

## THE GOTHIC AND *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

Whether or not *Wuthering Heights* should be classified as a Gothic novel (certainly it is not *merely* a Gothic novel), it undeniably contains Gothic elements.

In true Gothic fashion, boundaries are trespassed, specifically love crossing the boundary between life and death and Heathcliff's transgressing social class and family ties. Brontë follows Walpole and Radcliffe in portraying the tyrannies of the father and the cruelties of the patriarchal family and in reconstituting the family on non-patriarchal lines, even though no counterbalancing matriarch or matriarchal family is presented. Brontë has incorporated the Gothic trappings of imprisonment and escape, flight, the persecuted heroine, the heroine wooed by a dangerous and a good suitor, ghosts, necrophilia, a mysterious foundling, and revenge. The weather-buffed Wuthering Heights is the traditional castle, and Catherine resembles Ann Radcliffe's heroines in her appreciation of nature. Like the conventional Gothic hero-villain, Heathcliff is a mysterious figure who destroys the beautiful woman he pursues and who usurps inheritances, and with typical Gothic excess he batters his head against a tree. There is the hint of necrophilia in Heathcliff's viewings of Catherine's corpse and his plans to be buried next to her and a hint of incest in their being raised as brother and sister or, as a few critics have suggested, in Heathcliff's being Catherine's illegitimate half-brother.

### **The effects of intense suffering.**

In the passion-driven characters—Catherine, Heathcliff, and Hindley—pain leads them to turn on and to torment others. Inflicting pain provides them some relief; this behavior raises questions about whether they are cruel by nature or are formed by childhood abuse and to what extent they should be held responsible for or blamed for their cruelties. Is all their suffering inflicted by others or by outside forces, like the death of Hindley's wife, or is at least some of their torment self-inflicted, like Heathcliff's holding Catherine responsible for his suffering after her death? Suffering also sears the weak; Isabella and her son Linton become vindictive, and Edgar turns into a self-indulgent, melancholy recluse. The children of love, the degraded Hareton and the imprisoned Cathy, are able to overcome Heathcliff's abuse and to find love and a future with each other. Is John Hagan right that "*Wuthering Heights* is such a remarkable work partly because it persuades us forcibly to pity victims and victimizers alike"?

### **Self-imposed or self-generated confinement and escape.**

Both Catherine and Heathcliff find their bodies prisons which trap their spirits and prevent the fulfillment of their desires: Catherine yearns to be united with Heathcliff, with a lost childhood freedom, with Nature, and with a spiritual realm; Heathcliff wants possession of and union with Catherine. Confinement also defines the course of Catherine's life: in childhood, she alternates between the constraint of Wuthering Heights and the freedom of the moors; in puberty, she is restricted by her injury to a couch at Thrushcross Grange; finally womanhood and her choice of husband confine her to the gentility of Thrushcross Grange, from which she escapes into the freedom of death.

**Displacement, dispossession, and exile.**

Heathcliff enters the novel possessed of nothing, is not even given a last or family name, and loses his privileged status after Mr. Earnshaw's death. Heathcliff displaces Hindley in the family structure. Catherine is thrown out of heaven, where she feels displaced, sees herself an exile at Thrushcross Grange at the end, and wanders the moors for twenty years as a ghost. Hareton is dispossessed of property, education, and social status. Isabella cannot return to her beloved Thrushcross Grange and brother. Linton (Heathcliff's son) is displaced twice after his mother's death, being removed first to Thrushcross Grange and then to Wuthering Heights. Cathy is displaced from her home, Thrushcross Grange.

**The Haunted House**

Wuthering Heights, the house which gives the novel its name, is old, mysterious, unwelcoming and possibly haunted. Even its location is inhospitable – its nearest neighbour is four miles away, and its position on the moors leaves it exposed to the roughest weather: “one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun” (chapter one).

The construction itself is forbidding and unwelcoming: “the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones”, and the stonework is covered with “grotesque carving” (chapter one). The house is also very old – the date “1500” appears over the door, suggesting to the reader that it may have a long and dark history.

