

A Tribute to Emily Brontë (13 July 1818- 19 December 1848)

Gondal: The Fanciful World of Emily Brontë

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I was a student of ninth grade when I first discovered Emily Brontë. The final exams were over and I was slouching around the house when I found this volume in our old bookshelf-- the cover being half torn with the silhouette of a man and woman standing under the tree on a hill-top. Grabbing the book I went to sit at my favorite spot in the veranda with the winter sunlight warming my toes. I expected the book to be a romance and yes, romance it was indeed; even after completing an entire dissertation on Emily Brontë, I am still romancing her novel *Wuthering Heights*.

Many across the world are in love with Heathcliff and his Cathy, and regret that the author did not write any other novel. Yet with that single novel and some two-hundred and eighty poems, Emily remains a classic figure in literature and an enigma to the literary mind. I am certainly not going to even attempt at dispelling that aura of mystery surrounding her, but I will pursue a lesser known aspect of the second of the Brontë sisters—her poems on Gondal. I must admit though that my interest in these poems rises from my fascination with the novel itself. In significant ways, *Wuthering Heights* is a re-writing of the *Gondal* saga, which centres around a powerful female monarch called Augusta Geraldine Almeda (A.G.A.) in whom a reader might discern uncanny resemblances with Catherine Earnshaw. A careful reader would also recognize that unlike its various Hollywood

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representations, the novel is *not* merely a love triangle. It explores the freedom of one's spirit and love at its most elemental stage. And most of all, it reveals the complexities and possibilities of life.

Gondal is a fanciful world that Emily and her younger sister Anne developed and the poems are known as their Juvenilia. It was Fannie Elizabeth Ratchford, a librarian, scholar and author, who through extensive research, put together some eighty-four poems of Emily Brontë and reconstructed the story which was then published under the title, *Gondal's Queen*. The narratives of Gondal are juxtaposed with contemporary events like the Queen Victoria's ascent to the throne, or household activities of the Brontës. Augusta, for example, was a name proposed for the baby Queen Victoria, and many of the events and exploits of Emily's personal life were transformed into exploits of Gondal. For Emily, the imaginative land of Gondal was more real than the world she actually lived in. Apparently, after a Yorkshire trip that she took with her sister Anne in June 1845, she turned to write not about the trip but some "exciting event" in the *Gondal saga* (*Disappearance* 160). Then, after the publication and critical rejection of *Wuthering Heights* in 1847, Emily went to work on her Gondal poems again. It turned out as a realm that gave her sustenance in the bleak reality she resided in.

The storyline of *Gondal* is unusual considering that it was written by a Victorian woman. Augusta, the spirited protagonist of *Gondal*, indulges in a life of profligacy, taking lover after lover, and throughout the tale there are scattered pieces that record the agony of her discarded or betrayed lovers. Lord Elbë, her first love, groans at his last breath:

"Augusta—you will soon return
Back to that land in health and bloom
....
For you'll forget the lonely grave
And mouldering corpse by Elnor's
wave." (9. 63–68)

