



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

On the Threshold

Liminality in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights

B.A. Essay

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Abstract

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is examined in this essay through the scope of liminality. Brontë uses subtle liminal devices to enhance her narrative and give extra depth to her characters. The relevant characters are analysed and discovered in both fixed and fleeting liminal states and their actions and motives are influenced accordingly. The complete setting of *Wuthering Heights* is explored and found to embody in-between situations and places throughout. These places are examined further and in combination with characters and events. Heathcliff is analysed in accordance with his situation on the threshold of society and his actions are examined with special regard to his feelings for Catherine. However Catherine is analysed through her relationships and decisions rather than her permanent situation in life. Furthermore Nelly Dean and Mr. Lockwood's connection to the narration of the story is explored and found to present an interesting liminal situation between being a narrator and a character in the story. The main settings of *Wuthering Heights* impose much mystery and suspense upon the story. The moors are considered the ultimate liminal place in the story, being situated between the two main estates, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Connection between the moors and especially Heathcliff and Catherine are investigated and found to be of great importance to the whole narrative. Moreover the tension between the two estates, caused mainly by Catherine, heavily influences the characters and the liminality surrounding both windows and doorways adds a distinct supernatural effect to the whole narrative. Furthermore Brontë blurs the line between life and death to create additional drama and suspense but due to her narrative technique the novel is still connected with reality.

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1. Introduction

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) was frequently ill received by Brontë's contemporaries. Today, however, the novel is considered a classic and is often especially valued for its peculiar nature and mystical qualities. Some of the strangeness of the story can be linked to Brontë's use of liminality and associated with that, supernatural devices. Brontë uses liminality brilliantly to create mystery, suspense and drama, both through events and characters. Even though the term "liminality" is not found in many dictionaries it is used by many scholars and is crucial for the development of this essay. The adjective "liminal" is however found in dictionaries; it is derived from the Latin word *limen* meaning "threshold" and it can mean an intermediate state, phase or condition ("liminal"). The usage of "liminal" and "liminality" in this essay will be based on the works of Arnold van Gennep and Victor W. Turner.

Van Gennep describes in his *Les Rites de Passage* how every "rites de passage" or a change from one state to another has a liminal period between the initial phase or the separation and the conclusive phase or the aggregation (Gennep 11). Victor W. Turner expands on the concept and regards the liminal period or "liminality" as an interstructural situation in an otherwise structured society. He uses the term "liminality" as a situation between states, i.e. between two relatively fixed or stable conditions (Turner 46). However Turner's definition is very broad and he "tentatively suggested that a liminal state may become 'fixed', referring to a situation in which the suspended character of social life takes on a more permanent character" (Thomassen 15). This interpretation of liminality is different from Gennep's since there is no transition from one state to another and that broadens the term even more and Szakolczai even "diagnosed modernity itself as 'permanent liminality'" (Thomassen 19).

With the ever-expanding use of liminality it is possible to place every character and every situation into a liminal setting but for the purposes of this essay I will attempt to use the term in relevant situations to better understand the depth of narrative in *Wuthering Heights*.

Liminality is applicable to many things, as Bjørn Thomassen points out: Speaking very broadly, liminality is applicable to both space and time. Single moments, longer periods, or even whole epochs can be liminal. Liminal places can be specific thresholds; they can also be more extended areas, like

“borderlands” or, arguably, whole countries, placed in important in-between positions between larger civilizations. (16)

Liminality can for example be applied to an individual’s situation or to a certain place or a zone. A liminal situation often involves rituals like christenings or weddings when, for example, a woman who is getting married is in a liminal state between being single and being married. A liminal situation can also be a fixed position in life, for example a tramp is a person that is on the margins of society and therefore in a liminal zone of a certain kind. A liminal state can also be between life and death, i.e. someone that is dying or is already dead, i.e. ghosts. Another example of liminality is places or zones. A liminal place, or zone, can be for example the coast, which is between land and sea or bogs that are also between land and water or other in-between places. Liminal places can also be in doorways or windows where someone is neither inside nor outside or bridges where someone is for example placed between two banks of a river. Liminal places and are often connected with offerings to deities or burials and also to supernatural beings of many kinds. It was or is also somewhere believed that a liminal period of some kind will grant you an arcane knowledge or “gnosis” that can only be achieved through some kind of liminal ritual (Turner 51).

The complete setting of *Wuthering Heights* is liminal. Brontë places the moors in a betwixt position between the two estates Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Characters and events are then made to bounce back and forth, forever stuck in the whirlwind between the two places. Catherine struggles to find her balance between the wild nature of Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights and the sophisticated culture of Edgar and Thrushcross Grange. Furthermore Brontë uses, in many instances, liminal places like doorways and windows to enhance the drama of an event and create an invisible barrier between the real world and the supernatural one. Brontë also uses liminality in her characters by often placing them on the margins of society or on the boundaries of life and death. The main power in Brontë’s usage of liminality is viewed both through Heathcliff and Catherine as characters and through their relationship. Their connection embodies elements from both life and death and surrounds the whole narrative of *Wuthering Heights*.