Lockwood, the first narrator in the novel, also discovers that the house may be haunted when he sleeps in what used to be Catherine's bed. His sleep is disturbed by a troubling dream in which a child – Catherine – scratches at the window and pleads to be allowed in after roaming the moors for twenty years. Heathcliff's reaction to this, flinging open the window and begging her to come back again, suggests that the experience was not a dream at all but a visitation from a ghost, although the novel never makes this clear.

**The Byronic Hero**

Heathcliff, the main male protagonist in the novel, shows aspects of the Byronic hero, a figure that has become familiar to fans of Gothic. His past is shrouded in mystery; his parentage is never discovered, and the reader knows only that old Mr Earnshaw found him wandering the streets of Liverpool as a young boy. He is virtually a savage when he is brought home – “a dirty, ragged, black-haired child” (chapter 4) frequently referred to as a “gypsy” because of his dark colouring. His lack of surname stresses the mystery of

his background, and even as he grows older he maintains this air of secrecy – for example, when he returns to Wuthering Heights a wealthy man after a long absence, no-one is ever able to say where he made his money.

As an adult, his personality is dominated by his obsessive love for Catherine, and he shows himself to be cruel, violent, manipulative and vengeful. Despite these flaws, Heathcliff has proved an enduring and much-loved literary character, suggesting his great charisma and magnetism.

### **Aspects of the Supernatural**

Wuthering Heights is less reliant on the supernatural than Jane Eyre, but a mysterious and ghostly atmosphere does pervade the novel. Not only does Lockwood experience Catherine's ghostly presence via his dream, but he also makes other references to spiritual creatures – at the end of the novel, the house is to be shut up “for the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it” (chapter 34), and despite the positive nature of the union between young Cathy and Hareton, the novel ends on a more sombre note with a visit to the graves of Catherine, Heathcliff and Edgar: “I lingered round them... and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.”

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Many of the motifs which characterize the Gothic fiction of the Romantic age are also apparent in Brontë's novel. The rugged and remote setting of the Yorkshire Moors is comparable to the wild and desolate regions which the heroines of Ann Radcliffe's novels frequently found themselves wandering through. Also the 'wuthering' of the title seems to suggest the dramatic weather which Brontë employs to figuratively represent her characters' turbulent moods, illustrated in the scene where Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights after overhearing Catherine's plans to marry Edgar Linton: "It was a very dark evening for summer: the clouds appeared inclined to thunder" (p.75). Thunderstorms in particular are associated with the sublime in the arts. The sublime is a branch of aesthetics concerning itself with the profound emotional power of extreme natural phenomena. Gothic novelists such as Ann Radcliffe frequently drew on the sublime in their fiction.

Critics have likened the house of Wuthering Heights as being the Yorkshire equivalent of a Gothic castle. The building also contrasts with the refined gentility associated with its neighbour, Thrushcross Grange. Before entering the house, Lockwood observes

such Gothic features as the deep set 'narrow windows', 'large jutting stones', and 'grotesque carving'. He also notices that it was built in 1500, a date some 300 years earlier from the year in which he is relating his narrative. The suggestion that his landlord's house was erected in a distant past is another Gothic trapping, as the settings of many Gothic novels were often medieval buildings with sinister histories.

Heathcliff could be regarded as a Byronic hero in that despite his deeply vengeful character, his exotic appearance and passionate nature inevitably exert a powerful hold over Catherine Earnshaw. The figure of the attractive yet dangerous man with a mysterious past regularly features in Gothic fiction.

The figure of the imperilled young woman also features in this genre, and of the principal female characters in *Wuthering Heights*, it is arguably Isabella Linton who exemplifies this archetype the most. When Heathcliff and Catherine observe her at Thrushcross Grange she is shown to be a cosseted and impressionable girl. When she marries Heathcliff she is plunged into a brutal and precarious existence at Wuthering Heights. In this regard she shares some similarities with Emily St Aubert, the teenage heroine of Ann Radcliffe's influential Gothic novel *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Emily is plucked from the protective confines of her rural idyll in Gascony, eventually to find herself trapped within the grim and threatening surroundings of the novel's eponymous Italian castle.

