An Artistic Perspective of Yorkshire Folklore and its Cultural Significance through Emily Bronte's Novel *Wuthering Heights*

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Abstract ;(not more than 10 Lines)

Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights seems to be frequented by the British folklore that is not an element from stories published in Victorian Journals; it is lively present in the life of Yorkshire people. Moreover, it symbolizes an ongoing agitation that governed the relationship between the middle and the lower classes in 19th century Britain. The middle-class Victorian folklorists worked to collect folkloric materials like songs and old stories. This activity was engaged in constructing the British cultural identity yet, it was intentionally involved in excluding some cultural groups like the rustic northerners. Therefore, and throughout creating a biased image, they deemed these people's arts and culture as strange and primitive. Wuthering Heights appears to rival the folklorists' assumptions and depicts another perception. The present paper tries to shed light on two folkloric elements utilized by E. Bronte in Wuthering Heights. It also analyses the way they interact in the story and the way the author depicts their cultural significance differently from other authors.

1. Introduction

The British novel evolved through time and the concerns of the novelists changed according to the interests of their audience. Besides, social development in 19th Britain contributed to the emergence of cultural awareness and eagerness to learn more about British abstract heritage. The realistic novel emerged and coped with the aforementioned social upheavals. These social upheavals require writing about true-to-life characters and communities through employing socio-cultural elements, language, and the peculiarities of its characters and their environments in realistic depictions. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is published in1848 and written in great part in Standard English and some passages are written in Yorkshire dialect yet, the socio-cultural elements are introduced through the utterance of both dialect

and Standard English-speaking characters to fit well the necessities of a realistic representation. The author Emily Bronte infiltrates folkloric elements as the main cultural practices and beliefs of the British people in a more approachable manner than other authors who preceded her in employing such materials. She communicates the British oral culture and traditions which were involved in the daily life of the people of her community. Her interest is to render the popular culture of the remote Yorkshire area to the audience who might ignore or have a biased perception of it. Furthermore, she longs to grant them more visibility and significance as a part of the English popular heritage.

The novel comprises many folkloric elements but, only two of them are chosen to be scrutinized in this paper. The ghost and the folk songs or ballads represent the most important folkloric materials and show the rivalry between the middle-class character Lockwood and the servant Nelly. This antagonism displayed between the two characters reflects the antagonism in the real 19th century British society between those who looked for more sophistication and cultural development and those who believed in their past cultural identity. This past is still haunting a large part of the British northern area and implicated in people's daily life.

2. **E. Bronte's Representation of Folklore**

folklore is defined as "the body of expressive culture, including tales, music, dance, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, customs, and so forth within a particular population comprising the traditions (including oral traditions) of that culture, subculture, or group. It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared" E. Bronte's representation of folklore manifests distinctly and comes from a variety of sources from which the author collected her information. Stewart sets these sources as follows:

> The Irish folklore that was a vivid memory of her father; the traditional stories and ballads recited and sung by the family servant Tabitha Ackroyd; the wide, perhaps even comprehensive reading Emily and her sisters completed of the work of Sir Walter Scott; and the fashion for folklore articles, by James Hogg and others, in *Blackwood's Magazine* (Stewart, 2004, 181).

Wuthering Heights is a real depository of folklore which E. Bronte attained from several points of supply which helped her to provide a rich quantity of folkloric elements based on oral memories like her father and Tabitha's and from written resources like Scott's poems and Hoggs' articles.

The folklorists of the Victorian period represented the folk tradition and culture as remnants of the ancient times, however, the existence of folklore in *Wuthering Heights* holds different meanings and orientations. Though dialect-speaking characters in conventional literature are stigmatized or regionally aligned, they are perceived as the holders of a considerable cultural heritage of the English communities. In E. Bronte's novel, the folkloric materials are not marked as rustic or archaic elements moreover, their implications act as a reviving pulse of the old cultures which were entombed in oblivion for a long time. They appear to confront the common connotations which the folklorists of the era had related to them. The popular heritage and oralities in *Wuthering Heights* are introduced through a set of aspects like songs and supernatural beliefs.