2. Characters in Betwixt Situations

Brontë introduces few characters into *Wuthering Heights*, however most of them play important roles in the story. Heathcliff is the character that influences the story the most and since he drives the story from his childhood and to his death it is safe to consider him as the main character. Nevertheless it is difficult to distinguish whether Heathcliff is the main character or the villain, or both, because even though he is the force that motivates the narrative he usually does it in a destructive and malignant manner.

Heathcliff motives, i.e. his love for Catherine, conjure up some sympathies for him but he is still a static character that does not evolve on the inside even though he manages to refine his manner and outside appearance. Heathcliff's liminal attributes and situation in life are a large part of the reasons for his static state and villainous nature. Even though Heathcliff has great impact on the lives of most of the other characters and appears to have most of the control he is still affected by some of them. Catherine is the character that appears to be the reason for all of Heathcliff's actions. Her liminal status is different from Heathcliff's since his is more fixed and involuntary while hers is more self-inflicted and unstable.

Nelly and Mr. Lockwood are both characters that appear to be outside the story but are still part of it. Nelly is usually the narrator but still has great impact on the story. She is liminal in the way she is telling the story but still taking part in it, but what mostly makes her character liminal is her personal position in life. Conversely Mr. Lockwood is almost completely un-liminal and everything from his personality to his situation in life makes him an outsider both in the society and in the story. However Mr. Lockwood presents an interesting contrast to the other characters and provides a different perspective to the story as a whole.

Other characters in *Wuthering Heights* are also quite important and some even more than those previously mentioned but unless they have direct influences on the main liminal characters or other betwixt situations they will not be mentioned during this essay.

2.1. Heathcliff

Brontë presents Heathcliff as a completely liminal character from his origin to his nature and the mystery surrounding his origin is derived from its liminal characteristics. Heathcliff is brought as an alien child from the streets of Liverpool to an unsuspecting

household and is immediately put on the borderlines of both the household and society when Mrs. Earnshaw wonders “how [Mr. Earnshaw] could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house” (Brontë 31). Heathcliff’s gipsy status, reaffirmed by Mr. Lockwood’s comment that Heathcliff “is a dark-skinned gipsy in aspect” (Brontë 3), makes him an outsider not only at Wuthering Heights but also in society since gipsies are found to live on the margins of what most people consider conventional civilization. He is also most likely an orphan, which places him without a family into a family that has no interest in having him. He is also described as extremely alien to the occupants of Wuthering Heights both in appearance as Mr. Earnshaw describes the child as “as dark almost as if it came from the devil” and by his speech as Nelly says that the child “repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand” (Brontë 31). This presentation that Brontë gives of Heathcliff as a child reaffirms his liminality by not only presenting him as an gipsy orphan and therefore an outsider in society but he is also made to look, sound and even feel as alien as possible.

As well as making Heathcliff’s origin and overall appearance liminal, Brontë also introduces him into a liminal existence. Heathcliff has a home at Wuthering Heights but is still not welcome and most occupants consider him a foreign intruder. As Heathcliff’s saviour, Mr. Earnshaw becomes his foremost supporter and starts awarding him more attention than his own son, Hindley. Subsequently Hindley starts to further despise Heathcliff and abuse him, “[Heathcliff] would stand Hindley’s blows without winking or shedding a tear” (Brontë 32). Heathcliff’s status at Wuthering Heights is never secure and always fleeting. He is abused and treated like a servant by Hindley but Mr. Earnshaw treats him better than his son and makes him study with his daughter Catherine, “Miss Cathy and he were now very thick; but Hindley hated him” (Brontë 32). The contrast in Heathcliff’s situation makes his character even more ambiguous and enforces the supernatural air that surrounds his entire being.

Heathcliff’s name is another ambiguous feature of his character. Heathcliff arrives at Wuthering Heights without a name but is Christened with only one name, “it was the name of a son who died in childhood, and it has served him ever since, both for a Christian and surname” (Brontë 32), which places Heathcliff yet again in a liminal state, not nameless but still without a full name. The superhuman manner of a single name like Heathcliff suggests something otherworldly about him and combined with him being called “as dark almost as if [he] came from the devil” (Brontë 31) and an

“imp of Satan” (Brontë 34) it implies that he might come from some dark supernatural world or even be a changeling meant to replace the son that died. A changeling can be:

A creature begotten by some supernatural being and then secretly exchanged for the rightful child. From pre-Christian until recent times, many people have sincerely and actively believed that supernatural beings can and do exchange their own inferior offspring for human children, making such trades either in order to breed new strength and vitality into their own diminutive races or simply to plague humankind. (Ashliman)

Given Heathcliff’s physical attributes, liminal existence and “role as a wild and unlegitimated surrogate for the dead heir, the idea of the ‘swopped’ identity has immediate resonance” (Stewart 198). Heathcliff is always linked to the supernatural world and the other characters in the novel constantly regard him as an enigma that lurks on the boundaries of the natural world.

