



Gondal's Queen: A Novel in Verse

Emily Jane Brontë

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In *Gondal's Queen*, Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford presents a cycle of eighty-four poems by Emily Jane Brontë, for the first time arranged in logical sequence, to re-create the “novel in verse” which Emily wrote about their beloved mystical kingdom of Gondal and its ruler, Augusta Geraldine Almeda, who brought tragedy to those who loved her.

Thanks to previous publications by Ratchford, the imaginative world of Gondal is well known not only to Brontë scholars but also to general readers. Only in the present book, however, with Emily's lovely poems restored to the setting which gave them being, can the full impact of this extraordinary literary creation be realized.

The life story of *Gondal's Queen*, from portentous birth to tragic death, is set in a world compounded of dark Gothic romance and Byronic extravagance; yet out of it emerges not only a real country of wild moor sheep and piercingly beautiful nights but also the portrait of a real woman, whose doom was wrought not by the stars but by the clashing complications of her own nature.

In A.G.A. (the appellation most usually applied to the Queen), Emily Brontë created a personality, not a puppet reciting lovely lines. And Ratchford, in reconstructing her story, has re-affirmed the dignity, beauty, and richness of Emily's poetry.

Gondal's Queen is the end of a long trail of research and literary detection which has led Ratchford to all known Brontë documentary sources. This quest was originally stimulated by curiosity over a tiny booklet signed, “C. Brontë, June 29th, 1837,” in the Wrenn Library at the University of Texas at Austin. Ratchford's intense and astonishingly fruitful interest in the Brontës had its origin in her attempt to unravel the fascinating puzzle presented by this little book, which seemed to be merely a series of childish vignettes held together by “a shadow of a common character” and a “tendency toward a unified plot.”

Bit by bit, Ratchford assembled clues from manuscripts and obscure publications until the significance of the play world of the Brontë children began to emerge. In spite of the fact that the Brontës had been the subject of the liveliest literary speculation since their deaths, it remained for Ratchford to establish the importance of their juvenile writings to the later writings of Charlotte. In successive publications she presented the accumulating evidence. For a time her curiosity was centered on Charlotte and the group, but it finally became focused on Emily through a manuscript journal fragment which fortunately came to hand.

Unlike Charlotte, Emily left no prose works from her childhood. But it is apparent from journal entries and birthday notes written by Emily and Anne (whose shared creation Gondal was) not only that the two younger Brontës lived in and sustained daily an imaginary world which had evolved from the earlier play of the four children together, but also that they had written separately voluminous histories and “novels” about it. Of Emily’s vast Gondal literature, only a small body of verse has survived, poems originally intended for no eye but her own and possibly Anne’s. But it is clear that Gondal was not only Emily Brontë’s childhood dream world but also the major preoccupation of her adult creative life.

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