to explore symbolically feminine isolation, confinement and problems of expression. In "A Voice from the Dungeon", the female character through which Anne speaks is so desperate in her loneliness ("I'm buried now; I've done with life") that she has visions of her loved ones ("I dreamt [...] / That all was as it used to be"), but she is utterly unable to communicate with them even in dreams ("mute surprise", "I gazed at him; I could not speak").⁴⁴ Similarly, in "The Captive's Dream", the isolated speaker faces a linguistic predicament as she tries to address her beloved in dreams and realizes that she is paralyzed and voiceless: "I had no power to speak, / [...] I might not speak a single word; / [...] I could not rise from my dark dungeon floor, / And the dear name [...] / died in a voiceless whisper on my tongue".⁴⁵

⁴¹ Maria H. Frawley, *Anne Brontë*, Prentice Hall International, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1996, p. 6.

⁴² "Why, when I hear the stormy breath", December 1836; in Edward Chitham, *The Poems of Anne Brontë. A New Text and Commentary*, Macmillan, London and Basingstoke, 1979, pp. 49-51.

⁴³ "Maiden, thou wert thoughtless once", 1 January 1840; Chitham, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 71-72.

⁴⁴ "I'm buried now; I've done with life", October 1837; *Id.Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

⁴⁵ "Methought I saw him but I knew him not", 24 January 1838; *Id.Ibid.*, p. 62.

Another common feature to these poems, and also to Emily's, is that this confined female speaker often takes refuge in the remembrance of the past or in happy memories, now lost forever. That happens in "The North Wind", where this natural element recalls "the cherished land / Of thy nativity" and the prisoner's childhood ("a joyous mountain child"), but also in "Verses to a Child", where the same character addresses her young daughter, in whom she detects a semblance to her past existence: "[...] a glance of thine / Can bring back long departed years / [...] each feature soft and fair / [...] Some sweet remembrance bears."⁴⁶ In "An Orphan's Lament", the speaker evokes the disappearance of someone he refuses to forget in spite of the inexorable passage of time ("She's gone – and [...] Two summers springs and autumns sad [...]").⁴⁷

Approximately after 1840, Anne tends to see poetry as a privileged means of both self-expression and self-consolation, as she herself tells us in *Agnes Grey*:

When we are harassed by sorrows or anxieties, [...] we often naturally seek relief in poetry [...] to give utterance to those thoughts and feelings [...] relics of past sufferings and experience, like pillars of witness [...]⁴⁸

In Anne's first autobiographical composition, "The Bluebell", the speaker – exiled from home in Blake Hall – detects this wild flower, which recalls her of Haworth and whose "silent eloquence" seems to reiterate her own feelings ("Sad wanderer, weep those blissful times / That never may return!").⁴⁹ In poems such as "'Tis strange to think" and "Home" she reflects upon the painful contrast between her present desolate life and an extremely happy past. Besides this longing for her homeland and the days of her childhood, Anne also felt inspired by the memory of someone she had loved but who is now dead, disappeared forever. She dedicates several poems to this man (presumably, William Weightman) and to the pleasant reminiscences she has retained of his brief passage through the world. For example, in "To –", she compares him to "a dazzling ray", "a bright and burning gleam" and refuses to mourn him but she laments that "The pleasures buried in thy tomb, / [...] will not return."⁵⁰ In other compositions, such as "Yes Thou Art Gone" and "Severed and Gone", Anne wishes above all to show her

⁴⁶ "O raise those eyes to me again", 21 August 1838; *Id.Ibid.*, pp.69-70.

⁴⁷ "She's gone – and twice the summer's sun", 1 January 1841; *Id.Ibid.*, pp.78-79.

⁴⁸ Anne Brontë, *Agnes Grey* (1847), Chapter 17, in *Complete Novels of Anne Brontë*, Harper Collins Publishers, Glasgow, 1995, pp. 460-61.

⁴⁹ "A fine and subtle spirit dwells", 22 August 1840; Chitham, pp. 73-74.

⁵⁰ "I will not mourn thee, lovely one", December 1842, *Id.Ibid.* pp. 87-88.

fidelity to the memory of this love: "And though thy transient life is o'er / 'Tis sweet to think that thou hast been".⁵¹ But it is in the poem "Night" that she associates her bereavement to an unfulfilled life as a single woman: "[...] a voice [...] / That death has silenced long ago", "I may only dream of bliss".⁵²

The importance of the Past for Anne Brontë can be more clearly seen in a poem suggestively titled "Memory", in which she deliberately chooses to recall past pleasures in detriment of the pleasurable contemplation of nature ("[...] what were all these charms to me / When one sweet breath of memory / Came gently wafting by?"). Her involvement in this activity of recovering past sensations is so intense that she loses all the ties with the Present ("I closed my eyes against the day / And called my willing soul away"). In the end, she realizes that it is memory alone that can colour up life for her: "Sweet memory, [...] Nature's chief beauties spring from thee, [...]".⁵³

In "Self-Communion", a poem completed in 1848, Anne Brontë would declare that "The wise will find in Memory's store / A help for that which lies before" and, consequently, the subject is invited to "Look back on these departed years" for inspiration and knowledge.⁵⁴ The way this long poem is constructed suggests a multidimensionality of identity, corresponding to a possibility for multiple levels of dialogue with the self – a feminine consciousness interrogating itself on the issues of life and death.

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⁵¹ "A Reminiscence", April 1844, *Id. Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

⁵² "I love the silent hour of night", 1845, *Id. Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵³ "Brightly the sun of summer shone", 29 May 1844, *Id. Ibid.*, pp. 101-102.

⁵⁴ "The mist is resting on the hill", November 1847 – April 1848, *Id. Ibid.*, pp. 152-160.