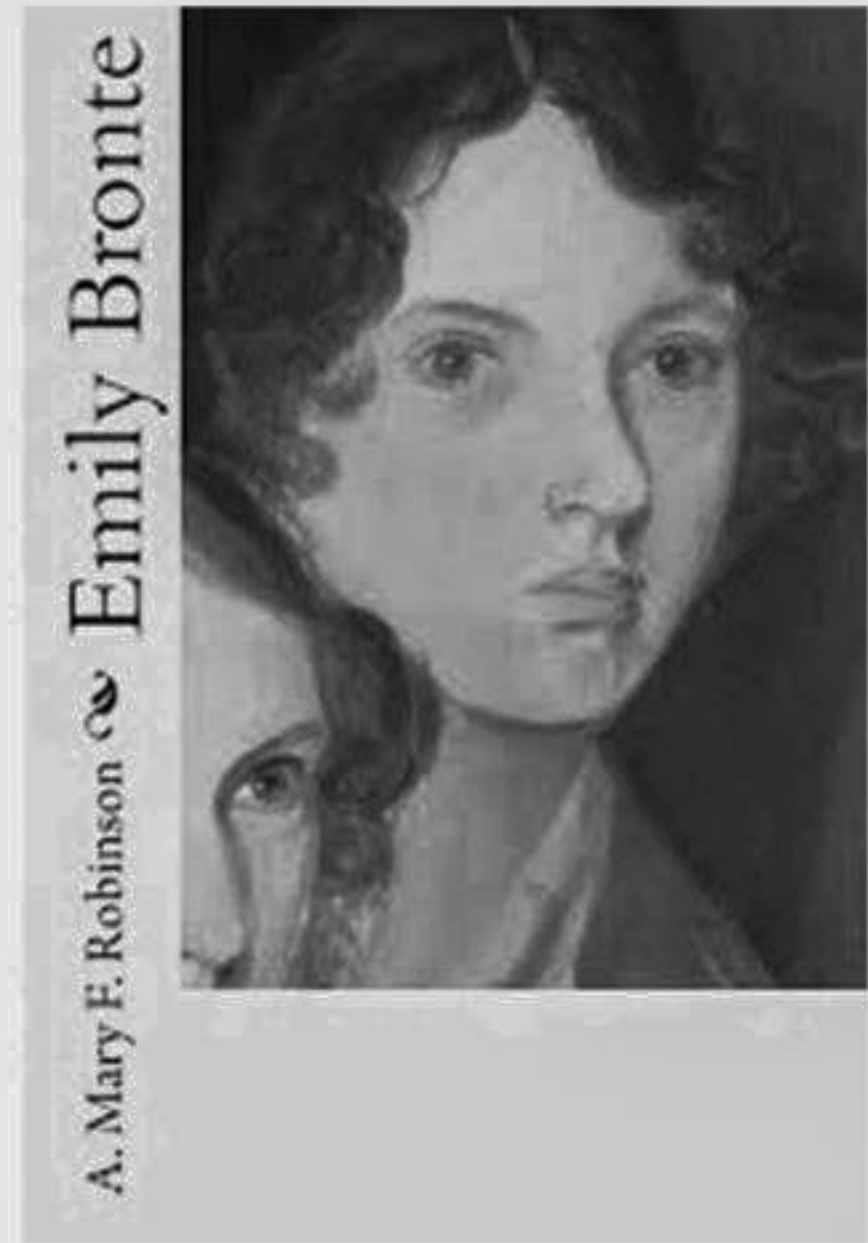
Even though A.G.A. does not abandon Elbë as she discards many other lovers later in her life, Elbë recognizes the strong life-force in his beloved and accurately predicts an exciting and radiant future for her. But A.G.A. too, reveals from time to time that it is excruciatingly painful for her to move on and she feels guilty and remorseful over her actions as she does after she deserts Lord Alfred for Julius Brenzaida:

I know I have done thee wrong—
Have wronged both thee and
heaven—
And I may mourn my lifetime long
Yet may not be forgiven. (169. 9–12)

Thus, *Gondal's Queen* becomes an amazing exploration for a Victorian woman poet showing the exploits of a woman with many lovers. And little wonder that she decided to use a fanciful setting because it would have

been impossible for a female author from her time to write such a tale and get away unscathed. Even when she transformed this saga into *Wuthering Heights*, a comparatively domesticated tale, she was castigated for immorality and obscenity. Contemporary critics failed to appreciate the passion that continues to amaze readers of later times, and saw only violence and the expletive language.

According to Edward Chitham, a renowned Brontë critic and biographer, the *Gondal* poems explore a sense of duality and her protagonist shows herself not merely as a licentious woman, but a philosopher too. Love in Emily's world, therefore, holds out no consolation. Her characters contemplate not merely physical separation or loss, but exile from one's self necessitated



by time and change. A.G.A. mourns the deaths of Lord Elbë and Brenzaida, and often condemns herself for betraying others. Her words and actions reflect a restless soul that does not understand her own desires. The poem "Cold in the Earth," for example, is not just about reminiscing a lost love, but also about life and the series of changes it brings, resulting in an intense awareness of remembrance and forgetfulness:

Cold in the earth, and fifteen wild
Decembers

From those brown hills have melted
into spring—

Faithful indeed is the spirit that
remembers

After such years of change and
suffering! (182. 9–12)

Lyn Pykett, another well-known Brontë critic, identifies that Brontë's verses and novel equally explore that continual flow of life than passion and love, even though her protagonists seem intent on experimenting with love and emotion. The speaker A.G.A. in this particular piece regrets the time that is lost forever, and yet puts the natural flow of life above everything else. The last stanza of the poem points to the division of the self, dictated by the demands of life: "And even yet I dare not let it languish,/ Dare not indulge in Memory's rapturous pain." Emily Brontë's heroine begs forgiveness of her lost love because she chose to live and take new lovers. At the same time, the tone of the poem makes it clear that the process of such an alienation is painful in its isolation, despair, and retrospection. Moreover, her inability to give herself in love too, seems to cause intense dissatisfaction both for her and her unfortunate consorts. She moves from lover to lover, and grieves for both the dead and the living. It is interesting to note that even though she survives after losing her loved ones like Lord Elbë and Brenzaida, none of her lovers do after she deserts them. The theme is brought back in *Wuthering Heights*, where Catherine's lover and husband mourn her with equal fervour—one destroying everything in a spirit of revenge and the other just wasting away in sorrow.