Folktales and songs in *Wuthering Heights* are neither employed to foster materialist revenue of the novel nor as a source of embellishment; they are set as a crucial part of the story itself and define the structure of the novel's plot. Furthermore, they constitute the memory of the oral narration which is fulfilled by the character 'Nelly'. E. Bronte infiltrates folkloric elements in a bald manner; she executes a method to create a way to centralize the popular culture and relates it to the English body instead of letting it at the periphery of the English culture as a remote one. Through folklore, the author attempts to consolidate the Englishness of those cultural aspects of the northern area which were driven to the inferior level of interest by the hegemony of the industrialized Yorkshire area and the southern part of England.

The impulsive presence of folklore in the novel was behind the harsh criticism launched by reviewers of *Wuthering Heights*. Allott mentions that some critics said that the novel was written for a very limited audience or it was produced as: "a youthful story, written for oneself in solitude" (Allott, 1974, 278). This view is a reflection of their refusal to the unrefined liberty given to characters of the novel which mirrors the personality of the people of the area. This is mainly because it displays difficult details that are not present in a classy society. The degree of coerciveness and irregularity in the social and linguistic behavior of the novels' characters are unacceptable by the critics who tend to portray the English people in prestigious ways. The novel does not produce limitations to the anger of wildness and works oppositely to the conventional literature which endeavors to set the literary text as an instructive tool of the audience and a taming means of the wild activities of the human psyche.

Wuthering Heights transgresses the conventional views set to the relevant style and themes which should be treated in a novel. Opposingly, it comprises themes and styles suitable for the folks as if the story was created by a folklorist, not a novelist. Moreover, by the mid of nineteenth century, the English novel broke up with stories comprising ghosts and superstitious beliefs trying to cope with the increasing sophistication of the English society in all domains. However, *Wuthering Heights* came to disturb this change. The novel contains both the old and the new views through its characters. 'Lockwood' symbolizes the new perspective of the Victorian gentility on the ghosts, boggles, and the demonic creatures yet; 'Nelly', the servant at the Earnshaw's estate and a member of the Yorkshire country people, symbolizes the views of her people. She is the memory of their beliefs and the narrator of most events in which the superstitious beliefs and the folkloric elements are demonstrated.

Wuthering Heights puts, in contrast, both views through these two narrators. 'Lockwood' perceives people who have faith in these folk elements as "delirious" but, 'Nelly' narrates her experience with them and confirms their existence as part of their cultural heritage without being ashamed of such beliefs. On the one hand, the folklorists of the time collected the folk legacy to show it as an ancient myth. Besides, they tried to raise the people's awareness about the civilization in which the country is living. For them, Britain had moved beyond these bygone myths. They endeavored to halt these vanished beliefs and urged the people to follow the industrial stream. On the other hand, E. Bronte infiltrated, artfully, the folkloric elements and longed to revive them. At the same time, she worked to distance herself from the superiority shown by the folklorists of her time and kept her position as an artist and a lover of her country's cultural heritage.

3. **The Ghost in *Wuthering Heights***

As far as the ghost's existence in *Wuthering Heights* is concerned, Catherine Earnshaw's ghost is used analogously to the Fanshawe woman's ghost employed by Walter Scott (1810) in "The Lady of the Lake" but, with some differences that Krebs comments on:

> In telling the story, Scott allows that prominent English people could see ghosts, but only in the past, and only in Ireland. When Bronte uses the form of the ghost memorat in *Wuthering Heights*, however, she does not use the same distancing technique. Instead, she divorces the memorat both from the tone of quaintness used by Scott and the condescension used by Victorian folklorists (Krebs, 1988, 45).