### **The Supernatural in Emily Bronte's Novel**

The distinctively Gothic theme of the supernatural reoccurs throughout *Wuthering Heights*, although Bronte's use of it is significantly ambiguous. Uncanny phenomena appear to make an entrance in the narrative when Lockwood is beset by what seems to be the spirit of the long departed Catherine Earnshaw: "As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window" (p.20). Some critics of the novel consider this window to symbolically represent a temporary portal to another world. Lockwood is portrayed as a rational man although his powers of observation are called into question on a number of occasions, for example, in an earlier scene where he mistakes a heap of dead rabbits for some cats. It is also unclear whether Heathcliff's tenant was dreaming about Catherine's ghost after reading the long dead heroine's diaries.

After hearing of Lockwood's chilling experience, Heathcliff's reaction - where he goes to the window and begs Catherine to appear to him as well - would suggest the possibility of a ghost. This particular scene is recalled much later when Heathcliff starves himself

to death, labouring under the conviction that he will be reunited with Catherine after he has died. In the closing scenes of the novel, the reader is given another instance of Lockwood's unreliable narration when, whilst contemplating the graves of Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar, he muses "how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (p.300). This observation of Lockwood's contradicts the stories which have emerged concerning sightings of the deceased lovers and the prevailing unreality of the narrative as a whole

. Does Gothic fiction perpetuate stereotypes of women, or challenge them? A discussion concerning Emily Brontë's 'Wuthering Heights'

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The 'Gothic' is now considered to be an attempt to expose and explore the unconscious world of desires and fears that both society and the individual attempt to suppress. In short, Gothic writers are primarily interested in the breakdown of boundaries, in the exploration of what is forbidden, and in desires that should neither be spoken of nor acted upon. If one were to limit a definition to the above characteristics, however, it would be difficult to locate Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) firmly within the Gothic genre, as the majority of the conventional Gothic trappings have disappeared.

### **Background/Context: *Wuthering Heights***

Ever since its publication in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* has astounded and baffled readers. Emily Jane Brontë was born on 30 July 1818, the fifth child and fourth daughter of the Reverend Patrick Brontë, an Irish clergyman who held a succession of not very well-paid curacies in the North of England. Emily, along with her sisters Charlotte and Anne, all published their works under the guise of pseudonyms, in order to conceal their identities and perhaps even more importantly, their sex, for in the Nineteenth Century a double critical standard clearly operated: the power which stunned contemporary reviewers of *Wuthering Heights* if exercised by a male writer was one thing – permissible, even admired; in the hands of a woman, however, it could easily trespass the boundaries of good taste and become 'coarse'.

That a decent, respectable woman could envisage such a tale, a tale characterised moreover by an astonishing amount of physical violence, was inconceivable to Emily Brontë's readers. Therefore, does Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, a novel one can now approach without sexual prejudice, perpetuate or challenge Gothic stereotypes of women?

## Oppression and Strength

Wuthering Heights takes an unconventional attitude towards gender identity. In the sexual potency of his Byronic savagery, it is possible to read Heathcliff as the personification of stereotypical masculinity and Isabella, in her tragic romantic infatuation with him, as manifesting a version of femininity which provides its exact counterpart.

However, in spite of such extremes, the novel offers an understanding of gender as demonstrably more oblique than this: Catherine and Isabella may adopt certain versions of ladylike femininity, but they are versions that are ultimately fatal. Edgar is described as both fair and slight, yet he is also referred to as 'the master', and he has the full weight of patriarchal privilege behind him; Heathcliff, by comparison, is an outcast, with no social position and no family until he contrives his own. Linton Heathcliff is presented as relentlessly effeminate, more convincing as Edgar Linton's daughter than as Heathcliff's son, according to Joseph.

Equally, Catherine's energy, daring and mobility are more suggestive of conventional masculinity in the Nineteenth Century. In Romantic and Gothic literature, reader expectation anticipates an antagonistic opposition of male sexual rivalry; in Wuthering Heights, this antagonism would be between the legitimised patriarch, Edgar Linton, and the dark, Byronic outsider, Heathcliff.

