



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**

**Hugvísindasvið**

# **Elements of the Gothic**

*Falling from Nature in Wuthering Heights*

**B.A. Essay**

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**May 2012**

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## Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the elements of the Gothic and the way these were employed to create one of the most controversial stories of the English language, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1857). Taking a brief look at the origins of the Gothic genre and exploring the notion of the sublime as being a central factor for the Gothic endeavour, the thesis explores some of the elements by which a story can be categorized as a Gothic narrative. While the purpose of Gothic stories has frequently been to shock and sensitize the reader, the form of the Gothic has also been the means through which authors have addressed their concerns regarding all factors of life, be they cultural or individual.

At the time of Emily Brontë's publication of *Wuthering Heights*, societal changes in Britain were tremendous: with the industrial revolution, the population was increasingly abandoning the rural life of agriculture for the urban life of the cities. As regards Emily Brontë's character, it is clear that she was one of few who held nature and what she believed to be man's essential nature in the highest regard, caring little for the so-called "society" of man. As a fierce naturalist who found her liberty on the ruggedness of her childhood moors, Emily Brontë wrote her story of the opposing forces of nature versus culture portrayed in the houses of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*.

While the thesis elaborates on the elements of the Gothic that characterize *Wuthering Heights* as a Gothic story, it argues that through a more careful analysis, Emily Brontë's hidden agenda is revealed. It thus becomes evident that through the gloom of Gothic fiction, the darkness of Brontë's vision stems from the conviction that in a society that will see nature tamed, man's essential nature would inevitably be lost.

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## 1. Introduction

Creating a literary form is something scarcely thought possible to trace back to a single human being, but that however, remains the case with the beginnings of what later became known as the Gothic genre. Its origins have been dated back to the year 1765, with author Horace Walpole's reissue of *The Castle of Otranto*, in which he subtitled his work: "A Gothic Story" (Hogle I). The genre was an attempt to blend ancient romance with the modern, to create stories in which the sublime "terror" would be the "author's principal engine" (Hume 282). Through Walpole's endeavour, the standard was set for all other Gothic novels to follow.

Walpole's idea of sublimity as an emotion, ultimately achieved via the feeling of terror, was a concept promoted by philosopher Edmund Burke some eight years prior to Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*. According to Burke's theory the feeling of terror, induced by the idea of a possible pending danger, is in all cases the source for achieving the feeling of sublimity. Adopted by the authors of Gothic literature, the idea of the sublime became a central factor for the Gothic endeavour, around which all the action is built. Moreover, with the Gothic form being adjustable to most genres, it gradually developed into the principal mode for authors who would use the terrible sublime to address and disguise their concerns regarding the widest aspects of the social and cultural ponderings of their time.

While a hundred and sixty five years have passed since the publication of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, it remains to this day a source of endless fascination for scholars and laymen alike. By many considered one of the greatest love stories written, Brontë's only novel published, under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, was highly controversial due to its extremely raw depiction of cruelty, hate, and vengeance. Throughout the years the narrative has been proposed as a candidate for just about every literary theory the English language has to offer, including Romanticism and, what seems more plausible, Gothicism. The following analysis will thus draw on the elements of the Gothic, and view the way in which they have been employed to create the sublime atmosphere surrounding the narrative of *Wuthering Heights*.

Although there can be no doubt that the narrative, indeed, is a Gothic story, a character analysis of Emily Brontë demands for a closer reading of the narrative to explore the possible agenda hidden within. The accounts available regarding Emily's life, and outlook, provide for a person who was highly preoccupied with the relatively untouched parts of nature. Much like her characters Heathcliff and Catherine of

*Wuthering Heights*, she would spend much of her time rambling for liberty on the moors of her childhood surroundings (Brontë, Charlotte 311).

Living in the post industrial-revolution England, in which people were increasingly abandoning agricultural settings for urbanization, Brontë's central concern was that people were becoming divorced from the nature she held so dear (Giddens 157). Moreover, in a society that increasingly viewed nature as an obstacle in need of taming to Brontë, it was not nature that posed the problem but the modern industrial society (Giddens 157). Believing that the wild nature should remain protected rather than domesticated, she thus presents the opposing forces of Thrushcross Grange, representing the "civilized" of society and *Wuthering Heights*, in which the essential nature of man still resides in the body of Heathcliff. In her allegory of man's inevitable fall from nature in a society that aims to tame it, Brontë uses the sublimity of the Gothic narrative to pose her belief that the anthropocentric view of the "civilized" man will be the destruction of all that is nature.

## 2. Origins of the Gothic and the Sublime

The history of the Gothic tradition in literature can be traced back to the latter part of the seventeenth century, with author Horace Walpole being the first to coin the term in his preface to the second edition of *The Castle of Otranto* (Hogle I). According to Robert D. Hume, Walpole claimed in his account that, “terror” was “the author’s principal engine,” serving as a means to involve and disturb the reader (282).