Krebs traces the distinction between Scott's and E. Bronte's representations of ghosts following the way they recount the story. Scott permits English individuals to see phantoms, however, they are set just in the past and just in Ireland. Yet, E. Bronte utilizes the type of apparition memorat in *Wuthering Heights* and does not utilize the same removing system. Rather, she separates the memorat both from the tone of oddity utilized by Scott and from the superiority employed by Victorian folklorists.

According to Briggs (1977), the Fanshawe lady's ghost is a dead spirit that appears different from that of Catherine. The former is an apparition from Ireland which deplores and moans family members or returns to rescue her babies. Her ghost is related to the Irish culture which is linked to women who were either tortured or dead when giving life to their babies. However, Catherine's ghost deplores and moans her fate and doom. For Krebs, though both employments of ghosts hold similarities, the thematic objectives of E. Bronte serve "femaleness" rather than Scott's which serves the "Irishness" which incorporates issues related to the community and the family as well.

Moreover, according to Lockwood's first impression about Catherine's ghost, the apparition is related to a folkloric story he read in Grant Stewart's *The Popular Superstitions and Festive Amusements of the Highlanders of Scotland* (1823) in which the author narrates a Scottish tale of a little girl's changeling. He confides to Heathcliff that the girl he sees at the window implores "let me in let me in!", "must have been a changeling—wicked little soul!" (Briggs, 1977, 14). At first, he relates his vision of the little girl to dreaming, however Nelly corrects his assumption and tells him the story of Catherine who lived and died in Wuthering Heights.

E. Bronte supports her vision of Catherine's ghost as a real apparition and not as simple a dream through Nelly who narrates specific events which denote that Catherine exists and she cannot be in "Lockwood's subconscious" (Simpson, 1974, 54). Nelly's narration challenges Lockwood's racial thoughts and pushes him to claim the existence of "ghost", "goblins", "fiend" and "changeling" which he assumes: "If the little fiend had got in at the window, she probably would have strangled me! (Bronte, 2010, 28). Here, the reader feels that Lockwood's fear denotes that he starts to believe in the existence of this ghost and forgets his previous assumptions which set it as a mere folkloric creed far from being real. Moreover, the unconventional relationship of 'Catherine' and 'Heathcliff' and their love are carefully interwoven with folkloric beliefs which are generally generated from either socially or culturally rejected behaviors of individuals. In this matter, Davidson (1975) posits:

> Emily Bronte associated folk beliefs, wraiths, portents, witchcraft and the like with 'that intense inner life' which sets Catharine and Heathcliff apart from ordinary humanity, and how she has used them to convey the strength of their savage passions of love and hate, and the rebellious spirit with which they encountered death, each refusing to relinquish the hold possessed over the other (Davidson, 1975,88).

The whole creative heaviness of the story disallows us to accept Lockwood's unfaith in Catherine's ghost and his endeavors to deny the vista of the native people of the area. Instead, it asserts that the unification accomplished by Heathcliff and Catherine is fairly and properly expressed through Catherine's apparition.

Folk beliefs' representation serves a thematic objective which is the ultimate peace achieved by their very own terms because, since they were young both Catherine and Heathcliff believed in ghosts and supernatural phenomena. Catherine's ghost is rationally interpreted as a "ridiculous nightmare" by Lockwood whose knowledge about the folktales is limited to the folklorists' books of the era. Yet, it is emotionally met by her lover Heathcliff, the cold, and the unfriendly master who desperately cries and screams for it, and who excludes the supposition that Catherine's ghost is a mere nightmare. For Heathcliff, Catherine's ghost is paramount to his existence to the point that he desperately calls: "Cathy, do come. Oh do--once more! Oh! my heart's darling, hear me this time!" (Bronte, 2010, 30).

E. Bronte represents folklore as being different from that of her contemporary folklorists who tried to put the folkloric heritage on the periphery of the British society and classify it as a bygone culture of the remote areas only. Krebs (1984) argues:

> Not only was Bronte no folklorist, but she actually seems to work against the ideological assumptions of the new folklorists. *Wuthering Heights* incorporates folk genres in a way that allows them a status and authority that they could never have had in the accounts recorded by Victorian folklorists, accounts in which narrators were always already discredited, old-fashioned, uneducated "old wives" Krebs,1984,44).