The novel both appeals to and subverts stereotypical constructions of sex roles by suggesting that strategies for survival are gender-related. So, for example, Heathcliff responds to oppression by plotting revenge, whereas Catherine turns to self-destruction. However, Brontë does not permit us simply to regard one response as inherently masculine and the other as feminine, because she makes clear that these strategies are determined as much by circumstance as by gender; Isabella, for example, is inclined to violence, but lacks the means to inflict it:

*I surveyed the weapon inquisitively; a hideous notion struck me. How powerful I should be possessing such an instrument! I took it from his hand, and touched the blade. He looked astonished at the expression my face had assumed during a brief second. It was not horror, it was covetousness. He snatched the pistol back, jealously; shut the knife, and returned it to its concealment.*

Similarly, Catherine boxes Edgar's ears for him on an early visit to Wuthering Heights, making him 'afraid and ashamed' of her.

## **The Power of Women**

The reader is presented with a direct challenge to the stereotypical woman in the form of Catherine Earnshaw. Catherine appears to hold some apparent power within the novel, a power which she is aware of herself. She marries Linton rather than Heathcliff because her brother Hindley has turned Heathcliff into an impoverished servant at the Heights. 'Did it never strike you,' Catherine says to Nelly, 'that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas if I marry Linton I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power.'

This can perhaps be seen as a challenge to stereotypes of women in the sense that females in the Gothic novel do not usually have the power to choose who they will marry. Yet Catherine's decision to marry Linton is not wholly altruistic, as she is also attracted to the gentility of his social position; as she tells Nelly, Edgar is handsome and rich 'and [she] shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood'.

Despite the apparent strength of the female characters, *Wuthering Heights* could also be looked upon as a novel about male power and female powerlessness: after Catherine marries Edgar, she feels incarcerated in her husband's fine home and undergoes recurrent bouts of 'brain fever' when her will is checked or her desires are thwarted, and each time she falls ill she refuses to eat. Catherine starves herself as an act of rebellion and despair; selfish and passionate, she repeatedly refuses food when others refuse to allow her to have her way. On the contrary, Heathcliff has far more freedom: when Catherine rejects him he goes off and makes his fortune in order to become worthy of her and in order, too, to wreak revenge on all those who have thwarted their love, especially Linton and Hindley.

## **Feminist Criticism of 'Wuthering Heights'**

When looking at *Wuthering Heights* in terms of feminist criticism, one has to be familiar with the definition of feminism and how feminist criticism works. In her 1981 essay 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness', Elaine Showalter identified three common modes of feminist literary theory, and placed them as modes belong to different national groups. She wrote:

*English feminist criticism, essentially Marxist, stresses oppression; French feminist criticism, essentially psychoanalytic, stresses repression; American feminist criticism, essentially textual, stresses expression. All, however, have become gynocentric. All are*

*struggling to find a terminology that can rescue the feminine from its stereotypical associations with inferiority.*

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar interrogate *Wuthering Heights* in terms of what they term 'feminist mythologies'. In their reading of the novel in terms of writing against the male tradition, they see *Wuthering Heights* as a 'Bible of Hell', a novel which validates the natural over the cultural, the anarchic over the world of organised repression.

*Wuthering Heights*, the house of the title, is hellish by conventional standards, but for Catherine and Heathcliff it represents the kind of non-hierarchical social space in which they are permitted a degree of power which would be denied them elsewhere, since she is female and he is illegitimate, thus they are both excluded from power in the conventional world.

Thrushcross Grange, home of the Linton family, represents the standards of patriarchal culture which will be triumphant by the end of the story, but which the novel itself, through its sympathies for Catherine and Heathcliff, implicitly attacks. This sustained gender reading of the novel sees Thrushcross Grange as cultured and discreet, and the polar opposite of *Wuthering Heights*. That Catherine emerges from the Grange 'a lady' is seen as an inevitable consequence of subjection to masculine mythologies about heaven.

### **Wuthering Heights - the Gothic Farmhouse**

The main setting for much of the novel is *Wuthering Heights*; its significance can be guessed from the fact that Brontë chose to name the whole book after this particular house. This location adds to the atmosphere of the novel, exposed as it is to all weather: "'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (chapter one).

That the wind is unforgiving is emphasised by the physical appearance of the vegetation surrounding the house: "one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun" (chapter one). As the reader comes to know the characters based at this house, it is not difficult to see them the same way - exposed to great passions and violence, but ultimately seeking love and warmth from one another.