Claiming the genre constituted of a blend of the ancient romance with the modern, Walpole’s new form was favoured only by a few until in the 1790s when it became tremendously popular in the British Isles, spreading from there to Europe and the New United States. The genre further continued to flourish throughout the romantic period; its characteristics were adopted into various modes of literature, including the Victorian novel, such as Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* (Hogle I). From the eighteenth century on, the Gothic genre has, to a more or lesser degree, sustained its popularity among the readers of fiction, with the reason undoubtedly being that its concepts can be adjusted to most kinds of literature, regardless of genre. According to Jerrold Hogle, the longevity and power of the Gothic novel is due to the way in which it addresses and disguises a number of the primal desires, ponderings and sources of anxiety, belonging to man, “from the most internal and mental to the widely social and cultural” aspects of existence (4).

The idea of sublimity, adopted by the authors of Gothic literature as an emotion ultimately achieved via the feeling of terror was a redefinition, made by Edmund Burke of a concept previously used in relation to the beautiful (Morris 299). According to David B. Morris, Burke’s work consolidated the different materials of earlier accounts within a single unified system, in which he irreconcilably split the sublime from the beautiful. In Burke’s view, all aspects of sublimity are governed by a single comprehensive power, explaining his theory: “Terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently the ruling principle of the sublime” (Morris 300).

In *The genesis of “Gothic” fiction*, E.J. Clery states that Burke, in his work, “begins by outlining the problem of indifference, a state of mental lethargy brought about by a steady diet of the familiar,” suggesting that in order to achieve sublimity, the feeling of “pleasurable pain” is much more sufficient than the merely positive pleasure associated with beauty alone (Clery 28). Burke suggests:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke 1759)

Moreover, Clery quotes Burke's statement that "the sublime being an apprehension of danger in nature or art, without the immediate risk of destruction..." and that the imagination must be "shaken and worked to a proper degree" by images and ideas of the terrible sublime (Clery 28).

Continually, Burke's theory has been linked to the Gothic explorations of terror, where author's would create the desired atmosphere in a space far removed from the reader's sphere of experience, thus minimizing the risk of "destruction" for the reader himself. In this sense, the notion of Burke's sublime, has been claimed to be the central factor for the terror-driven Gothic experience.



### 3. Elements of the Gothic and *Wuthering Heights*

While the sublime is considered the most prominent and the most enduring characteristic of the Gothic endeavour there are certain general features applied to create the atmosphere necessary, and by which a narration might be identified as a Gothic story (Hume 282). According to Hume the early Gothic authors' emphasis was toward an inward move from the neoclassical realistic outlook in which the literature would generally focus on the exterior actions of life, to drawing the reader's attention to the internal psychological processes and reactions of men (288). Authors' main aim was thus to involve the reader in a new way by creating scenes which would arouse his imagination and stimulate the senses (Hume 284). One of the major components in the involvement of the reader was to remove him from his daily life, from where everyday standards and moral values would not intervene with the probability of events in the story (Hume 286).

Consequently, the authors of Gothic fiction would frequently present a moral norm in their stories, often in the form of an outsider such as Mr. Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*, providing the reader with a standard recognized as close to his everyday outlook (Hume 286). The reader's views on the action as well as on the Gothic-villain, from whom most of the action derives, would then coincide with the outsiders; hence, Lockwood's experience would become their own. The absence of the reader's everyday beliefs would, furthermore, prove necessary to create the probability of the ever popular supernatural occurrences. While such events occurring within the comfort of the reader's home might be improbable, they would serve as a valid enough device for the narrative to remove him from his realistic everyday outlook (Hume 284).

In addition to the abovementioned features the Gothic atmosphere is frequently transmitted through the setting of an "antiquated or seemingly antiquated space," such as castles or mansions in faraway countries (Hogle 2), and through "raging storms, dark nights, tyranny, incarceration, and torture" (Morris 301).

When considering the abovementioned criteria for a narrative to be categorized as being a Gothic, there can be no doubt that Emily Brontë's story of the self-contained world of *Wuthering Heights*, indeed, is a Gothic story. In her narrative, the reader is drawn into the dark, hostile, and isolated world of the Yorkshire moors by Mr. Lockwood, through whom the sublime atmosphere of the Gothic is transmitted. Through his eyes the reader will witness the repugnance and brutality of the inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights* and feel the terror in his encounter with the supernatural.

Additionally, the reader will share Lockwood's curiosity in wanting to know the cause of how things came to be in their present form, thus finding himself involved beyond recall.

### **3.1 The sublime Landscape**

In *Wuthering Heights* the involvement of the reader is secured in his removal from his sphere of comfort, with Brontë relocating him to the desolate Northern English moors. The landscape serves to create an atmosphere of isolation, imprisonment even, suggested already on the first page with Mr. Lockwood exclaiming that: "In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society" (Brontë 1). That atmosphere is further emphasized in that the reader never leaves the moors once entering them with Mr. Lockwood, and while he knows where the road to the outside world lies, never does he follow that road to the outer world. When characters belonging to the story leave, the reader remains behind, awaiting their return, or news that they have died (Watson 100).