Heathcliff’s name appears occult and gives him a special position in the novel. However other names in *Wuthering Heights* can highlight the movement of Catherine’s position in the novel and how Heathcliff is again stuck in the zone in-between her situations.

When you have processed all the information you have been waiting for, you see the point of the order of the scribbled names, as Lockwood gives them:

Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff, Catherine Linton. Read from left to right they recapitulate Catherine Earnshaw's story; read from right to left, the story of her daughter, Catherine Linton. The names *Catherine* and *Earnshaw* begin and end the narrative [...] this is an account of the movement of the book: away from Earnshaw and back, like the movement of the house itself. And all the movement must be *through* Heathcliff. (Kermode 419-20)

This suggests that Heathcliff is firmly stuck in the liminal area that Catherine has to move through and later her daughter Cathy. Heathcliff is the wilderness between the roughness of Wuthering Heights and the culture of Thrushcross Grange and Catherine is constantly being pulled back and forth between them and that eventually breaks her whole spirit.

The darkness surrounding Heathcliff is apparent but there is always some uncertainty in determining the root of the darkness, whether it is only his appearance or his innate character. As a child Heathcliff is almost always described as dirty but even as he gets older and has cleaned up, being described as a gentleman, he is still

considered dark-skinned. More specifically Mr. Linton calls him “a little Lascar” (Brontë 44), which means “an Indian sailor” (“Lascar”) and furthermore Nelly comments about his parents, “who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen” (Brontë 50). This could mean that he is viewed as being from an Indian or Asian descent, which would make him rather medium dark-skinned but not completely black-skinned. Still it is not only Heathcliff’s skin that is often described as dark, for example Nelly describes his eyes as rather inhuman when he is a child:

Do you mark those two lines between your eyes; and those thick brows, that instead of rising arched, sink in the middle; and that couple of black fiends, so deeply buried, who never open their windows boldly, but lurk glinting under them, like devil’s spies? (Brontë 50)

Additionally she describes his eyes when he is older as “full of black fire” (Brontë 85). Heathcliff’s eyes are always fierce and severe and implying that they are spies for the devil and full of black fire gives the impression that there is something deeper hidden behind them like suggested by the Yiddish proverb “the eyes are the mirror of the soul.” Moreover there is also a certain vague liminality about how Heathcliff never completely opens his eyes but keeps them half closed as to stay in the in-between and never fully emerge.

Whether Heathcliff is a normal person or a creature from the beyond is uncertain. Brontë creates such magical enigma around Heathcliff that any reader is unable to judge his actions without considering endless aspects of his liminal being. Although Heathcliff is an outsider at Wuthering Heights he still fits perfectly into its wilderness and insanity. Furthermore Heathcliff is considered a foreigner in his own society but he still manages to use it to become wealthy and for his personal revenge. Heathcliff is obviously a character creation that is difficult, abnormal, interesting and unique all at once. Attempting to understand all of Heathcliff’s aspects is surely impossible but examining some of them can only be beneficial and motivating.

2.2. The Older Catherine

Catherine Earnshaw Linton is never really alive in the story since she is actually dead when the narrative starts. Her story, both when she is alive and after her death, is told by Nelly who appears to have some mixed feelings about her. Catherine is placed firmly into the liminality between life and death and also between two social classes. She has

her soul stuck to Wuthering Heights, the moors, and most of all to Heathcliff but she feels compelled to marry Edgar for comfort and social status.

Brontë introduces Catherine as a child close to Heathcliff in age. Catherine is quite boyish in behaviour and is described as “mischievous and wayward” (Brontë 32) and “A wild, wick slip” (Brontë 36). Catherine’s masculine traits and behaviour give her a borderline personality and in a society where women are not normally considered strong she is called “a haughty, headstrong creature!” (Brontë 58). Catherine eventually comes to a crossroad when she goes away from Wuthering Heights and is stranded at Thrushcross Grange. At this time Catherine is going through a transition, she is leaving the wild, boyish, nature-centred personality behind and is on her way to becoming a cultured, sophisticated lady. During her in-between situation at Thrushcross Grange she appears to gather some knowledge about proper civilisation and she emerges as a full-grown woman considering marriage and the future. Although this development appears normal for a young girl it is quite possible that this transformation actually becomes the reason for Catherine’s premature death.

Catherine becomes so connected to Heathcliff that she passionately states “*I am Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind*” (Brontë 73) and “[Heathcliff]’s more myself than I am” (Brontë 71). Catherine and Heathcliff not only blur the line between each others being but also between life and death. Catherine becomes so attached to Heathcliff that when she decides to marry Edgar she cannot even imagine that Heathcliff will not be with her. She feels that their souls are so united that they cannot be broken apart: “Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same” (Brontë 71). The mere thought of being without Heathcliff is unbearable to her. Even though Catherine decides to marry Edgar she still always regards him lower than Heathcliff, as she states: “every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing, before I could ever consent to forsake Heathcliff” (Brontë 72) but because of her naïve nature she still ends up loosing him. The complete bond between Catherine and Heathcliff creates a state of mixed identities and the liminal space between them generates high tension and violent moods in them both.

