

**Wuthering Heights**  
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**Lecture 23**  
**Gothic Transgressions**

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Week 5: Wuthering Heights

Lecture 5C: Gothic Transgressions

Image source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/536632111827496636/>

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Hello, and welcome to week 5's lectures on Wuthering Heights. In today's session I am going to discuss different kinds of Gothic transgressions.

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Lockwood's terror

- "The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in - let me in!' 'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. 'Catherine Linton,' it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of LINTON? I had read EARNSHAW twenty times for Linton) - 'I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!' As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window."

- Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, Ch. 3



In the previous session we talked about the terrors that Lockwood experienced when he first came to stay in Wuthering Heights. Today, I have brought that particular passage to share with you.

Let us read that quote from the novel.

“The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, ‘let me in – let me in. Who are you?’ I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. ‘Catherine Linton’, it replied, shiveringly. (Why did I think of LINTON? I had read EARNSHAW twenty times for Linton) – ‘I am come home: I had lost my way on the moor!’ As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child’s face looking through the window.”

This passage is from the scene in which Lockwood spends the night at Wuthering Heights and he is reading Cathy’s diary and he nods off and this is the nightmare that he experiences. You can see the intensity of the nightmare. You can see that Lockwood is trying to retract his arm, but the hand clung to it. So the hand of the ghost Cathy, the child ghost of Cathy clings to his hand and sobs in a most pathetic voice asking to be let into the Heights.

And very interestingly it tells that it has come home, the ghost has come home. Cathy has returned to Wuthering Heights and she says that she had lost the way on the moor. So this

nightmare, terrifying as it is, is also in a sense logical. Catherine Linton, Catherine who marries Linton, Edgar Linton of Thrushcross Grange has come back after her death to Wuthering Heights. That is one way to look at it.



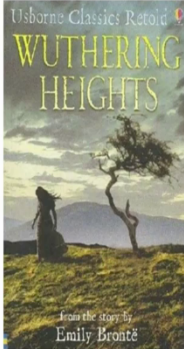
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Lockwood's terror

- "Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes..."

- Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, Ch. 3

Source: <https://www.aresearchguide.com/wuthering-heights-quotations.html>



This passage is also a quote from the novel, and it continues the nightmare that Lockwood experienced the first night at Wuthering Heights.

He says “terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist onto the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes... “

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## Lockwood's terror



- "The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in - let me in!' 'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. 'Catherine Linton,' it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of LINTON? I had read EARNSHAW twenty times for Linton) - 'I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!' As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window."

- Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, Ch. 3

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While the previous slide is one kind of Gothic nightmare, the second is another more horrifying kind. While we see the spirit return to the house in which the person grew up.



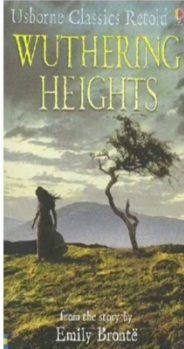
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Lockwood's terror

- "Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes..."

- Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, Ch. 3

Source: <https://www.aresearchguide.com/wuthering-heights-quotations.html>



Here we see that even the spirit is violently treated on the part of the guest who is staying the night at Wuthering Heights.

Lockwood is unable to extract himself from the ghost and he attempts to shake off the creature, he calls it the creature, by rubbing its wrist on to the broken pane. You can see the violence there in the passage and the violence is something, which is meted out to a child not to an adult, and look at the impact of his action towards the child. He himself records that blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes.

Even in that nightmare you can see the continuation of the trajectory of violence that seeps this novel. One can say that this novel is soaked in brutality, it is overrun by brutality and the nightmares are equally full of them and even this apparently naive and innocent narrator is also capable of extreme violence and that too, violence towards the young.

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Gothic transgression

- “In true Gothic fashion, boundaries are trespassed, specifically love crossing the boundary between life and death and Heathcliff’s transgressing social class and family ties”.

• Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)



In this novel, “in true Gothic fashion, boundaries are trespassed, specifically love crossing the boundary between life and death and Heathcliff’s transgressing social class and family ties.”



We saw in the previous slides how the boundary between life and death is crossed. We got an example through the emergence of the ghost of Cathy. And this is not the only one time where we get an instance of the spirit being met by one of the live characters in the novel.

Even at the end of this fiction, we are told that the villagers have met the ghost of Heathcliff and Catherine walking together on the moors. So that is also further an example of the kind of spirits walking on the moors and thus, proving that the boundary between life and death are crossed.

And more importantly, we also see that Heathcliff has been transgressing certain regulations of society. For instance, Heathcliff is a nobody who is brought from Liverpool by Mr. Earnshaw and suddenly he seems to kind of acquire an identity, a position while he continues to be an interloper. He also simultaneously acquires, believes himself to have acquired a social class and he thinks that he has a right to marry Catherine.

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Tyrannies of the father



- “Brontë follows Walpole and Radcliffe in portraying the tyrannies of the father and the cruelties of the patriarchal family and in reconstituting the family on non-patriarchal lines, even though no counterbalancing matriarch or matriarchal family is presented.”

• Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)

• Image source: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180725-heathcliff-and-literatures-greatest-love-story-are-toxic>



The Tyrannies of the father are exemplified in Wuthering Heights as well. “Brontë follows Walpole and Radcliffe in portraying the tyrannies of the father and the cruelties of the patriarchal family and in reconstituting the family on non-patriarchal lines, even though no counterbalancing matriarch or matriarchal family is presented.”

In Wuthering Heights, we can see the cruelty of the patriarchal figure best illustrated in the character of Heathcliff. He harasses the young Catherine as well, he harasses his own son, Linton, he harasses Hareton, the son of Hindley, so the cruelty of the father figure, the head of the household is remarkably and powerfully captured in Wuthering Heights.