Moreover, in endowing the reader with a vivid picture of wide expanses of continuous moorlands, Brontë creates an atmosphere of danger. Lockwood's fear of travelling the moors evokes the feeling of the sublime, as he stresses the threat posed to strangers roaming the moors with its pits, and deep swamps, in which they could potentially drown (Brontë 26).

### **3.2 The Elements**

In addition to the scenery of a desolate landscape, the harshness of the elements remained a powerful resource to mediate the desired suspense and terror to the reader. Changes in the weather would thus generally indicate a dramatic shift in the narrative, an oncoming disaster of some sort.

The forces of the elements are employed on the night of old Mr. Earnshaw's death; Brontë uses them to prophesise a gruesome change. Nelly Dean relates: "A high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney" (Brontë 37), signalling the oncoming ousting of Heathcliff, upon Hindley's return as head of the family. After Heathcliff has been degraded to the status of a mere farm-boy, and thus an unacceptable spouse where Catherine is concerned, a second violent storm occurs as he departs from *Wuthering Heights*. Magnifying the scene is the exclamation that it "was a very dark evening for summer...", and that the "storm came rattling over the Heights in full fury"

(Brontë 75). Furthermore, the split between the lovers is emphasized with the “violent” wind and thunder breaking a nearby tree in half, resulting in its falling across the roof, sending a “clatter of stones and soot into the kitchen fire” (Brontë 75).

The elements are, furthermore, used to emphasize the dramatic atmosphere in relation to the deaths of Catherine and Heathcliff. A shift in the winds thus occurs following Catherine’s death, where a fall of snow interrupts the early weeks of summer, killing the flowers that had just begun to emerge and silencing the birds (Brontë 150). On the night of Heathcliff’s death, however, rain pours down throughout the night and, showering the bed in which Heathcliff parts, “...his face and throat [were] washed with rain...” (Brontë 298).

While Gothic fiction would frequently use the elements as a device to indicate a change in the atmosphere of the narrative’s material world, their employment would also commonly suggest the possibility of those passed on, haunting those who are yet living.

### **3.3 The Supernatural Effect**

Brontë introduces the possibility of supernatural events occurring, early on in *Wuthering Heights*, with narrator Lockwood being forced to stay overnight at Wuthering Heights due to an unforeseen snow-storm. Having been secured in Catherine’s childhood room, Lockwood wakes up from a frightful nightmare to the sound of tree-branches rattling against his window. When reaching out to remove the limb he instead finds himself grasping the hands of the ghost of one Catherine Linton, who has lost her way on the moors, claiming to have been “a waif for twenty years” (Brontë 21).

While leaving the reader with the possibility of the incident being merely the remnants of Lockwood’s dream, Brontë frequently addresses the belief, shared by the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, in that ghosts do exist. This can be seen, for instance, in the younger Catherine’s response to Hareton, upon his refusal to escort Lockwood to Thrushcross Grange, saying: “Then I hope is ghost will haunt you . . .” (Brontë 13). Heathcliff, who claims to know that ghosts do exist, confesses to Nelly that after Catherine’s death, he had almost dug her up, when he felt her spirit above him on the moors. Thus he knew that her spirit was not in the grave but on the earth, and ever since he feels her presence (Brontë 256). Moreover, pending his own death, Heathcliff tells Nelly that should she neglect to have him buried next to Catherine, she would surely

discover that “the dead are not annihilated” (Brontë 297).

Additional events pertaining to the supernatural further occur, for instance where after Heathcliff’s death, Joseph claims to see him roaming the moors with Catherine on rainy nights. Also, Nelly meets a young shepherd who expresses his fear of crossing the moors, having seen the ghosts of the pair “under t’ Nab” (Brontë 299). Confessing that while she is hesitant to believe in such “nonsense,” Nelly refrains from being left alone or travelling the moors in the dark (Brontë 299).

While Brontë promotes the idea of possible supernatural events occurring in the narrative, the ghosts of the story belong to the house of Wuthering Heights which, at the end is abandoned by everybody apart from Joseph. He chooses to live on in his chamber while the rest of the house will be shut up, “for the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it,” as Lockwood exclaims (Brontë 300). In Lockwood’s proposal, the role of the outsider is used in transmitting possible supernatural events to the reader, making them all the more likely to have occurred. Thus, with Lockwood’s scepticism in whether his encounter with Catherine’s ghost is a dream or not, his last visit to Wuthering Heights suggests that by the end of the story, he is a firm believer.

### **3.4 The Antiquated Castle**

Towering over the landscape is the “ancient castle” from which the name of the narrative derives. As the main setting for most of the narrative’s action, its role is of so much importance, it almost seems like a living, breathing entity reflecting the harsh nature of its inhabitants. A centuries-old farmhouse, Wuthering Heights stands solitary amidst the expanding moorlands with even the name suggesting its exposure to the elements. For Lockwood the house presents itself with an air of neglect as he notices the grass around it growing wild, where “cattle are the only hedge-cutters” (Brontë 2).

As a home, clearly not meant to be penetrable by outsiders, Lockwood explains Wuthering Heights’ name and location as:

”Wuthering” being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have 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.

