

Wuthering Heights
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Lecture 22
Gothic Terror, Fantasy, and Violence

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Week 5:
Wuthering
Heights

Lecture 5B: Gothic Terror, Fantasy, and Violence

Image source: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/walking-the-landscape-of-wuthering-heights>

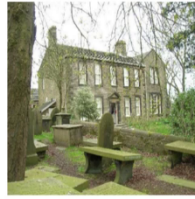


Hello, and welcome to week 5's lectures on Wuthering Heights. In today's lecture, I am going to talk about the nature of Gothic terror, fantasy and violence in Emily Brontë's novel.

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Haworth Parsonage

- “Emily Brontë lived not in a mythical moorland fastness but in a rapidly industrialising world. Her home, Haworth Parsonage, looked down on a small Yorkshire mill town and backed onto the moors.” (John Bowen)



- Source: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/walking-the-landscape-of-wuthering-heights>
- Image source: https://www.tripadvisor.com/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g186409-17355465-Haworth_Keighley_West_Yorkshire



Let us start with Emily Brontë’s life in her home, Haworth Parsonage. “Emily Brontë lived not in a mythical moorland fastness but in a rapidly industrialising world. Her home, Haworth Parsonage, looked down on a small Yorkshire mill town and backed into the moors.”

This is the view held by Professor John Bowen and he is concentrating on a particular myth, which is about the moors in which Emily Brontë grew up.

What he is trying to argue here is that there is not a kind of mythical permanence to the world in which Emily Brontë lived. The reality of Emily Brontë’s childhood and youth is a place, which was developing in a rapid pace. It is an industrial world, Yorkshire was a mill town and the mill town was adjacent to the moors. So you had modernity on the one hand and these vast landscape of moors.

So there is a wild natural beauty on the one hand, and the world of mills and factories on the other. This point made by the critic also suggests to us that Haworth Parsonage was at a kind of crossroads, a symbolic crossroads, where it looked at both sides of the world, the world of wild elemental beauty and the man made world, which was full of progress and industrial development.

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Wuthering Heights and Moors

- “The bleakly beautiful West Yorkshire moors have often helped to define in important ways how readers and critics have interpreted *Wuthering Heights* – as a strange and wild book about a remote and unfamiliar landscape.”
(John Bowen)



- <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/walking-the-landscape-of-wuthering-heights>
- Image source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/obolevicius/39629552124>



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This particular critical perspective exemplifies the ways in which the novel has been interpreted by countless readers. Readers and critics perceive *Wuthering Heights* as a unique book, a very strange, bizarre wild book. And it is very interesting to see how the epithets that one would use with a landscape, especially the landscape of Yorkshire moors is transferred to this novel *Wuthering Heights*.

One can talk about a strange and wild landscape, but in the context of *Wuthering Heights*, the same descriptive terms of strangeness and wildness is used to illustrate this novel. So there is a kind of a parallel between the book and the land from which it emerged.

And I would once again, want to direct your attention to the words strange and wild and remote and unfamiliar and make a connection between these adjectives and the idea of the Gothic, a concept that we have been discussing and which kind of centers on ideas of the bizarre, strange, and something which is not within normal bounds.

So you can see how this book has already gravitated towards the Gothic sub genre.

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Haworth and Industrialization



- “Yet it is important to remember that Haworth was a modern working town, with several mills and a good deal of industrial unrest. Although it might have seemed distant from London, it was not so far from Manchester (the ‘shock city of the age’) and the bustling metropolis of Leeds.”
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“Yet it is important to remember that Haworth was a modern working town, with several mills and a good deal of industrial unrest. Although it might have seemed distant from London, it was not so far from Manchester, the shock city of the age, and the bustling metropolis of Leeds.”

John Bowen here, once again, reminds us that in addition to the remote and unfamiliar landscape, which immediately comes to our mind, Haworth was also a modern working town with a lot of mills and industrial agitation going on.

You can see how connected it was to Manchester and Leeds. It was not very far from these places, which were seeing a lot of industrial, rapid industrial growth and an increasing population.