The complicated relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine is full of extremes but it also embodies certain liminal aspects. They were raised together, basically as brother and sister, yet when they get older there relationship begins to develop into something more romantic. Although Catherine greeted Heathcliff for the

first time by “spitting at the stupid little thing” (Brontë 32) for costing her a gift from her father, she quickly learns to love him and soon Nelly says about her, “she was much too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him: yet she got chided more than any of us on his account” (Brontë 36). She cares so much for him that she is willing to endure punishments for him and she also protects him as you would a younger sibling.

Catherine and Heathcliff are playmates from a very early age and it is natural that a strong bond is forged between them, however there is something that brings their connection a step further. The love between Catherine and Heathcliff is always present during the novel yet they never truly become a couple. Sometimes it appears as if Heathcliff and Catherine have a relationship beyond culture and that they view marriage as a tool and not something needed for true lovers. While marriage is for Catherine a way into a comfortable life, for Heathcliff it is something to be used for revenge and accumulation of power. Even when Catherine does get married she never comprehends that it can mean that she will lose Heathcliff, “well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend--if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I’ll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. That will be a prompt way of finishing all, when I am pushed to extremity” (Brontë 104). Furthermore even though Heathcliff becomes jealous of Edgar he quickly realises that Edgar’s love is nothing compared with his:

Two words would comprehend my future, *death* and *hell*—existence, after losing her, would be hell. ‘Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton’s attachment more than mine—If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn’t love as much in eighty years as I could in a day.’ (Brontë 131-32)

Although Heathcliff and Catherine’s relationship appears to go beyond culture it is still very much affected by it. Catherine actually says: “it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff” (Brontë 71) because of his low status in society which can be derived from his liminal state as an outsider on the margins of proper civilisation. However if Heathcliff were to be a full part of the household of Wuthering Heights he would of course have been considered as Catherine’s brother and so it seems that there is no possible solution that would allow them to be together. This contradiction in the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff envelops the entire novel and gives the reader a mysterious and unpredictable storyline.

Brontë introduces Catherine as a wild child firmly connected with nature. The reader perceives her as a naïve girl that is unable to comprehend how life and society actually work. That is the mastery of Brontë's depiction of Catherine. She makes Catherine grow up in relative isolation at Wuthering Heights with few occupants where she is able to run free with Heathcliff on the moors surrounded by the nature she loves. When she is introduced to Thrushcross Grange and Edgar she is completely unprepared and follows blindly the path she believes is expected of her, and it probably is. Catherine does not understand why marrying Edgar would mean losing Heathcliff because even though society views them as two adults, a man and a woman, with an unhealthy and unnatural bond, Catherine only sees herself and her soul mate, a united entity with an unbreakable connection. Catherine may be naïve, but it is only because she does not perceive the world through the scrutinizing eyes of society and culture: Catherine sees the forces of nature that connect the world and the people in it and why should culture influence something as powerful as that?

2.3. Ellen "Nelly" Dean

Nelly is a child when her mother brings her to Wuthering Heights. Her position is not completely defined since she is only a child and is neither entirely viewed as a servant or as an equal to the other children. She describes her situation as such:

I was almost always at Wuthering Heights; because my mother had nursed Mr. Hindley Earnshaw, that was Hareton's father, and I got used to playing with the children — I ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set me to. (Brontë 30)

Nelly's liminal position as child provides her with a unique perspective on the life of the other occupants of Wuthering Heights, especially the children. She is a part of their society but she is still able to view it as an outsider with less biased eyes. This is a trait that is very important when she is older and is made the narrator of *Wuthering Heights*.

The reader of *Wuthering Heights* perceives Nelly's character differently than the others. Since Nelly recites most of the events that happen in the story the reader usually gets her opinions on other characters and needs to decide for himself how much is coloured by her personal feelings. With Nelly herself however, the reader gets her own account on her actions, which makes judgement rather difficult. Nevertheless since Nelly is telling the story she is very often present which gives the reader more data to

work from and form an opinion about her. Nelly is obviously proud and never doubts her ability to be a fair storyteller,

‘I certainly esteem myself a steady, reasonable kind of body,’ [Nelly] said, [...] I have undergone sharp discipline which has taught me wisdom; and then, I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood. You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into, and got something out of also (Brontë 55)

Furthermore Nelly always considers herself as unfailingly healthy. Mathison reflects that “numerous examples of illness, decline, wasting away, and death in her experience make little impression on her, who feels herself so strong” (110), which is reaffirmed by her comment to Cathy when she worries that everybody will die and leave her: “I am strong, and hardly forty-five. My mother lived till eighty, a canty dame to the last” (Brontë 203-4). Also there always seems to a hint of arrogance surrounding Nelly and even though she is meant to be a housekeeper both at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange she still considers herself higher than many of the characters, both in morality and status.