The house itself is by necessity built to withstand the onslaught of the elements, creating the unwelcoming aspect that greets Lockwood on his arrival: "the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones" (chapter one). This impression of the residents of the house being isolated from outsiders is emphasised by the fact that the house is repeatedly associated with locked doors, gates and windows throughout the novel.

The house itself is old; a date above the door suggests it dates from 1500. Full of dark corners, the house has elements of the classic haunted mansions of the Gothic novels so popular in Emily Bronte's day; indeed, Lockwood undergoes a ghostly experience when he is visited by the spectre of Catherine imploring to be let in at the window in chapter three.

### **Thrushcross Grange: Superficially Cultured**

If Wuthering Heights is associated with the Earnshaws and the passionate Catherine and Heathcliff, Thrushcross Grange is the home of the refined and socially superior Lintons. The contrast with the neighbouring house - albeit four miles away - could not be greater; here the vegetation is lush and beautiful, sheltered by the Grange's position tucked away on lower ground.

However, the Grange is not as perfect as it may seem on the surface. Edgar and Isabella Linton are spoilt and silly as children, and greatly concerned with superficial matters such as appearance. It is Catherine's great misfortune that she finds herself torn between her love for Heathcliff and her desire for the wealth and social position that goes with the position of lady of the house at Thrushcross Grange.

The Grange is also a place of boundaries and restrictions, surrounded by a high wall. When Catherine lies ill in bed at the Grange, all she wants is to return to her old home: "'Oh, dear! I thought I was at home,' she sighed. 'I thought I was lying in my chamber at Wuthering Heights'" (chapter 12), and her daughter Cathy is forbidden to go beyond the boundary walls. If the residents of Wuthering Heights find themselves exposed, those of the Grange are too sheltered from the realities of real life.

Both houses also play a material role in Heathcliff's plan to dominate all those who have slighted him - he ends up the owner of both properties through his trickery; a far cry from his humble beginning on the streets of Liverpool.

The early gothic revival had begun by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century and by 1850 the High Victorian Gothic was in full swing (Hitchcock 47). The gothic novel included elements of "haunted castles, supernatural occurrences...and ghost-story devices"(Hume 282). Bronte introduces these elements early in her novel. Catherine's ghost shows herself to the character Lockwood; here, she reminisces of her punishment to walk the earth for twenty years (Bronte 22). Her appearance could be dismissed as a dream of Lockwood's and offering natural occurrences for the appearance of gothic elements is a device often used in gothic novels (Hume 282). In the early chapters, Bronte is setting *Wuthering Heights* in the gloomier tones of the High Victorian Gothic, which is in a sharp contrast to the lighter tones of Thrushcross Grange. This contrast is setting up a battle between the evil of Heathcliff with that of the calmer and more benevolent Edgar Linton.

The two settings of *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange establish the light and dark tones of the novel. There can be little doubt that *Wuthering Heights* is haunted and that this setting has a hold on the character Heathcliff, who broods about this abode as if possessed by a demonic force. In Chapter XXXIV, Heathcliff is often described by the housekeeper, Nelly, as a ghoul or a vampire (Bronte 282) and even the character himself has visions of hell: "I am on the threshold of hell" (Bronte 281). As well, *Wuthering Heights* is set on the moors, which in themselves are dangerous to the characters and their presence further establishes the wildness of *Wuthering Heights*.

Thrushcross Grange, on the other hand, is situated on more fertile land and this second setting is more equated with safety, rather than death. *Wuthering Heights* seems to draw the reader further down into the abyss, while Thrushcross Grange tries to alleviate the gloom from the first half of the novel. The novel is structured in such a way that *Wuthering Heights* is central to the story for the first half of the novel, while the second half is predominantly set in Thrushcross Grange. The use of Thrushcross Grange in the second portion of the book is showing Bronte's ability to balance out the elements of the wild and the civilized, with the supernatural and the literal. Thus, the novel ends in lighter, more hopeful tones. Unfortunately, Heathcliff is unable to leave *Wuthering Heights* due to its supernatural hold upon him. His ties to the ghost of Catherine and to this haunted abode create much of the tension between him and Edgar Linton and between *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange.

Comparing Heathcliff to the demonic further cements Bronte's novel in the gothic genre. Heathcliff is at the center of *Wuthering Heights* and therefore, he is at the center of the evil that resides therein. He is equated with evil or demonic characters often within the final chapter: "those deep black eyes!