So how do we connect this with this book *Wuthering Heights*? We do not see any major reference to the bustling industrialization that was impacting on the lives of the people involved in this novel. Yet there is a thematic symbolic concept, which one can connect from this book to the industrial world and vice versa, which is the ambition and the drive of Heathcliff.

Under that romantic rage, under that passion of Heathcliff is hidden the drive to agglomerate, the drive to accumulate on the part of Heathcliff, especially when he comes back after his

travels and starts his revenge on the people who have wronged him in the heights, in Wuthering Heights as well as in Thrushcross Grange.

So there is a parallel between the ideas within Wuthering Heights and the concept which drives industrialization, which is greed and accumulation.

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The Past and the Modern



- “It was part of a world in rapid motion that witnessed the dramatic mid-Victorian transformation of nature and work in both town and country, changes powered by the railways (for which Branwell Brontë worked) and by the mills that surrounded them.” (John Bowen)

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“It was part of a world in rapid motion that witnessed the dramatic mid-Victorian transformation of nature and work in both town and country, changes powered by the railways, for which Branwell Brontë worked and by the mills that surrounded them.”

So John Bowen, again, writes about the transformation that went through Great Britain. The transformation had an impact in both the villages as well as in towns and one of the key transformation was embodied in the figure of the railways.

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Wuthering Heights and Terror



- “Wuthering Heights creates a world of passionate intensities, in which particular events are burned on the characters’ and readers’ memories, beyond reason, measure or reserve. Terror stalks the book and defines so many of its central relationships, concerned as it is with the ecstatic, eerie and mad”. (John Bowen)

• Source: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/melding-of-fantasy-and-realism-in-wuthering-heights>



Keeping in mind all these concepts about industrialization, the location of Haworth Parsonage and the Yorkshire moors, let us now turn to the novel, *Wuthering Heights* and look at the nature of terror exemplified in this novel.

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From the nature of the rhetoric, you can understand the intensity of this novel. It is a passionate novel. Cathy and Heathcliff embody that passion to the extreme and some of the events in the novel suggests the ghost of Cathy, the child ghost of Cathy trying to get into *Wuthering Heights*, the house, is very, very powerful and poignant.

So some scenes in the novel stay in the minds of the readers and these are scenes of a lot of intensity. And you can see how there is a subtext of terror, and that terror seemed to kind of stalk the characters in the novel and the central relationships.

Heathcliff and Cathy’s relationship is full of passion but there is also an undercurrent of violence and intense emotions, such as jealousy and revenge and you can see that madness,

the associated ideas of extreme emotion such as madness stalks many of the characters behavior in this particular novel.

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Death and *Wuthering Heights*



- “The book plays with death, courts death, stages death, ...or when

Heathcliff breaks through the side of Catherine’s coffin or hangs his

wife Isabella’s dog from a hook in the garden.” (John Bowen)

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“The book plays with death, courts death, stages death, ...or when Heathcliff breaks through the side of Catherine’s coffin or hangs his wife, Isabella’s dog from a hook in the garden.”

So this idea of death is almost omnipresent in this novel. Characters are treated brutally and death is also a kind of a recurrent phenomenon in this novel. Catherine especially, when she dies, you can see how Heathcliff finds it very, very difficult to let her go and how he tries to get into her grave by breaking the side of Catherine’s coffin.

So these are some of the moments in the novel which stay in the minds of the readers. The other example there on the slide is to, Isabella’s dog, which Heathcliff kills. So you can see, violence is ever present in this novel, alongside this much celebrated romance between, I would like to put that word within quotes, "the romance between Catherine and Heathcliff.”

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Diabolical Force



- “The book is fascinated by what lies at the limits of the human and is haunted by the forces of death and the diabolical, by compulsive modes of behaviour, by infantile and sublimely powerful emotions, by the force of irresistible will, and by the terrible consequences done to human beings by radical evil. The book is full of animals, spirits and ghosts, and those, like Heathcliff, about whom we can never be sure.” (John Bowen)

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“The book is fascinated by what lies at the limit of the human and is haunted by the forces of death and the diabolical, by compulsive modes of behaviour, by infantile and sublimely powerful emotions, by the force of irresistible will, and by the terrible consequences done to human beings by radical evil. This book is full of animal spirits, ghosts, and those, like Heathcliff, about whom we can never be sure.”