(Brontë 2)

The description evokes a vivid image of a sealed off space, shadowy and hostile with the rough exterior of the house, its jagged edges and sun-deprived thorns, suggesting its dark atmosphere. The hostility is further emphasized in the chained gates and barred doorways which simultaneously serve to prohibit entrance, while conveying a prison-like atmosphere for the souls occupying the house (Brontë 6). Paralleling the rough exterior, the house's interior atmosphere proves to be equally pugnacious with its hostile inhabitants and dogs that are "not kept for a pet" (Brontë 4). This is clearly portrayed in Lockwood's initial visit where he is assaulted by the house dogs, after which he is insulted by Heathcliff who claims the dogs would have disregarded him, had he not been touching something (Brontë 5).

Through Lockwood's visit to Wuthering Heights, the reader learns of the vampiric-like atmosphere, seemingly stemming from the presence of Heathcliff, whose brutal treatment draws all vitality from those inhabiting the house, creating the air of bitterness and hostility to which Lockwood is subjugated. His encountering the supernatural in Catherine's old room on the night of the snow-storm and the following scene, in which he hears Heathcliff's sobbing and begging Catherine to come in (Brontë 24), furthermore, leaves Lockwood as bewildered as any outsider would be.

As far as Lockwood's visits to Wuthering Heights serve to initiate the narrative and provide the external account needed for the reader to relate, they also provide for the reader's curiosity regarding the inhabitants and how things came to be as they are. Thus Brontë provides a second narrator, equally "normal" as Lockwood in the character of Nelly Dean, the housekeeper who relates to Lockwood the story of the house that bred the villain-protagonist that is Heathcliff.

### **3.5 The Villain-Protagonist**

While Lockwood's introduction to the character of Heathcliff suggests a character of an almost inhuman nature in his manner of mistreating the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, Brontë soon reveals him to be much more than the evil that meets the eye. As the typical villain of Gothic literature, Brontë portrays her protagonist as a man whose circumstances have turned to evil purposes (Hume 284), and despite his brutal nature, he is one who must unavoidably be sympathized with.

The sympathies aroused for the villain-hero of Brontë's narrative are initiated in his arrival at Wuthering Heights as "a dirty, ragged, black-haired child (Brontë 31), about whose past nothing is known. Already as a child, Heathcliff is introduced to severe hardship and blows at the hands of a jealous Hindley Earnshaw, who resents his father's supposed favouritism of the "beggarly interloper" (Brontë 34). While possessing the potential to become a man of civility his prospects are destroyed at Mr. Earnshaw's death, with Hindley granted the power to degrade Heathcliff to the status of a mere servant (Watson 90). Through his tyrannous treatment of Heathcliff the resentful character of Hindley prepares for his own downfall, and while the brutality with which Heathcliff will later treat him is at times appalling, his destruction can bring no specific grief to the reader (Watson 91).

Although Hindley's persecutions cause Heathcliff to be forced down to an animal level, he is not alone for he still holds Catherine, upon whom; he can pour his love and devotion. Bonding as a result of the likeness of their souls, the pair's love is described with such intensity that it can scarcely be matched by any literature since. Forgetting all their miseries "the minute they were together" (Brontë 40), Catherine's love remains the controlling force of Heathcliff's mentality, providing him with a kindred spirit without whom he would be alone in the world. Catherine's social aspirations, however, brought on by her collision with the civilized world of Edgar Linton are what ultimately divide the lovers, as she trades what Nelly refers to as "a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley" (Brontë 61). Catherine blames her abandonment of Heathcliff on Hindley's bringing Heathcliff "so low" (Brontë 71), and while she so famously declares, "*I am Heathcliff*" (Brontë 73), she simultaneously rejects the thought of a union with him as it would degrade her. The loss of Catherine into the world of Thrushcross Grange, in which the likes of Heathcliff are not welcomed, is what finally ousts all kindness from Heathcliff's soul, leaving only the brutal creature that Lockwood encounters when arriving to Wuthering Heights.

Having deserted the moors as a result of Catherine's abandonment, Heathcliff returns three years later in a manner "even dignified" (Brontë 85), seemingly having made his fortune, further adding to the air of mystery surrounding his character. Heathcliff's return, as a more cultivated figure on the exterior but with all the savageness of the Gothic villain within, initiates the sequence of destruction for all he feels have wronged him. While the narrative provides for appalling descriptions of the brutality with which Heathcliff carries out his vengeance on Hindley, Isabella, and their descendants of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, Brontë constantly reminds

the reader of the betrayal causing Heathcliff's wrath. He remains unwelcomed into the polished world of Thrushcross Grange, and must endure the thought of his "soul" belonging to someone else.

The second generation, whose necessity for the story has often been questioned, proves necessary for Heathcliff to fulfil his aim in gaining the social status that he feels separated him from Catherine (Watson 94). Accumulated by hatred towards the world that cost him his love he must therefore gain possession, not only of Wuthering Heights, but Thrushcross Grange as well. This he succeeds in doing, only through the second generation. In his obtaining financial control over Hindley he is able to secure possession of Wuthering Heights as well as Hindley's son, Hareton. At Hindley's death, Heathcliff states: "Now, my bonny lad, you are *mine!* And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" (Brontë 165). His thirst for revenge thus extends to the next generation as he unfolds his intentions for Hareton to receive the same fate that he was subjected to.