That smile and ghastly paleness! It appeared to me, not Mr. Heathcliff, but a goblin" (Bronte 282). His association with the supernatural and his residence in a place of evil not only suggest that Heathcliff is the villain, but that his motivations are the result of demonic possession. Heathcliff's actions throughout the novel are often dishonourable e.g. his motivation for revenge. And the descriptions of Heathcliff being associated with hell are often given by the other characters in the story. No other character is described this way. The reason for Heathcliff's terrible curses upon others and his foul mood are explained by his connection with the supernatural and with the evil present at Wuthering Heights.

The characters at Thrushcross Grange remain good, while balancing the evil designs and supernatural motivations of Heathcliff. As well, the setting of *Wuthering Heights* establishes the gothic tones of the novel by equating this setting with darker, more horrifying elements, when compared to Thrushcross Grange. Thrushcross Grange draws the novel away from this darkness and into lighter tones. These contrasting elements help to establish the symmetry of the novel. This symmetry also helps to create a unity in the piece, while the gothic tones clearly show that *Wuthering Heights* set in the Mid-Victoria period.

### Imprisonment

Boundaries, of a physical and emotional nature pervade the text. On a literal level, characters are imprisoned as an expression of power: Heathcliff imprisons Cathy in order to punish her for fleeing the grange. Catherine locks Edgar and Heathcliff in the same room as Heathcliff so that they can battle out their disagreement.

Edgar will not let Cathy leave Thrushcross Grange although this act of imprisonment is motivated by love

Heathcliff himself is imprisoned by his own desire for revenge. He must return to the Heights to be with Catherine

Edgar is imprisoned in the social and cultural conventions that keep him at Thrushcross Grange.

Cathy and Hareton are emotionally trapped by Heathcliff's malignant influence. Lockwood is confined by illness and poor weather.

Freedom returns when Heathcliff dies

The notion of boundaries, limitation and imprisonment is conveyed via the symbolism of windows and doors. In the novel, windows are used to separate different worlds.

Heathcliff and Catherine admire the Lintons through the window of Thrushcross Grange – a world of material elegance and luxury Catherine flings open a window before her death

After Catherine's burial, Heathcliff forces a window to regain entry to the Heights Young Cathy escapes from Heathcliff by climbing through a window.

The window in Catherine's room is the boundary that separates the living and the dead – the ghost child of Catherine scratches on this window whilst Lockwood sleeps in the oak panelled bed. Heathcliff dies in this bed and the window is found open on his discovery.

To what extent is Wuthering Heights a Gothic text?

There are many elements of the Gothic genre in the novel but Bronte's treatment of gothic concerns differs radically from her contemporaries.

a stranger arrives at a mysterious house

the domestic scene is interrupted by a negative and disruptive force – the child Heathcliff  
obsessive emotions and passionate natures

threatening scenes and backdrops

Ghosts

An old servant

Derelict and decaying properties

Bronte's novel operates through suggestion rather than overtly and melodramatically inscribing the supernatural elements. Fantastic or supernatural events become acceptable in the novel because, for the most part, the text is grounded in reality and daily life. Throughout the novel, the hallucinations and visions of Catherine and Heathcliff occur at moments of heightened emotion and passion. They have both endured illness and starvation prior to these psychological disturbances. Their emotional states are realised in shadowy figures by the consciousness of the character themselves.

Violent and supernatural events in the novel

Lockwood's dreams Lockwood grates the arm of the ghost child on a pane of broken glass

Heathcliff threatens to pain the front of the house with Hindley's blood Heathcliff's visitations by Catherine

Atmospheric tumult – literally stormy weather and language used to describe the moods and feelings of the characters

Both Catherine and Heathcliff infect others in the tale

## Description in Wuthering Heights

Mr Lockwood's first impression of Wuthering Heights

Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr Heathcliff's dwelling. 'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation that must have been up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.

Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door; above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date '1500', and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw.' (Chapter 1)

The young Heathcliff describes the interior of Thrushcross grange

A splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers.  
(Chapter )

Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights

Before I arrived in sight of it, all that reminded me of day was a beamless, amber light along the west: but I could see every pebble on the path, and every blade of grass, by that splendid moon. I had neither to climb the gate, nor to knock – it yielded to my hand. That is an improvement! I thought. And I noticed another, by the aid of my nostrils; a fragrance of stocks and wall-flowers, wafted on the air, from amongst the homely fruit trees.