The entire set of ideas on the slide can be used to exemplify, talk about, the character of Heathcliff. He is diabolical, he is evil, he is jealous, he is passionate and he wants to wreak vengeance on the people who brutalized him when he was young. And he also wants to get revenge on Catherine because she married Linton instead of him.

So the whole book is a series of violent acts committed by Heathcliff on the people who have wronged him. And you can see that Heathcliff is embodied by the notion of powerful emotions. Whatever he feels is not you know the usual emotion, it is always in the extreme. The time he spends with Cathy, the joy he experiences with Cathy when they run about on the moors is his most beloved memory from his childhood.

And when he feels anger towards anybody who has slighted him, he experiences immense anger and wants to commit a lot of injury to that person who slights him, affects him.

So whatever emotion is described in the novel is at the far end of the spectrum and once again, there are references to spirits and ghosts and even Heathcliff is described as a ghoul, a vampire, a ghost, a demon, so we do not really know as to the makeup of that diabolical mind of Heathcliff.

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Gothic and *Wuthering Heights*

- “In the opening episode of Emily Brontë’s
 - *Wuthering Heights*, the narrator, Lockwood, has t
- Heathcliff’s house because of heavy snow.”

- (Source: John Mullan)
- <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>
- Image source: <https://www.bookdepository.com/Wuthering-Heights-Emily-Bronte/9781912464265>



Now let us look at our *Wuthering Heights* and the opening episode.

So in the opening episode of Emily’s novel *Wuthering Heights*, the narrator, Lockwood, comes to Heathcliff’s house and he knocks at the house and wants to be let in. The place is overrun by snow.

So the novel begins in a very incremental weather and that is again a Gothic trope. You have read *Frankenstein* by now, and you would remember how the storms are significant moments, which indicate that something terrible might happen. And here, we have this narrator, Lockwood, entering the hides in stormy weather and the novel also leads to the next nightmare when Lockwood imagines seeing the child ghost of Cathy trying to get in.

So the setting is exciting and nightmarish and this appearance of the ghost connects the novel with the Gothic.

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Gothic and *Wuthering Heights*

- “In the opening episode of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, the narrator, Lockwood, has to stay the night at Heathcliff’s house because of heavy snow.”

- (Source: John Mullan)
- <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>
- Image source: <https://www.bookdepository.com/Wuthering-Heights-Emily-Bronte/9781312464265>



This narrator, Lockwood, is a southerner and he comes to the northern part of the country to get a bit of peace and rest in this part of the country and ironically he does not get that because you can see how very unpleasant his experiences at *Wuthering Heights* are. So Lockwood gets trapped in this world and that idea of entrapment is also an interesting Gothic motive.

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Gothic and *Wuthering Heights*



- “He finds Cathy’s diary, written as a child, and nods off while reading it. There follows a powerfully narrated nightmare in which an icy hand reaches to him through the window and the voice of Catherine Linton calls to be let in.”

- (Source: John Mullan)
- Source: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>



When he spends the night at the Heights, the house he finds Cathy’s diary written as a child, and nods off while reading it. There follows a powerfully narrated nightmare, in which an icy hand reaches to him through the window and the voice of Catherine Linton calls to be let in.

This is the most exciting moment in the novel for many. We have Lockwood spending the night at Wuthering Heights, a man who has come from the south of England. He has come to this part of the world to convalescent and when he enters the world of Wuthering Heights, he picks up Catherine, Cathy’s diary, which she had written as a child and he sleeps off while reading it and he experiences a nightmare and he imagines that Cathy is trying to get back into Wuthering Heights.

And this moment is a fantastic Gothic moment in the novel when Lockwood tries to prevent this ghost from entering and in that kind of clash between Lockwood and the child because Lockwood is trying to shut the window against this child ghost, we can read that the child’s hand gets caught in the window. So it is a powerful and violent moment in the novel and it is a nightmare for Lockwood.

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Gothic and *Wuthering Heights*

- “The vision seems to prefigure
- what he will later discover about the history
- of Cathy and Heathcliff. Half in jest, Lockwood tells Heathcliff that Wuthering Heights is haunted...”