Through *Wuthering Heights,* the author appears to conflict with the ideological suppositions of the new folklorists. The novel contains folklore in a way that permits it a position which it would never acquire in the records documented by Victorian folklorists; documents in which storytellers were dependably defamed and seen as antiquated and uneducated "old wives".

E. Bronte does not render the folklore as being controlling the individual life in the English remote areas as the folklorists did. Yet, she manages to show that the folk of these areas represented through characters like 'Nelly' are the primary sources of information about folklore and ghosts in the town and who disclose its folk tradition. Moreover, 'Joseph' and other people attest that Heathcliff and Catherine's ghosts are roaming in the area. Nelly narrates:

> The country folks, if you ask them, would swear on the Bible that he *walks*: there are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house. Idle tales, you'll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on 'em looking out of his chamber window on every rainy night since his death:- and an odd thing happened to me about a month ago (Bronte, 2010, 354-355).

When a character like 'Heathcliff' declares frankly having: "a strong faith in ghosts" and having: "a conviction that they can, and do exist, among us!" (Bronte, 2010, 304), he is challenging the folklorists' point of views which perceived folklore as part of a primitive life already conquered by the industrialization of Britain and by the overspread literacy among people. E. Bronte is conveying her own opinion through her characters' viewpoints. Thereby, she is defying the folklorists' assumptions and promoting folk beliefs through her heroes.

4. Folksongs and Balladry in *Wuthering Heights*

Folklore in *Wuthering Heights* takes several forms; the folksongs or the ballads are utilized too. These folkloric songs had been associated with the "peasant origin". It is defined by A. H. Krappe (1930) as a "lyric poem with a melody which originated anonymously among unlettered folk in times past and remained in the currency for a considerable time, as a rule for centuries" (quoted in Pound, 2005, 217). This definition characterizes the folksongs as being fashioned and transmitted orally among uneducated peasants of bygone eras as it is shown by the expression "unlettered folk". The ballads are employed in the novel neither for embellishment nor to refer to rusticity yet; they serve thematic details of the story itself.

While stitching, Nelly sings a cheerful song entitled "Fair Annie's Wedding" which fits dancing. This ballad is not identified by the early editors of *Wuthering Heights* (1874) and it is important to call attention that it does not seem to exist in any known text. Rather, its only reference is Nelly's narration. The ballad narrates the story of Lord Thomas who captivated a maiden called Fair Annie who gave birth to seven sons. After a time, he was determined to marry legitimately and accompanied his spouse to his house looking forward to Fair Annie to work for them as a servant. The new spouse discovers that the mistress of her husband is her lost sister. She stays a virgin and Lord Thomas got married to his mistress and lived all together.

At the moment of Nelly's singing, the old Joseph interrupts her. He expresses his discontent about her irreligious songs launching, another time, with very harsh criticism. He objects that: "It's a blazing shaime, ut aw cannut oppen t' blessed Book, bud yah set up them glories tuh sattan, un' all t' flaysome wickednesses ut iver were born intuh t'warld!"(Bronte, 2010, 225). However, Nelly acclaims the beauty of her singing as a response to his judgment. The folklorists posit that "Fair Annie's Wedding" is another ballad of Nelly's old songs interested in flaysome wickedness (frightening evilness) certainly, but whose identity has been hidden by one of those errors of the press which abound in the first edition of *Wuthering Heights*" (Belmerabet, 2018, 247).