Both doors and lattices were open; and yet, as is usually the case in a coal district, a fine, red fire illumined the chimney: the comfort which the eye derives from it, renders the extra heat endurable.

and his words close the novel:

My walk home was lengthened by a diversion in the direction of the kirk. When beneath its walls, I perceived decay had made progress, even in seven months: many a window showed black gaps deprived of glass; and slates jutt'd off, here and there, beyond the right line of the roof, to be gradually worked off in coming autumn storms.

I sought, and soon discovered, the three headstones on the slope next the moor: the middle one grey, and half buried in heath; Edgar Linton's only harmonised by the turf, and moss creeping up its foot; Heathcliff's still bare. I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

(Chapter 34)

Emily Bronte's "Wuthering Heights" is a fine instance of a Victorian 'female gothic' novel which features women entrapped within the confines of their domestic space and victimised by patriarchal bullying. Some important features of the gothic are:

**1. The architecture:** ancient dilapidated houses, "before passing the threshold...the date 1500." Ch1. These houses are usually haunted by ghosts. In Ch3 Lockwood encounters the ghost of Catherine.

**2. Ghosts:** In Ch.34 "a little boy with a sheep and two lambs" sees the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff.

**3. Death and decay:** In Ch29 Heathcliff disturbs the grave of Catherine and in Ch34 he is buried alongside Catherine so that their decaying bodies can become one.

**4. Madness:** Both Catherine and Heathcliff are hysterical and almost insane before their deaths, Chs15 and 33 and 34.

**5. Hereditary curses:** Heathcliff's adoption is referred to as, "so from the very beginning he bred bad feeling in the house."

**6. Tyrants:** First Hindley and then Heathcliff exercise their authority over the household of Wuthering Heights.

**7. Persecuted maidens:** Both the Catherines and Isabella are treated cruelly.

By way of contrast, the elements of romance are:

**1. Love for Nature:** The novel is full of the beauty of moors of Yorkshire.

**2. Egoistical:** All the characters are egoistical and fiercely independent.

*3. Love and its concurrent dilemmas:* Catherine in love with two men at the same time.

## **How and why does Emily Bronte use Gothic elements in Wuthering Heights?**

**By Tom Hermes**

The novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Bronte is the tale of tragic love and all-consuming passion, these romantic themes and a sense of horror and the supernatural combine to make *Wuthering Heights* a Gothic novel. Quintessential elements of Gothic fiction include the above mentioned themes as well as grotesque imagery, dark and foreboding mansions and landscapes, chaos, pain and doomed love, all themes present in Bronte's work. Gothic elements are used by Bronte in allowing the novel to transcend the binds of the merely romantic. She uses the Gothic style to evoke terror and fear.

One of the classic features of Gothic literature is that of the supernatural and *Wuthering Heights* is very much ridden with other-worldly ideas. The first and most vivid description of supernatural beings appears to the character Mr. Lockwood when staying at the estate of *Wuthering Heights*. A ghostly, bloody apparition of Catherine appears at his window; "The intense horror of nightmare came over me; I tried to draw back my arm, but, the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice, sobbed, 'Let me in - let me in!'" (Bronte 1847, p. 24) It is not made explicit in the novel whether the event is just a dream or something more but the graphic nature of the account evokes a sense of unearthly dread. Moreover, it is clear that the central character Heathcliff is convinced of the existence of ghosts and the idea that Catherine's spirit remains present at the Heights. On hearing of Lockwood's ordeal, Heathcliff "Got on the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. 'Come in! come in!' He sobbed." (Bronte 1847, p. 28) Her ominous presence in Heathcliff's mind eventually manifests itself into convincing him to dig up her grave, which itself highlights another trope of the Gothic - an obsession with death. A focus on the paranormal penetrates right throughout the text. In the final pages of the novel we hear of accounts of ghostly sightings of Heathcliff and Catherine on the moors; "Country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their Bible that he walks. ... That old man ... affirms he has seen two on 'em ... on every rainy night, since his death." (Bronte 1847, p. 356) The presence of these spectres also attests to their perpetual and unconquerable love which defies even the grave.