Nelly is the main narrator of *Wuthering Heights*. She is believable and her accounts appear to be accurate but she never misses a chance to add her own moral judgments to the acts of the other characters. Nelly is therefore made to be both the narrator and a participant in the story. She is an active member of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange however she is not narrating her own story; Nelly is narrating the story of others with her effects on it. This intermediate situation makes the reader believe the story but still question the strong ethical applications that Nelly puts forward. This gives the reader room to make independent judgements and conclusions on the characters and their motives. John K. Mathison points out:

As Nelly contentedly provides her superficial interpretations of motive, and contentedly recounts her inadequate parental behaviour, we are constantly directed toward feeling the inadequacy of the wholesome, and toward sympathy with genuine passions, no matter how destructive or violent. (129)

2.4. Mr. Lockwood

Mr. Lockwood is the character that begins narrating the story of *Wuthering Heights* from his own experiences. He becomes curious about his landlord, Heathcliff, and the other occupants of Wuthering Heights but being an outsider he is unable to find the knowledge he is after. Mr. Lockwood repeatedly tries to visit Wuthering Heights but is

constantly met with obstacles and even when he makes it over the threshold he is chased out again by dogs, a ghost and even kept out by an illness suffered because of his ordeals. Furthermore Mr. Lockwood's name can be interpreted as him being locked outside the estate of Wuthering Heights or even the whole world of *Wuthering Heights* itself and unable to penetrate its secrets and mysteries. Carol Jacobs vividly describes Mr. Lockwood's attempts in entering the story of *Wuthering Heights* as well as the estate itself:

We enter *Wuthering Heights* through the voice of Lockwood, who devotes the first three chapters of his narrative to what he twice calls the "repetition of my intrusion." These intrusions are, to be sure, the literal incursions he makes into the house of Wuthering Heights but they function no less as attempts to penetrate *Wuthering Heights-as-text*. The outsider, conventional in language as well as understanding, makes repeated efforts to force his way to the penetralium. Yet one knocks vainly for admittance at these locked doors and, on his second visit, the intruder enters only by means of a violence which almost matches that of Wuthering Heights itself. (Jacobs 50)

Eventually Mr. Lockwood employs Nelly as a surrogate storyteller and a gossip in his efforts to observe and infiltrate the text of *Wuthering Heights*.

Mr. Lockwood immediately appears alien and out of place in *Wuthering Heights*. He is obviously not the main subject of the narrative but still he initiates the storytelling. Mr. Lockwood is the observer of a story told mainly by Nelly and the reader views the story through the comments and observations of both Nelly and Mr. Lockwood. With Mr. Lockwood being firmly placed between the story and the reader he gains the only liminal attribute available to him, which gives him a chance to take a minor role in the narrative. However Mr. Lockwood needs to strive for every connection he makes to the story and his un-liminal nature and character make him a constant outsider to the peculiar society that surrounds *Wuthering Heights*.

Mr. Lockwood appears to be completely unable to enter the liminal setting of *Wuthering Heights* and even the characters of the novel act strangely around him. One example of how Mr. Lockwood is excluded from the tale is how he tackles the experience of nightmares.

Lockwood interprets his dreams by rooting them firmly in his waking world. In this manner he attempts to establish the ascendancy of reality over dream and to dispense with a merely fictional terror by rational explication. (Jacobs 51)

During the story Mr. Lockwood always represents reality while the other characters are stuck in the supernatural world. He is so rooted in culture that the mystery of *Wuthering Heights* is completely unavailable to him. Other characters fear and respect the unknown but Mr. Lockwood always supports the logical explanations for events making his connection to culture and reality too strong for him to break the liminal barrier between himself and *Wuthering Heights*.

3. Places and Settings Fused with Liminal Attributes

Brontë places great emphasis on the places and settings in her novel and especially the connection between them and the characters. The setting of the novel is mainly three places, Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange and the moors between them. Nature is represented differently in all of those places. The moors are completely wild, rough and isolated while Thrushcross Grange has a beautiful garden where nature is cultivated and formed to the likings of the residents. Wuthering Heights is a place that appears to be fighting to be neither wild nor cultured, allowing streams of both to enter but never take a complete foothold. Brontë also actively uses windows and doorways to highlight for example an invasion of supernatural forces and intrusions of the cultured Mr. Lockwood.

3.1. The Moors

Not all liminal aspects in *Wuthering Heights* bode ill for Catherine and Heathcliff. The moors mark the threshold between water and land and have long been connected with offerings and burials. They are also the barrier between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange: the two places that tear Heathcliff and Catherine apart. Brontë presents the moors as a mysterious place that only Catherine and Heathcliff really appreciate and admire and their connection with the moors even transcends death. Because of the narrative structure of *Wuthering Heights* it is difficult to get an unbiased view of the moors. The reader can imagine for himself how the moors appear and most will surely imagine a rather wet and cold place maybe even windy or surrounded by a fog. Few readers probably imagine a sunny happy place full of interesting plants and beautiful animals as Catherine and Heathcliff appear to view it.