Previously in the novel, Nelly sings another ballad as a lullaby for the young 'Hareton' trying to make him asleep. This time, the song is identified by the editors of the novel as being verses originally from a Danish poem entitled "Svend Dying" whose English version is translated by Scott as "The Ghaist's Warning". The title of this ballad is not explicitly recalled in the novel yet; it is recognized, as aforementioned, by the editors. The poem recounts the story of an Irish woman who died leaving her children mistreated by their pitiless stepmother. They were left starving and their mother in the grave heard them crying. Her angered soul was roaming in the area deploring their suffering and managed to protect them from their stepmother. Finally, their father Svend Dying was afraid of the ghost of his deceased wife and started to take care of his children.

Nelly's choice of this ballad is done because she refuses the behavior of 'Hindley' with this little child 'Hareton' and her fear of his mother's ghost. She replies to Hindley's screaming: "I wonder his mother does not rise from her grave to see how you use him!" (Bronte, 2010, 80). Nelly's superstitious beliefs are related to the theme of the "ghostly return" in the area of Yorkshire which E. Bronte wants to highlight to prompt femaleness. Furthermore, the editors of *Wuthering Heights* discerned that this ballad is relevant to young orphans whose mothers are dead and are afraid of their children's fate after their demise. The ballad fits Hareton's status as he is a child without a mother. Besides, after his father's death, 'Heathcliff' relegates him to a position of a servant and, except Nelly, no one loves or sits for him.

The folksong appears another time in the novel, this time it has a historical reference to a story that happened in the frontiers between Scotland and England. The ballad "Chevy Chase" is cited by name in the novel. It narrates the story of two rival landlords 'Percy' and 'Douglas' who fought and killed each other in a battle that followed frontiers' trespassing by Lord Percy to hunt in the lands of Lord Douglas. "Chevy Chase" verses are not available in the novel but the ballad is cited by the young 'Cathy' who is in charge of teaching 'Hareton' to read. She secretly spies him reading a book in which the ballad is written and later, she tries to make fun by joking about his way of reading. She says:

> 'Yes, I hear him trying to spell and read to himself, and pretty blunders he makes! I wish you would repeat Chevy Chase as you did yesterday: it was extremely funny. I heard you; and I heard you turning over the dictionary to seek out the hard words, and then cursing because you couldn't read their explanations!' (Bronte, 2010,317-318).

In this quote, she refers to the ballad and showing its linguistic difficulty for 'Hareton' whose illiteracy is being treated by Cathy who endeavors to improve his readings and his linguistic behavior as well.

The three folksongs employed by E. Bronte are analogously serving the same thematic ends in the story since they have satisfactory conclusions. According to the original ballads, happiness is their resolution. Stewart summarizes their ends as such: first, in "Ghaist's Warning" or "Svend Dying and his wife are compelled to take care of the children"; second, in "Chevy Chase": "the fighting between the English and the Scots results in a plea for peace"; finally in "Fair Annie Wedding": "Annie succeeds to the station of Lady and is reunited with her sister" (Bronte, 2010). Similarly, *Wuthering Heights* ends

with hopes and things change after the demise of 'Heathcliff'. 'Cathy', 'Hareton' and 'Nelly' leave Wuthering Height to Trushcross Grange. The only one who stays in the estate is 'Joseph' who still works as a servant whereas; 'Nelly' transcends to a status of a mother for 'Cathy' and 'Hareton' who become the masters instead of and abandoned orphans.

Krebs indicates that E. Bronte attentively fetched in the folklore for the elements she infiltrates in her novel. She also asserts that the lore in the story is neither used to show social and cultural naivety nor retardation, on the contrary, they are signs of confidence and pride of Bronte's original culture of the Yorkshire area (Bronte, 2010, 51). Similarly, Goodridge (1976) analyses folksongs in *Wuthering Heights* and pinpoints that it is: " a novel that preserves them, intact, as part of much more complex patterns" and he represents the author as "capable of receiving as it were from afar, the vibration and rhythms of the ancient beliefs and experiences as clearly as the impression of her own locality" (Goodridge, 1975, 175). Another time, the novel proves to be an adequate recipient of customs, folklore, and the language of Yorkshire and E. Bronte is a writer who is proud of her origins and wants to teach them to her audience.