While relating Heathcliff's years of terrorising the young Hareton, Catherine Linton, and even his own son, Linton, whom he uses to secure his possession of Thrushcross Grange, Brontë regularly reminds the reader of his loss. Projecting him as a man haunted by a ghost of the one he could never have, she regularly creates scenes where his pain is visualised. Nearing the end of his reign of hatred, his frequent conversations with Nelly reveal his longing to be reunited with Catherine, that she is taking over his existence, her features haunting him, "in every cloud, in every tree..., he is "surrounded by her image" (Brontë 288). Upon the realization that the end of his voyage is near, and that reunion with Catherine will soon be consummated, he ceases his reign of terror, providing for a happier ending of the story, as he leaves Catherine Linton and Hareton to unite (Watson 94). Their union thus provides for the ending that should have been Heathcliff and Catherine's.

For *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff as the villain-protagonist is central to the story. Not only is he the one who acts and suffers, he is the one who brings action and suffering to the others. With his strength, he dominates the sequence of events in the story, and both his passion and power for evil shock and amaze the reader. With Heathcliff, a story that might have been but a chaotic heap, is made into a coherent whole, from the ghastly beginning, to its peaceful close (Watson 89).

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* includes all the devices necessary for a Gothic novel. From the very first pages, where the reader is brought on to the moors, from which the outside world is closed, he remains isolated within the space throughout the

whole of the narrative. Through the eyes of narrators who share his own outlook on life, he is introduced to a world of love, hatred, revenge, and supernatural occurrences that will shock and terrify him, as well as arouse his curiosities in how the status quo was achieved.

According to Watson, Brontë's sister, Charlotte, while incapable of understanding the narrative still captured its power, stating that "the reader is scarcely ever permitted a taste of unalloyed pleasure; every beam of sunshine is poured down through black bars of threatening cloud; every page is surcharged with a sort of moral electricity" (100). Although the theme of Heathcliff's quest for vengeance creates a terror-stricken atmosphere as it destructs every life he touches, the reader remains forced to appreciate the reasons for his evil. Elaborating the hurts of Heathcliff, in various ways throughout her narrative, Brontë excludes any moral judgment from being passed upon the damage he inflicts upon himself and others.

However, with the aforementioned power of the Gothic literature being due to, for instance, the exploration of the social and cultural aspects of existence (Hogle 4), viewing *Wuthering Heights* as merely a Gothic romance, would automatically exclude it as any sort of study for a societal problem (Watson 88). Although Brontë's fiction unquestionably consists of the sufficient amount of Gothic elements to categorize it as such, a deeper analysis reveals the underlying societal concerns of the author. As a means to explore the possible agenda, hidden within the Gothic novel of Emily Brontë, a glimpse at the author's own perspectives on life proves a necessity.



#### 4. Emily Brontë: Life and Nature

As Brontë's life was not a long one, a glimpse into her personality must be retrieved through her own personal poems and from her sister Charlotte's accounts. These constitute an explanation regarding Emily's outlook on life and provide us with the reasons for her concerns, that is, how man's true nature was endangered by the influences of the so-called "civilized" of society, a view, clearly reflected in *Wuthering Heights*.

Charlotte reveals the nature of Emily's youth, as being passed in seclusion among the "Long low moors, dark with heath" (Brontë 311). She claims that her sister loved the moorlands and that her idea of liberty was to be found in the solitary landscape of the stern northern moors, without which, she could not thrive (Brontë 311-312). This is made evident, in that, when Emily was away; her health would rapidly decline, as she suffered from the loss of her inartificial life in wild nature. Charlotte relates her sister's homesickness: "Every morning when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her" (Brontë 311). This feeling Emily would later transfer to Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, as she withers away when removed from the wild nature of her moors.

Emily's preference for nature over the supposedly "civilized" habitat is further addressed by Barbara Goff, where she quotes Charlotte Brontë relating a time when the sisters' common editor invited them to London so that they might observe the "real world." Charlotte states: "Ellis, I imagine, would soon turn aside from the spectacle [of London] in disgust. I do not think he admits it as his creed that 'the proper kind of study of mankind is man – at least not the artificial man of the cities...' (484). In Emily's view, it is clear that the truth about human nature was not to be found within the "civilized" men of the cities, but in the wild, and she found that the greatest error of man was his refusal to recognize the fundamental relations between humans and nature (Goff 478).