Many have called Emily Brontë's world a crazy one largely because there is a lack of moral correctness. Unlike most Victorian writers of her time, Brontë does not make her characters reap their harvests according to the so called "good" and "evil" deeds. However, her characters might act uncharacteristically enough to be condemned by her contemporaries, they also appear more real to the readers of our world.

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Speak with Ceaseless Spark; Speak to Leave an Indelible Mark

HASAN MARUF

"Let thy speech be better than silence, or be silent," said Dionysius of Halicarnassus. While realizing the essence of this sagacious saying, we can readily conclude that good English speaker is rarer than hens' teeth in these regions of the world where there is an outlandish, preternatural and almost spurious cultural supposition that having a kingly command of the English language is rather an odious pageantry of colonial aggrandizement.

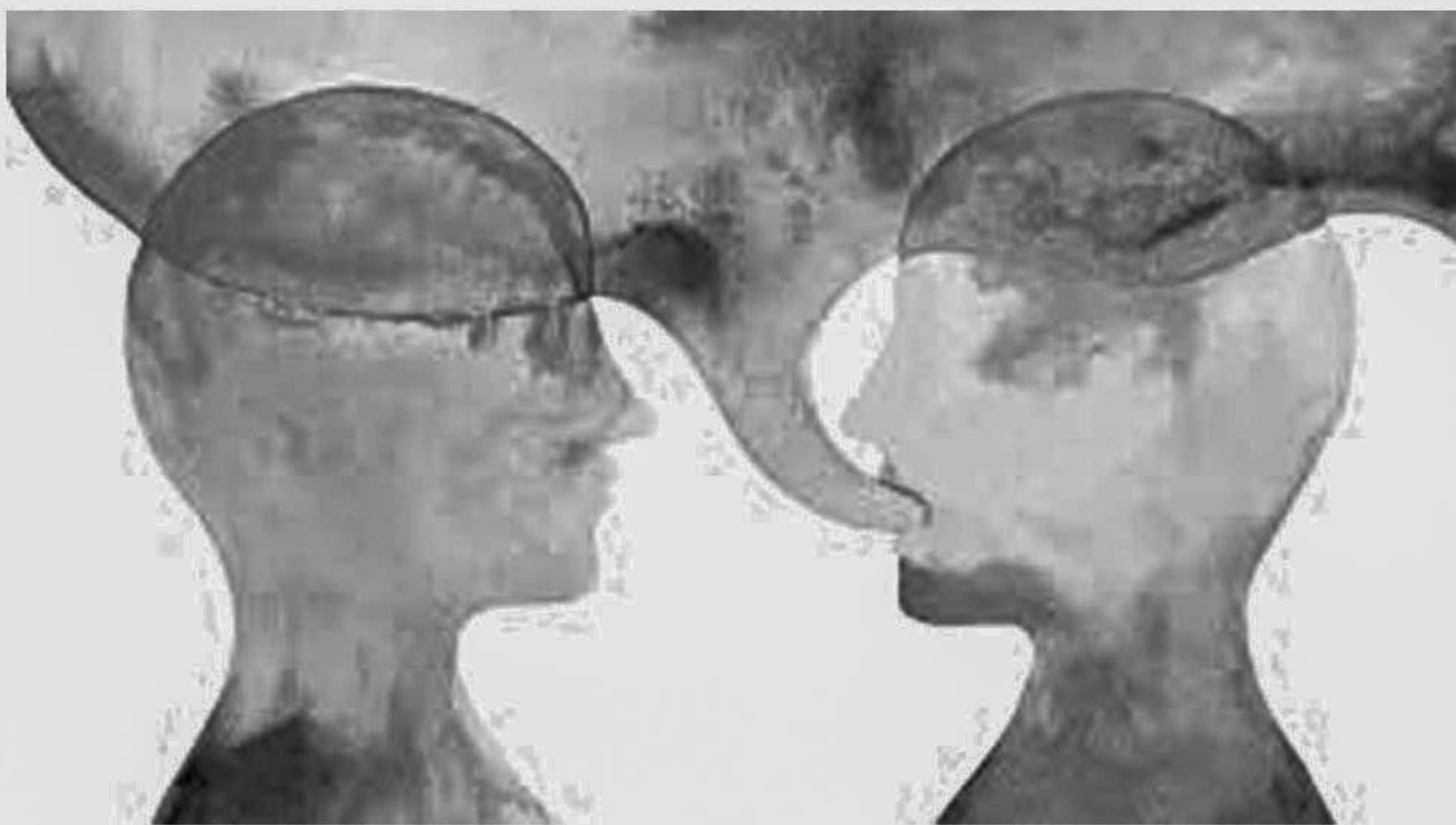
Against such disparaging social milieu, if one wants to become a great speaker with native like pronunciation and natural fluency, the first step one must take is to stop worrying about those egregious overtures while focusing on acquiring the skill sets that one can master through certain degree of labor and diligence. However, at first one has to know what it is that differentiates the good speakers from thousand other ordinary ones.