The moors represent a safe haven and a retreat for Catherine and Heathcliff. As children they often need shelter from Catherine's brother Hindley and the moors are an endless wasteland of solitude and freedom. When being punished by Hindley their first consideration for an asylum is to "appropriate the dairy woman's cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter" (Brontë 17) and even though they are sure to be punished even more "it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day" (Brontë 40).

For Heathcliff, the moors become a place to venture into with his problems and ponder in peace and isolation on how to tackle them. Considering how Heathcliff is

constantly stuck in a liminal situation of some kind it is interesting to examine the rewards connected with this state:

The arcane knowledge or “*gnosis*” obtained in the liminal period is felt to change the inmost nature of the neophyte, impressing him, as a seal impresses wax, with the characteristics of his new state. It is not a mere acquisition of knowledge, but a change in being. (Turner 51)

Incidentally Heathcliff has moments where he appears to gather some spiritual knowledge in a liminal condition, which helps him come to a conclusion and/or make a decision. Heathcliff frequently takes strolls on the moors, placing himself in a liminal place, searching for truth or peace and sometimes returning with an enlightened spirit. For example when Heathcliff is upset about the manner of Catherine’s return from Thrushcross Grange, “he rose early; and, as it was a holiday, carried his ill-humour onto the moors” (Brontë 49) but when he gets back he exclaims, “Nelly, make me decent, I’m going to be good” (Brontë 49) so his time spent on the moors must have helped him see things clearly and make a decision about trying to improve his behaviour. This example further enhances the mysteriousness of the moors and they become a place where you can obtain some clairvoyance about yourself, life or even the world.

For Catherine the moors continue to be a soothing place into her adulthood. When she gets sick and delirious she comforts herself by examining feathers and recollecting the birds from the moors in a childish manner, “Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor” (Brontë 108). Furthermore, after being confined in her room by illness or madness, or both, even the breeze from the moors is coveted by her: “Do let me feel it — it comes straight down the moor — do let me have one breath!” (Brontë 110) and the urgency in her speech is felt by her desiring even just “one breath” of the air that she connects with her childhood and with Heathcliff. Catherine’s connection with the moors may also be connected with the fact that she is also wedged between Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. She feels familiarity with the moors and with them she can free her wild nature and spirit and live free from the burdens of society.

With the moors stuck between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange they represent the untamed nature that lurks between the two cultured places. The moors appear alive and try to reach Catherine in death as she tried to reach them in life. With Catherine’s grave situated “on a green slope, in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall

is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat mould almost buries it” (Brontë 149) the moors try to invade the culture of society by climbing over the kirkyard wall after Catherine’s death as they also appear to have invaded her whole being when she is alive and she feels connected to it like nothing else. This personification of nature climbing like a physical being is a true representation of the war between nature and culture in *Wuthering Heights*.

The inkling that Heathcliff could be believed to be a changeling makes it possible that the moors are actually his home and he was potentially torn away from them. With both Catherine and Heathcliff having such strong connection with the moors it is probable that they are only in balance when they are both there. When the connection between Catherine and Heathcliff and the moors is broken the energy in the story changes and Catherine and Heathcliff both appear to go mad and the moors seem to become an even more hazardous place to venture into. The moors are considered a spiritual place that Catherine and Heathcliff both delve into and time stands still until they emerge again. They seem more at home on the moors than at the two estates surrounded by the people and the culture and them returning there seems merely an obligation that they must uphold for their basic needs like food and shelter. In adulthood both Catherine and Heathcliff are pulled by society to become more cultured. Catherine is pulled by Edgar and Heathcliff is pulled by Catherine. They are both dragged away from the moors and neither finds peace until they are united there again.

3.2. Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange

Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange can be considered rivals throughout the story. Some characters actually live at both places during the novel but most only consider one of them to be their true home. Thrushcross Grange has elegance and beauty and seems the perfect place for peaceful and docile living. As a place without extremes and passions it is a fitting home for both Edgar and later Mr. Lockwood. However, Thrushcross Grange is invaded by Catherine, an extremely passionate and vigorous person. This combination proves deadly for Catherine and she becomes sick of body and mind feeling like a prisoner unable to leave. She says in desperation shortly before her death: “Oh, I’m burning! I wish I were out of doors—I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free” (Brontë 111). Catherine is in death expelled to the edges of the property, as close to the moors as possible.

Contrary to Thrushcross Grange, Wuthering Heights is a wild place, mysterious and harsh. It evokes fierceness, intensity and often violence in its inhabitants. Wuthering Heights is also just as severe as Thrushcross Grange in rejecting occupants that do not fit with its internal mood. Being lucky, Isabella manages to escape, however her son Linton is not so fortunate. Linton feels the full brutality of Wuthering Heights through his father, Heathcliff, and even from Hareton, “Earnshaw burst the door open, having gathered venom with reflection. He advanced direct to us, seized Linton by the arm, and swung him off the seat” (Brontë 221). With his weak body he does not survive long in the hostile environment of Wuthering Heights. Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights are places of different extremes. They affect many characters in *Wuthering Heights* but mostly they affect the ones that get stuck in the liminal gap between them.