Gothic novels typically take the setting of a dark castle, dungeon or laboratory; in *Wuthering Heights* the foreboding environment created by the title location is just as potent in inciting terror. The weather-wracked estate of *Wuthering Heights* offers an untamed, dangerous and sinister atmosphere.

"I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door, above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins, and shameless little boys, I

detected the date '1500'." (Bronte 1847, p. 2)

This imagery bestows upon the mansion an atmosphere akin to that of a haunted manor or castle as is typical of Gothic fiction. The sense that the Heights is a sinister place is most saliently seen when compared with the other location of the narrative, Thrushcross Grange, which serves to provide a stark contrast as a polar opposite in feeling and in what it represents; civility and the genteel. Bronte makes the contrast so clear in order to hone the sense of morbidity of the Heights.

Equally important as the mansion itself is the stormy and wild weather which abounds at the Heights. The title of the estate is telling here in that, based on the oft described conditions, it was very aptly named after the roaring winds which beset the house.

"Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there, at all times, indeed: one may guess of the power of the north wind, ... by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun." (Bronte 1847, p. 2)

The weather mirrors the passion and wildness of the inhabitants of the Heights. The moorlands which surround Wuthering Heights add to the sense of untamable danger associated with the property. The estate of Wuthering Heights, the wild weather and the dangerous moors which surround it combine to create a truly Gothic setting.

The tragic anti-hero of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff, is in many ways an archetypal Gothic character. He is mysterious, dark and exceedingly dangerous. He is wholly bent on revenge for perceived past wrongs and his passion is all-consuming. Like many Gothic anti-heroes, Heathcliff's love and fury lead him to destroy the woman he desires. In the end it is Catherine's love for Heathcliff which ultimately destroys her. His return reinforces this and she cannot live with herself anymore, she tells Heathcliff "You have killed me - and thriven on it, I think." (Bronte 1847, 167) Though he most certainly did not wish Catherine harm, he also certainly played a part in her mental and physical capitulation.

Heathcliff shows no qualms in destroying those for whom he does not care, however undeserving of his wrath they may be. Isabella Linton falls in love with Heathcliff and is abused so heartlessly that she is forced to leave him, a social taboo for the period, this can be seen in this excerpt from her epistolary confession to Ellen Dean "I assure you, a tiger, or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens... I hate him - I am wretched - I have been a fool." (Bronte 1847, p. 153) He shows no remorse as to the fate of Isabella, nor even their son Linton whom he neglects to seek medical care for when he has fulfilled his purpose in usurping for Heathcliff Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff's unwarranted acts of violence against defenseless victims show his utter disregard for human suffering. Heathcliff's relentless sadism manifests itself in his use of torture and imprisonment; classic Gothic

features. When he imprisons young Cathy at Wuthering Heights he does so to emotionally torture Edgar Linton, the man who took Catherine from him, but it is equally tortuous to poor Cathy "If papa thought I had left him, on purpose, and if he died before I returned, could I bear to live?" (Bronte 1847, p. 290) Heathcliff's use of cold-blooded emotional and psychological torture elevates him beyond the mere scorned man of passion to the disturbed and cruel monster that he becomes. Like any other Gothic anti-hero, or in many cases the antagonist, Heathcliff is bent on vengeance and does not care who must suffer from his cruelty in order for him to achieve it. In this way Heathcliff is a prime example of a Gothic protagonist.

Wuthering Heights is Gothic in its essence, it is the Gothic elements which allow the novel to transcend the genre of tragic romance and make it unique. The spectre of Catherine haunts the tale from the very first chapters onwards, and fittingly, this eerie apparition is what makes this novel so eternally enduring, the sense that love and loss are sentiments that can defy even death is a palpable and evocative theme. The mysterious and untamable setting of Wuthering Heights provides the perfect backdrop for the terrible events of the narrative. And Heathcliff's inexorable quest for revenge through premeditated torture makes him arguably the classic Gothic anti-hero. Emily Bronte makes perfect use of Gothic elements in evoking within the readers' mind a powerful sense of dread, apprehension and pain.