The accounts available, furthermore, suggest Emily's complete lack of interest in whatever could be referred to as "society" (Goff 481). While Brontë would reserve her favours for her immediate family and servants, she seemingly never altered her conduct towards the "betters" of society and according to Goff, later biographers would discover far more about Emily, through interviews with servants and local tradesmen than those

higher ranking in society (481). In her preface to *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte thus explains that:

Ellis Bell did not describe as one whose eye and taste alone found pleasure in the prospect; her native hills were far more to her than a spectacle; they were what she lived in, and by, as much as the wild birds, their tenants, or as the heather, their produce. Her descriptions, then, of natural scenery, are what they should be, and all they should be. (Bell 308)

Moreover, Charlotte suggests that had Emily been a member of the “cultivated” of society, “her view of a remote and unreclaimed region, as well as of the dwellers therein, would have differed greatly from that actually taken by the homebred girl” (Bell 307-308). Emily was, however, a person who felt the essence of nature when rambling on the moors and as such, saw the Victorian man as having descended from his essential primal nature (Goff 479).

#### **4.1 The Nature of the “Civilized”**

Brontë’s contempt for the “civilized” and their descent from the true nature of man is evident in her view of the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange, including the tenant Lockwood, who she portrays as acting out a town scenario in the midst of the desolate landscape (Goff 493). Cutting themselves off from the real nature they live in idleness within the gardens, fences, and hedges of Thrushcross Park, preferring their organized paths and flowerbeds to the wild of the moors. Their weak disposition is asserted in that the slightest provocation will cause them to fall sick or even die, such as in the case of Mr. and Mrs. Linton, who die from catching Catherine’s fever (Brontë 78). Moreover, Brontë shows those from the “real world,” to be equally weak, where Lockwood falls ill, and is submitted to several weeks of bed rest from his walking through the snow between Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights (Brontë 80).

Extending the weak stature of the “civilized” to their mentality, Brontë characterises the Linton family as both superficial and cowardly in nature. Isabella thus becomes uncontrollably infatuated with Heathcliff, when he returns from the outside world with his polished exterior. Taking no heed from Catherine’s warning, in him being an “unreclaimed creature, without refinement – without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone” (Brontë 90), she sees only what lies on the surface. For Isabella, fortune equals civility and the realization that he really is a “fierce, pitiless,

wolfish man” (Brontë 90) comes too late for her to be salvaged. Incapable of thriving in the raw nature of *Wuthering Heights* she flees for the city, carrying her child by Heathcliff.

Edgar Linton proves equally shallow in his fascination with Catherine, whose nature he cannot understand, and passion he cannot equal. Cowering away from any kind of confrontation he retreats to his library rather than enduring her “wild” episodes (Brontë 105). His cowardly nature is further emphasized in his collision with Heathcliff at Thrushcross Grange, where the only manner in which he dares confront Heathcliff is with the aid of armed servants (Brontë 103). Openly showing his fear of fighting Heathcliff, only his and Catherine’s merciless taunting will suffice to bring out the “savage” in Edgar, causing him to abandon his cowardice and administer a blow to Heathcliff’s throat (Brontë 102). That is the only moment we are enabled to admire the character of Edgar Linton, whom we otherwise only feel painfully sorry for (Goff 493).

With the two houses representing opposing worlds and values, Thrushcross Grange is frequently related to civilization and refinement, while the atmosphere of *Wuthering Heights* is, from the outsiders’ perspective, hostile and brutal.

Viewing *Wuthering Heights*, however, within the context of realities of the rural life, which Brontë herself embraced, goes far toward explaining the brutality and destructiveness as merely one of the hard facts of a harder way of life (Goff 497). In farming as Goff points out, people do not anthropomorphize their animals, but see them as merely an economic system (498). This can be seen in Lockwood’s initial visit to *Wuthering Heights* as he attempts to caress the nursing pointer, whereupon he is told that she is “not accustomed to be spoiled – not kept for a pet” (Brontë 4). Moreover, while Isabella sees no fault in her and Edgar’s fighting over a small dog, nearly pulling it “in two between them” (Brontë 42), she implies that the hanging of a litter of puppies at *Wuthering Heights* is performed out of mere cruelty (Brontë 161). Brontë however, has come to terms with nature’s indifference to such human sentiments and in her view, the “breeding” so common in the nineteenth century, referring to the proper nurturance of “civilized” behaviour, has weakened the nature of the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange (Goff 498).

While Heathcliff is the character most frequently mentioned in relation to brutality, Brontë’s views on the humanizing gentility of the upper classes is made evident in one of the most violent acts of *Wuthering Heights*. This involves Mr. Lockwood’s encounter with the ghost of Catherine Linton pleading for entrance, with his response being to pull her wrist “on to the broken pane, and rub[bed] it to and fro till

the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes” (Brontë 21). Additionally, Isabella Linton is shown to take great delight in inflicting further pain onto Heathcliff, where he is grief-stricken after Catherine’s death. Isabella states: “Had it been another, I would have covered my face, in the presence of such grief. In *his* case, I was gratified: and ignoble as it seems to insult a fallen enemy, I couldn’t miss this chance of sticking in a dart” (Brontë 159). When compared to Heathcliff’s reactions upon his infliction of pain upon Isabella, muttering: “I have no pity! I have no pity! The worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain” (Brontë 134), it seems evident that Heathcliff takes no pleasure in his cruelty.