• (Source: John Mullan)
• <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>
• Image source: <https://www.history.com/story/2017/08/26/the-meaning-of-wuthering-in-wuthering-heights/>



“The vision seems to prefigure what he will later discover about the history of Cathy and Heathcliff. Half in jest, Lockwood tells Heathcliff that Wuthering Heights is haunted.”

So that scene, that nightmare from Lockwood’s night at Wuthering Heights is a foreshadowing of the kind of events that he will come to know through Nelly Dean. Nelly Dean is the housekeeper at Wuthering Heights and she is also a dominant narrator. In fact, the dominant narrator of this novel. So we have Cathy’s voice also emerging from the diary. So certain voices are also there, but the most dominant narrator is that of Nelly Dean followed by Lockwood.

So the next morning Lockwood tells Heathcliff a half in jest in fact, he is only half joking. The other half is that he is really serious, when he says that Wuthering Heights is haunted. And some critics say that, Cathy has returned to the wrong person on that night. She should have gone to Heathcliff and asked to be let into the house.

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Gothic and *Wuthering Heights*



- “the novel, centred as it is on a house, seems to exploit in a new way the Gothic idea that entering an old building means entering the stories of those who have lived in it before.”

- (Source: John Mullan)
- <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/the-origins-of-the-gothic>



“The novel, centred as it is on a house, seems to exploit in a new way the Gothic idea that entering an old building means entering the stories of those who have lived in it before.”

It is a fantastic way to describe the nature of the Gothic. Gothic novels have a fascination with houses, castles, old buildings, mansions, forts and in this novel *Wuthering Heights*, the key house is that of this *Wuthering Heights*, which is owned by Mr. Earnshaw and eventually, Heathcliff appropriates this house.

So this house is Gothic in nature. It has a lot of mysteries. Its master is a very strange character. When I call, when I refer to the word master, I am referring to Heathcliff, because Mr. Earnshaw was a kindly man and he was the one who brought Heathcliff into the house, this orphan who came and changed the way in which people live there.

So the presence of the outsider in this house is a trajectory which we can also unpack at a later time. But here, let us remember that *Wuthering Heights* is a Gothic space, people get locked in, Heathcliff was locked in once when the house had visitors from the Grange, Thrushcross Grange and Cathy gets locked up.

So the idea of locking up people is a gothic concept and that happens within *Wuthering Heights*. There is brutality, there is violence, there is a lot of swearing. So it is not a very

domestic space and because domesticity has its associated connotations of peace, affection, romance, and love.

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Wuthering Heights and Structure



- “It is also a highly organised and rationally
- planned novel, with a complex time scheme and several interlocking narrators. It sets its extraordinary actions in a vividly realised family history and landscape.”

• (Source: John Bowen)

• Source: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/melding-of-fantasy-and-realism-in-wuthering-heights>

• Image source: <https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/homes-and-property/Emily-Bronn%C3%AB-s-wuthering-heights-house-goes-on-market-for-1.25m-1.3874372>



“Wuthering Heights is also a highly organised and rationally planned novel, with a complex time scheme and several interlocking narrators. It is, it sets its extraordinary actions in a vividly realised family history and landscape.”

It is a very well structured novel, that is quite apparent. Very rationally planned in the sense that events are connected to one another and there are consequences for events that happen within it.

Again, it is a well planned novel, because several generations’ tales are connected in the story and there are several narrators, points of view, people who tell the story. We have voices such as Cathy’s narrating experiences from the past and it is a tale of a particular family. It is also a tale of a landscape, of a particular region.

So even though it talks about Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, we can see how these houses become symbolic in the way families evolve and the traditions the family follows.

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Fantasy and *Wuthering Heights*



- “It is fascinated by the power of fantasy, particularly erotic fantasy, in people’s lives – Isabella thinks of Heathcliff as “a hero of romance” (ch. 14) until she learns the truth of his brutality – but those fantasies take their place within a carefully plotted story about inheritance, intermarriage and theft.”