3.3. Windows and Doorways

Brontë begins *Wuthering Heights* with Mr. Lockwood trying to gain entrance into Wuthering Heights. The description he gives of the house resembles a description of a fortress where “the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones” (Brontë 2) and everything around the house appears dreary and neglected. Brontë pronounces every entrance that Mr. Lockwood makes as if he is entering an evil damned place from which he might never return. Still Mr. Lockwood decides to enter the house but pauses on the threshold where he feels Heathcliff “demand [his] speedy entrance, or complete departure” (Brontë 2). This attitude might have frightened many and suggest even further that there might be no coming back from entering the house, however Mr. Lockwood still continues into the unknown and is soon introduced to what the house has to offer.

I took a seat at the end of the hearthstone opposite that towards which my landlord advanced, and filled up an interval of silence by attempting to caress the canine mother, who had left her nursery, and was sneaking wolfishly to the back of my legs, her lip curled up, and her white teeth watering for a snatch.
(Brontë 4)

The suspense of the impending danger is clear by the vivid description of the hound’s behaviour. Furthermore the addition of “half-a-dozen four-footed fiends, of various sizes and ages, issued from hidden dens to the common centre” (Brontë 4) claims the scene as almost demonic and the estate is represented as a place inhabited by diverse

creatures of evil, which soon the reader will associate with Heathcliff. Mr. Lockwood clearly crosses a liminal threshold and has to take the consequences but despite Mr. Lockwood's fearful first experience with Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights he still decides to venture there again.

Mr. Lockwood's next visit to Wuthering Heights evokes even worse terrors. This time the door will not even open for him and instead of giving up he persists further and he "grasped the latch, and shook it vehemently" (Brontë 6) and eventually gains entry. This voyage over the threshold does not bear better fruit and again Lockwood is attacked by dogs but this time when trying to leave "two hairy monsters flew at [his] throat" (Brontë 13). Brontë portrays Mr. Lockwood as the ultimate nosey neighbour when he actually goes back to a place that he feels contains fiends and monsters that attack him at every turn. There appears to be some sort of supernatural pull that entices him to inquire more about this mysterious place, its inhabitants and its "ghosts and goblins" (Brontë 22).

During Mr. Lockwood's second visit he becomes stranded and is forced to stay the night. When he encounters Catherine's ghost the window becomes a noticeable barrier between Mr. Lockwood and the ghost. The ghost comes from a liminal place, i.e. the moors, through an in-between opening, the window, and subsequently Mr. Lockwood's reaction becomes extreme: "terror made [him] cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, [he] pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes" (Brontë 20-1). The combination of the ghost being from the moors, a mysterious and frightening place, and it being stuck in the window opening, not completely being outside but still never making it inside, gives an extra sense of anxiety and terror surrounding both Mr. Lockwood and Catherine's ghost. Using entrances, thresholds and windows Brontë highlights the otherworldly nature of Wuthering Heights. The suspense of entering is magnified and being stuck is terrifying.

4. Neither Life nor Death, What is left?

Wuthering Heights is both dramatic and mysterious and brings the reader into a terrifying yet realistic world. Both the story and the characters are believable and every event is convincing and credible. However, *Wuthering Heights* is full of superstition, paranormal activity and unexplainable events. Brontë manages to suspend the reader's disbelief by having the story told by narrators that the reader can easily question or doubt. All supernatural events can be explained by them being dreams, hallucinations or simply lies. Nevertheless these unexplained events and occurrences are no less frightening or distressing and help make *Wuthering Heights* an exciting and unforgettable read.

Some characters are already dead when the narrative starts and even one of the main characters, Catherine, is actually dead and buried, although her story is told later. In accordance with Catherine's attachment with the moors, she is not buried in a conventional place:

The place of Catherine's interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel, under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope, in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor. (Brontë 149)

This connection between Catherine and the moors is evident when she is introduced as a ghost haunting Mr. Lockwood, and she says: "let me in — let me in!" [...] "I'm come home, I'd lost my way on the moor!" (Brontë 20). Catherine is buried next to the moors and ventures over them in order to gain entrance into *Wuthering Heights*.

The relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is intensified by how it appears to transcend life into death and many of the most powerful moments of their connection is shown on the brink of death or after it: "Kiss me again, but don't let me see your eyes! I forgive what you have done to me. I love my murderer—but yours! How can I? (Brontë 142). Heathcliff's devotion to Catherine is soon revealed by his reaction to Catherine's ghostly arrival "Come in! Come in!" he sobbed. 'Cathy, do come. Oh do—*once* more! Oh! my heart's darling, hear me *this* time—Catherine, at last!" (Brontë 24). Heathcliff is shown in agony over not being able to be reunited with his soul mate and he essentially prefers being haunted to being without her.