For Emily Brontë, Thrushcross Grange is a place of human brutality, where “savageness” thrives in the midst of plenty, indicating just how far man has fallen from the instincts of natural humaneness (Goff 503). While Catherine and Heathcliff’s initial opinion of it is that it must be like heaven to dwell in, “heaven [does] not seem to be [their] home” (Brontë 71).

#### **4.2 Nature’s Corruption by Civilization**

The irreversibility of human nature is Brontë’s primal concern in her narrative of how things came to be in their present form (Goff 487). This is visualized in the way the Earnshaw children, Catherine and Hindley, once introduced to the world of the “civilized,” develop an attraction to it that will ultimately lead to their downfall. Catherine’s fall is brought on by her incapability to adapt to the civilized world she enters, while Hindley having adapted to civility in his absence from Wuthering Heights, is rendered incapable of reversing the process.

When Hindley returns to Wuthering Heights from university, having “grown sparer, and lost his colour, and spoke and dressed quite differently” (Brontë 39), he brings with him a part of the cultivated world, in the form of his bride, Frances. His homecoming brings further changes to the household as the now refined Hindley establishes a space between his family and the servants, quartering them in the back kitchen (Brontë 39). Hindley, moreover, ousts Heathcliff from the family, reducing his status to a common labourer at the farm (Brontë 39-40). However, his overdependence and passion for his “civilized” wife will be the destruction of him as Frances, like most outsiders, is unable to adapt to the environment of Wuthering Heights, and dies from childbirth (Brontë 57).

While Hindley’s destruction is brought on by grief over the loss of his wife, the

cause of Catherine's downfall is her fascination with the cultivated life, offered by the Linton family of Thrushcross Grange, causing her to abandon her own nature.

Brontë explains Catherine and Heathcliff's initial response to Thrushcross Grange as a fascination by its beauty, with Heathcliff claiming that had he and Catherine lived there: "We should have thought ourselves in heaven!" (Brontë 42). With Catherine's forced incarceration within the walls of Thrushcross Grange, due to the Linton's dog biting her Heathcliff, however, learns that not all are welcome in this heaven, as his outlandish outlook causes him to be "unfit for a descent house" (Brontë 44). Catherine, with her more refined looks is welcomed and remains smitten with the cultivated family of Thrushcross Grange. This causes her to adopt a double personality in attempting to adhere to the civilized world to which the Linton's belong, having "no temptation to show her rough side in their company" (Brontë 59).

Indicating Catherine's inevitable downfall, is her prophesying dream in which – she relates to Nelly – she was in heaven, but: "heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to the earth," and flung out by the angels, into the heath, she "woke sobbing for joy" (Brontë 71). In the same instance, she forfeits her own nature in exclaiming that:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees – my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff. (Brontë 73)

Her revelation to Nelly suggests that she is aware of her folly in marrying Edgar, but also asserts the fragility of nature in the face of civilization, as her fascination with the world of Thrushcross Grange causes her to betray the very nature that is her essence.

Catherine's status as the fragile part of nature which, if forced to yield to civilization will ultimately perish is emphasized in her mentality. The deterioration of her mental self is thus elicited, subsequent to her choosing to marry Edgar Linton and, by extension, to abandon the part of her that is Heathcliff. His departure from Wuthering Heights upon hearing of the pending marriage, causes Catherine to suffer her initial mental breakdown, acting out such a scene that it terrified Nelly, who exclaims to have thought "she was going mad" (Brontë 78). With Catherine's spirits briefly elevated upon Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights, she suffers her final mental breakdown

as a result of his banishment from Thrushcross Grange, appearing to Nelly as “one doomed to decay” (Brontë 138).

Further symbolizing the deterioration of nature bound to civilization is Catherine’s weakening disposition at Thrushcross Grange. This is, for instance, indicated in her having “seasons of gloom,” ascribed to her previous illness as “she was never subject to depression of spirits before” (Brontë 81). Moreover, Heathcliff symbolizes Catherine’s relocation to the home of the Lynton’s as her being like “an oak [planted] in a flower pot,” and expecting it to prosper (Brontë 135). On Catherine’s deathbed, nature’s confinement within the walls of the civilized Thrushcross Grange is asserted in her longing to free herself from the “shattered prison,” that her body has become, and “escape into that glorious world” that is nature (Brontë 141). Furthermore, Catherine expresses the need for the open air of the moors, believing them to have the healing power she needs to feel like herself again. She emphasizes the nature as fundamental to her character in wishing that she “was a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free” and should be herself again “were [she] once among the heather on those hills” (Brontë 111).

Through Catherine’s death, Brontë asserts her view on that should nature be confined within the restrictions of civilization, it cannot but perish. With Catherine’s betrayal to her own nature, in attempting to belong to the civilized culture, her innate nature is what ultimately defeats her and throughout the story, she continues to exist only as a spectre: an image of what nature once was.