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• Source: <https://www.bl.uk/romantics-and-victorians/articles/melding-of-fantasy-and-realism-in-wuthering-heights>



Wuthering Heights, the novel is fascinated by the power of fantasy, particularly erotic fantasy, in people’s lives – Isabella thinks of Heathcliff as a hero or romance until she learns the truth of his brutality – but those fantasies take their place within a carefully plotted story about inheritance, intermarriage and theft.

Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* is a figure of fantasy. For example, he is such a figure to Isabella Linton. Isabella thinks of Heathcliff as a hero of a romance, he is tall, dark and handsome, he is rich. So when Heathcliff returns to the Heights, he comes as a man who is wealthy and civilized. That is the apparent aura that Heathcliff has and Isabella quickly falls in love.

She does not know that he has come back to take vengeance on Linton and Catherine, on Hindley. Hindley is the son of Mr. Earnshaw. He wants to make sure that everybody who has thwarted him pay for the actions against him. Mistakenly, Isabella thinks that he is an ideal partner, falls in love and Heathcliff quickly marries to wound Catherine. And gradually, once she is married, she learns the truth of his brutality. And you can see how very thorough and quick Heathcliff is to take his vengeance.

And this kind of character of Heathcliff makes him a Gothic villain. Some call him a Byronic hero, who is dark and brooding, and who is taking vengeance for the society’s wrongs against him. There is also an eroticism around Heathcliff. He embodies desire, he is an elemental

figure, who kind of provokes the most primitive emotions in the people around him. So be it rage or desire or passion if it is Catherine.

So Wuthering Heights is complex because of its central character and his relationship to Catherine.

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Gothic and Economic



- “The erotic is not separated from the economic, and the passage of power and land across generations. Emily Brontë was fascinated by extreme emotions, radically opposing mental and social forces, and the creation of moments of moral revelation and transformation that were typical both of Gothic fiction and Victorian melodrama, but she could control, ironize and discipline those energies to serious purpose.”

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“The erotic is not separated from the economic, and the passage of power and land across generations. Emily Brontë was fascinated by extreme emotions, radically opposing mental and social forces, and the creation of moments of moral revelation and transformation that were typical both of Gothic fiction and Victorian melodrama, but she could control, and ironize and discipline those energies to serious purpose.

This novel can be classified as both Victorian melodrama, because lots of dramatic events happened, extreme emotions are displayed to the fore and it can also be classified as Gothic fiction.

There is an impression that this novel is about the pure passion of Heathcliff and Catherine. But that is not just the message of this particular novel. The erotic fantasy is not entirely cut off from the economic trajectories that are criss-crossing this novel.

Heathcliff is the outsider figure when he is brought to Wuthering Heights. He is an orphan, he does not belong to Earnshaw’s bloodline. So when Catherine becomes close to Heathcliff at the right moment she is introduced to Thrushcross Grange and she falls in love with Linton, the heir to the Thrushcross Grange property and she is torn between these two figures Heathcliff and Linton. And in one of those most crucial moments in the novel, she declares to Nelly that though she is in love with Linton, Heathcliff is like the rocks.

She is Heathcliff, no, she kind of identifies herself completely with this raw energy, the passion that Heathcliff is. But Heathcliff who is kind of eavesdropping on the scene does not stay long to hear the second half of her declaration of love. He runs away the moment he hears that she is in love with Linton and he goes away and he kind of comes back later to take his revenge.

But what I am trying to point out here is this, that even though there are trajectories of romance and passion, there are social forces at play. Wuthering Heights does not really take in Heathcliff, the orphan. He does not belong. The family does not really think that Catherine should marry Heathcliff because he is a nobody, there is no surname, people do not know who his parents are. So it is considered the right thing when Catherine marries Linton from Thrushcross Grange. So that you know property is neatly exchanged and everything follows the rules and regulations of society.

However, Heathcliff comes back and everything is thrown out of gear by his trajectory of revenge, which also has this crucial end point of snatching away, taking away by any means whatsoever the property that belongs to Hindley, who is the heir, the legitimate heir to the property. But you can see how he cheats him of his inheritance. Hindley becomes deprived of his rights and Heathcliff becomes the master of Wuthering Heights.

Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.