Moreover Catherine appears to be stuck wandering the liminal zone between life and death because of her unwillingness to rest without Heathcliff, as she exclaims when she is near death:

We've braved its ghosts often together, and dared each other to stand among the graves and ask them to come . . . But Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself; they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me . . . I never will! (Brontë 111-2)

Catherine and Heathcliff both become so tormented in their life that it seems natural that they will not rest in the afterlife either. Catherine becomes delirious in her last days and torments Heathcliff to his knees

'Are you possessed with a devil,' he pursued, savagely, 'to talk in that manner to me, when you are dying? Do you reflect that all those words will be branded in my memory, and eating deeper eternally, after you have left me? You know you lie to say I have killed you; and, Catherine, you know that I could as soon forget you, as my existence!' (Brontë 140)

Catherine continues to torment Heathcliff after her death and actually in his last days he appears to forget his own existence and only focus on being reunited with Catherine.

Heathcliff is so distraught after Catherine's death that his only alternative becomes exhuming her body:

'I got a spade from the toolhouse, and began to delve with all my might—it scraped the coffin; I fell to work with my hands; the wood commenced cracking about the screws, I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave, and bending down—'if I can only get this off,' I muttered, 'I wish they may shovel in the earth over us both!' and I wrenched at it more desperately still. There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by—but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth.' (Brontë 256)

Heathcliff is situated between the ground and underground. He is in a grave, although not dead, and attempting to converse with a person that is no longer living. The power of this liminal state can be clearly felt through Brontë's narrative. Heathcliff's

animalistic behaviour, his enthusiasm and impatience, intensifies the scene and when the climax has been reached, he has acquired a companion from the other world. Catherine appears to follow Heathcliff but still torments him by not completely presenting herself to him and keeping him on the edge of entirely being united with her.

Subsequently Heathcliff becomes increasingly fixed on being reunited with Catherine and he takes walks on the moors to look for Catherine's ghost but is unable to find it and feels that "when [he] walked on the moors [he] should meet her coming in" (Brontë 257). Heathcliff finds the centre of the liminality that surrounds him, the moors, and in this place he believes he can find Catherine. His desperation escalates and during his last days he becomes completely unable to sustain his own life and withers away.

Nelly describes his last days:

Now, I perceived he was not looking at the wall, for when I regarded him alone, it seemed, exactly, that he gazed at something within two yards distance. And whatever it was, it communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes: at least, the anguished, yet raptured expression of his countenance suggested that idea. (Brontë 294-5)

Whether Heathcliff is seeing Catherine's ghost or just imagining her presence it is obvious that her death literally sucks the life out of him until there is nothing left. The supernatural implications make the time leading up to Heathcliff's death more dramatic and intense.

Brontë ends *Wuthering Heights* with Mr. Lockwood visiting "the three headstones on the slope next the moor" (Brontë 300). The scene is very fitting since he has been a follower of the whole situation with all three of them. Catherine is buried in the middle as if she embodies the moors with Heathcliff and *Wuthering Heights* on one side and Edgar and Thrushcross Grange on the other. Catherine seems destined to be stuck in the in-between in life as well as in death. She is so tempted to cross the moors into her new society with Edgar that she damns her self to a life away from Heathcliff and is haunted by the pleasant memories from her childhood, especially the ones enjoyed on the moors and with Heathcliff. It is not until after her own death that Catherine ventures back to *Wuthering Heights* to be with Heathcliff. Catherine and Heathcliff never find peace until they are both dead and buried together so they can wander the moors content in the existence between life and death.

After Heathcliff's death a small boy claims: "They's Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t' Nab," he is thought to have "probably raised the phantoms from

thinking, as he traversed the moors alone, on the nonsense he had heard his parents and companions repeat” (Brontë 299). Showing that everything seems to be possible on the moors and, whether the ghosts are there or not, it is not advisable to trust your own senses or wit on the moors or possibly anywhere around Wuthering Heights.

5. Conclusion

Emily Brontë gives *Wuthering Heights* a whole new dimension by using so many coupled aspects combined with mysterious liminal situations. These features give extra meaning to events and insight into characters. The narrative is uniquely intertwined with multiple narrators and Mr. Lockwood as an observer. The frame upon frame narrative gives the reader more opportunities to interpret characters and events and decide what to believe.

Heathcliff's background and his permanent liminal situation in life make him more enigmatic and eerie without making him directly supernatural. Catherine, on the other hand, is not so firmly stuck in a liminal situation but actually manufactures it herself. She is stuck between nature and culture, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange and Heathcliff and Edgar. Her inability to choose a position in life creates the liminal states that she endures her entire life and even into her afterlife.

Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship is complicated throughout the novel and these situations only enhance the intricate and delicate nature of their connection. Their bond becomes obvious from the start but still there is always something that is holding back further development of their relationship. The nature of the moors connects them but culture of the estates keeps them apart and the only relieve Catherine and Heathcliff get from culture is death. Brontë brilliantly uses liminal devices to make *Wuthering Heights* a mystical and supernatural love story and her genius makes the novel a classic that will never be over analysed.

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