Here are some basic parameters which can be regarded as determining factors in scaling the ability of a great speaker.

1. A great speaker does not talk, he/she literally sings, He/she sings words to one's ear and one is bemused as if s/he heard a beautiful melody coming from a wanderer's flute.

2. His/her way of putting words together is masterful. He/she does not speak like a parrot trilling some crammed tunes. He/she speaks with insouciant authority as if he/she is playing difficult part of an opera in front of cynical crowd with unflappable display of flamboyant skills.

3. A good speaker has the poise and grace of a poet, lyricist. It does not mean that a good speaker will unleash



fecund verse at every time he/she utters word/words from his/her mouth. But, he/she talks with wit, calculated wisdom, terse vocabulary and he/she is like a whisperer or a hypnotizer which is why one is going to be enamored with his/her words.

4. He/she is well read and well conversant with worldly affairs. He/she will show his/her superior skill in a manner that a tailor demonstrates his skill of designing cloth. He/ she is not going to unravel entire repertoire his/her skill sets but the listener will soon end up being an ardent admirer of his/her manipulative power without getting to know how he/she did it.

5. A good speaker is an alpha male

(read it as a gender neutral); vivid, unique, potent and like the finest breed of horse, they are meant to win the listener a swashbuckling race in a slippery bet. The character of a good speaker is of a gigantically cool persona to lighten up the fire from burned charcoal. The results are complete deliverance from rigidity, immobility, humorlessness and imbecility.

A great speaker often disguises the secret trajectory of his/her sublime skill with the cultivation of following gifts; the relevance of these gifts has always been proved irrefutably strong throughout the centuries:

Style: A great speech must be masterfully constructed. The best

orators are masters of both the written and spoken word, and use words to create texts that are beautiful to both hear and read.

Substance: A speech may be flowery and charismatically presented, and yet lack any true substance at all. Great oratory must center on a worthy theme; it must appeal to and inspire the audience's finest values and ideals.

Impact: Great oratory always seeks to persuade the audience of some fact or idea. The very best speeches change hearts and minds and seem as revelatory several decades or centuries removed as when they were first given.

All in all, the traditional benchmark we set to become a good speaker is a

terribly flawed and disturbingly dull one. We neither decide our purpose nor our fate in the process of learning the language. Hence, we become a toy expected to utter some familiar tricks which is installed by our maker. Alas, that makes us facile speaker who are drawn into the phantasm of self-contentment through cacophonous and hyper repetitive imitation of the histrionic outburst of our piteous self. And, with murky and erratic pronunciation, people in these regions crown themselves as English Gurus aka aficionados while severing the tie with the main stream English unanimously spoken and academically pursued by people all over the world.

Therefore, time has come for us to decide whether we want to be a toy with some installed tricks or a master tailor by essaying our entire repertoire through artfully disguising our skill. Nonetheless, never should we ever forget to shut our eyes to the ginormous accusation of certain quarters slamming this learning process as a colonial pilgrimage of invoking the apparitions left by the British. On the contrary, great English author, D. H. Lawrence aptly put what the role of a speaker should be; I quote, "be still when you have nothing to say; when genuine passion moves you, say what you've got to say, and say it hot." So, let us talk when we are stirred by genuine passion, and let us articulate it hot.

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