### **4.3 Nature’s last Stand**

Brontë’s view on the prospects of nature, surviving in its purest form, was coloured with a sense of doom. In quoting Leavis, Barbara Goff asserts that “*Wuthering Heights* became a responsible piece of work, once Brontë began to see it as a way to alert her own generation [to the dangers of rapid social and ecological change]” (486). While feeling that nature was doomed to succumb to the destructive effects of civilization, she posts her beliefs in a higher force, operating ruthlessly to restore nature to its original form, representing this force in the character of Heathcliff (Goff 479).

Emily Brontë’s fascination with the unruly nature is emphasized throughout *Wuthering Heights*, where she portrays Heathcliff through symbols of the natural world that is his essence. He is thus frequently referred to in animal form, as when Nelly describes him: “foaming like a mad dog,” adding: “I did not feel as if I were in the

company of a creature of my own species; it appeared that he would not understand, though I spoke to him; so, I stood off; and held my tongue, in great perplexity” (Brontë 141-142). For Brontë, however, Heathcliff’s power goes beyond that of a mere human, seemingly having more to do with the power that she equates to nature itself (Goff 483).

Brontë’s disregard for society was largely because she realized that man was increasingly descending from his “native form,” and his fall was, as far as she was concerned, due to the effects of “civilization.” The idea that the whole of the second-generation narrative was created as an afterthought (Small xv), is thus flawed as only through them can Brontë’s notion of man’s descent from his essential nature, as the result of the collision with the “artificial men of cities” be explored. In showing the driving forces of nature’s creative and destructive powers, embodied in Heathcliff, it is through that generation that Brontë expresses and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the human animal (Goff 486).

With Heathcliff’s cruelty is frequently mentioned throughout the story, Brontë likens him to the creator who is often apparently cruel in his measures of protecting his work. There can be no doubt that Heathcliff’s aim for Hareton was to raise a proud, zealous, and independent farmer, keeping him pristine while suppressing any inclination toward the gentility that destroyed his father and aunt (Goff 505). Much like nature, Heathcliff’s attempt is toward culling his “stock,” so that only the strong remain, that is, those who possess the essential nature of man.

Out of the youngest generation, Cathy Linton is the sole character that remains defiant and brave in the face of Heathcliff, never swaying from her own wilfulness. While Heathcliff’s treatment of her is perhaps the most brutal, his lessons for her enclose the true value of life, which she learns through his forcing her to care for Linton on his deathbed. The most adaptable of all the characters, she is able to endure her stay at Wuthering Heights, but she thrives in the civility of Thrushcross Grange (Goff 502). Through Heathcliff’s lesson, however, humanity is instilled in her, enabling her to begin to love Hareton whom she earlier loathed and while free to marry him, she is equally free to corrupt his nature with her own frailty (Goff 505).

As the narrative draws to a close, it becomes ever clearer that in Brontë’s view the deterioration of man as nature was inevitable. In Heathcliff’s death, she shows his hard fought battle for the culling of his stock to have been in vain, as while Cathy and Hareton continue their ramble on the moors, their genes for gentility draw them back to Thrushcross Grange. Wuthering Heights, will be shut up for the most part and although Joseph chooses to remain, the true sublimity of the story reveals itself to the reader in

the realization that with Joseph's eventual death, the last remainders of nature will be lost.



## Conclusion

When Horace Walpole wrote the first “Gothic” story some two hundred and fifty years ago, little did he know that he had created a new form which paved the way for many of the most memorable works in the history of literature.

By now a classic, Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, which followed the tradition initiated by Walpole, remains an endless source for fascination and regardless of how often it is read, a new perspective is always to be found. Having been designated to a variety of genres from its time of publication, there is little doubt that it belongs within the Gothic literary mode, providing a new source for the terror-driven sublimity with each new reading.

While the narrative contains an abundance of the “classic” Gothic elements, such as the isolating factor, the supernatural and the raging storms, the true sublime is the narrative that lurks in the shadows of the most obvious elements of the Gothic provided, almost as if to distract the reader from seeing the true horror that Emily Brontë felt the need to address.

Although the characters of the story, and especially Heathcliff, are frequently referred to in animal terms, and seemingly to indicate the brutality of Heathcliff’s nature, Brontë’s idea for one of the most famous Gothic villains in the history of English literature was a quite different one. Placing him above all others, Heathcliff is the epitome of man’s essential nature, and possibly the only one who could reverse her fears of her beloved nature being overrun by the “civilized” of her society. Culling his “stock” with all the brutality of raw nature, Heathcliff represents the essence of humankind, fighting off the forces of the society that mean to tame his nature and while Brontë would like to have seen him victorious, she was not only a naturalist, but a realist too.

The ending of the story symbolizes the realities overriding Emily Brontë’s visionary nature. Offering nothing but gloom, the embodiment of the essential nature of man has fallen, leaving the reader to reflect upon the generations to come. With Cathy and Hareton leaving the self-sustainable nature of *Wuthering Heights* for the disabling atmosphere of Thrushcross Grange, the future seems to offer little more than the prospect of future generations as embodiments of Edgar and Isabella Linton, pulling small dogs in two between them. Thus the true sublimity of Emily Brontë’s Gothic story lies, not in the classic elements of the Gothic, but in her vision of man falling from nature.

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