In *Wuthering Heights,* popular creeds and traditions are catching. In opposition to other authors, who, as long as, they employ folkloric elements in their works, attentively separate them from themselves by means of assigning them to comic and/or illiterate minor characters. Yet, E. Bronte dares to grant them a crucial share in the mind of her protagonist and principal characters. She utilizes folklores in critical events and carefully connects them to the thematic texture of the story. The extent of creeds proposed in the work is dissimilar, still, they are similar in the kind of myth employed and in the role it concludes.

By introducing folkloric elements as folktales, folksongs, and supernatural by standard-speaking characters, E. Bronte nullifies Armstrong's (1993) and Krappe's (1930) assumptions that they are customary myths related to the rustic side of the British countryside. At the same time, she confirms folklore's definition of Pound (2005) who claims:

> My personal definition of folklore would omit all delimitations of origin, characterizing it simply among homogeneous groups. Such traditional lore maybe beliefs superstitions, tales, legends, magic rites, rituals, institutions, as and it should include linguistic usages too, that is, the dialect of the group, or the occupation, or the class, or the race. (Pound, 2005, 217)

Therefore, Pound's definition confirms that the folkloric heritage is not bound to a specific social class or speaking congregate yet; it is employed by people from different classes and different speech communities.

Besides, she employs the folkloric elements rendering "the voice of the community to drive home her point" (Simpson, 1974, 60) and showing the many-sided richness of the area and its people. E. Bronte's employment of folklore in *Wuthering Heights* is portrayed as part of the customary life of its characters. She conveys the folk's faith in the supernatural apparition. Her rendering works in opposition

to the current vistas of the folklorists' rationality and the religious philosophers whose opinions put the folklore at the margin of the British culture.

Critics charged the novel to be filled with 'Coarseness' and a lack of orthodox morality. This morality was commonly employed as a subjugating tool of human beliefs and behaviors in the Victorian era. In addition to that, beliefs in supernatural and even themes of the British ballads were often related to paganism. More, the character of the ballads are seen as the remains of heathendom and they are marked and that the ideas and practices imbedded in British balladry may be referred almost wholly to a pagan culture.

Eventually, E. Bronte brings about an opposite opinion frankly expressed through the novel characters, events, devices, and themes. As far as the novel's renovation is concerned, the author breathes a new life into this emerging literary genre of the nineteenth century through the use of basic tools such as language, themes, and issues relevant to the oral tradition, which the author is well acquainted with since her childhood.

5. Conclusion

Wuthering Heights records realistic employment of folkloric elements such as balladry and ghosts which the author wants to demonstrate as parts of the current cultural heritage of Britain and not as a traditional legacy of bygone eras. The author depicts these elements to contrast the contemporary folklorists who documented them as related to the naïve people of rustic areas. Since folklore is not depicted through dialect-speaking characters or by characters of one social class only, the author exhibits her stance that this folklore is a British property and is not linked to a specific community or class. Moreover, the character Nelly narrates the folk tales and customs and arguments for their truthfulness and Lockwood tries to show them as antiquity and life-free elements. In doing so, the author longs for the *Britishness* of folklore rather than a mere regional belonging in which the folklorists tried to entrap it. At the same time, she plainly shows the two opposite stances of the lower and the upper classes. Her depiction is ostensibly displaying these folk elements as part of the cultural legacy of all Britain and they are not the qualifiers of a specific region, community, or social class. They are not set apart as bygone cultural components yet; they suggest a resuscitating beat of the remote societies which were buried in obscurity for quite a while. Folk elements seem to go up against the regular meanings and bias with which Victorian folklorists and literary authors had identified them. Another time, and not only through the use of dialect, but E. Bronte also seems to confront and transgress the conventions set by the Victorians by highlighting folklore as part of the British society with its diverse classes and linguistic properties. Eventually, *Wuthering Heights* is distinct in representing folklore in an ostensibly appealing way.

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