At the end of the novel, there is an impression that the patriarchal domain is going to be lessened at least with the marriage of Catherine with Hareton, but we do not get a representation of a matriarchal figure or a matriarchal family represented in Wuthering Heights.

When the young Catherine marries Hareton, we get the sense that her relationship with Hareton is going to be better than all the marital relations that we have seen in this novel. You can see how Catherine takes the upper hand when she teaches Hareton how to read. So there is a reversal of rules in which Catherine teaches, a female teaches the male yet we see that there is no powerful matriarchal figure in this novel at the end of it.



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## Gothic trappings



- “Brontë has incorporated the Gothic trappings of imprisonment and escape, flight, the persecuted heroine, the heroine wooed by a dangerous and a good suitor, ghosts, necrophilia, a mysterious foundling, and revenge. The weather-buffed Wuthering Heights is the traditional castle, and Catherine resembles Ann Radcliffe’s heroines in her appreciation of nature.”

- Source:

[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)

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So Wuthering Heights is clearly a novel that embodies all the Gothic tropes, many of the Gothic attributes such as the idea of incarceration. Heathcliff gets locked up when he was young as punishment. Catherine gets locked up, the young Catherine gets locked up by Heathcliff because she is being forced to marry his own son Linton, the son that he has with Isabella.

There is this idea of escape, flight, Isabella tries to flee from Heathcliff. Heroines are persecuted both the older Catherine and the younger Catherine. The heroine are being wooed by dangerous figures, Heathcliff, we have the idea of ghosts as we just discussed. The idea of necrophilia and obsession with dead bodies, Heathcliff tries to dig up the buried Catherine. We have a mysterious foundling, Heathcliff represents that notion.

He was found in Liverpool by Mr. Earnshaw. We do not know his parentage and of course, we have the idea of revenge embodied by Heathcliff himself. He wants to be avenged on all the characters who have thwarted him.

And of course, Wuthering Heights becomes the traditional castle in the sense that it represents all the perversity, it represents all the inequities that you usually find in a gothic castle. And Catherine also resembles some of the heroines of Anne Radcliffe because of her love for wild nature. She is absolutely in love with the moors and the height of happiness for Catherine as well for Heathcliff is when they run wild on the moors.

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## Gothic excess and Heathcliff



- “Like the conventional Gothic hero-villain, Heathcliff is a mysterious figure who destroys the beautiful woman he pursues and who usurps inheritances, and with typical Gothic excess he batters his head against a tree.”

• Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)

• Image source: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180725-heathcliff-and-literatures-greatest-love-story-are-toxic>

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“Like the conventional Gothic hero-villain, Heathcliff is a mysterious figure who destroys the beautiful woman he pursues and who usurps inheritances, and with typical Gothic excess he batters his head against a tree.”

The last point does not need any further explanation. You can see how passionately Heathcliff behaves when he is thwarted in his wishes. Heathcliff destroys the women that he pursues and Catherine becomes one important figure that he wants to be with. And Catherine, as we know has married, the first Catherine as we know, has married at Edgar Linton from Thrushcross Grange and when Heathcliff returns to the Heights, he somehow wants to be with her.

And because of the conflict between the three, Catherine, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, Catherine Linton stabs herself to death after she gives birth to the baby, the young Catherine. We also see Heathcliff usurping inheritances, property. We can see how very cruelly he kind of, provokes, indulges the drink habit of Hindley who drinks to death and he takes over the property of Wuthering Heights. So there is a lot of Gothic excess. Isabella of course, the woman he marries, the sister of Edgar Linton, whom Heathcliff marries also is destroyed by Heathcliff.

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Gothic excess



- “There is the hint of necrophilia in Heathcliff's viewings of Catherine's corpse and his plans to be buried next to her and a hint of incest in their being raised as brother and sister or, as a few critics have suggested, in Heathcliff's being Catherine's illegitimate half-brother.”
- Source:  
[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)



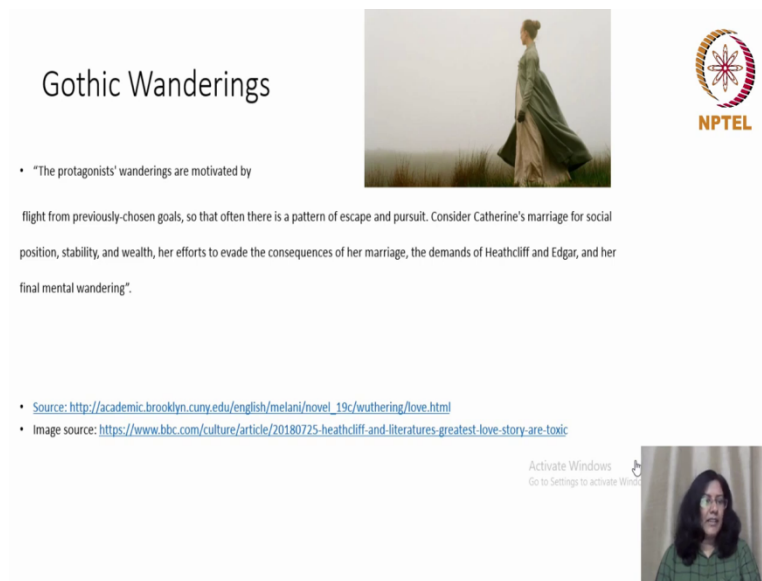
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We have talked about the idea of necrophilia in Heathcliff when he digs up the corpse of Catherine. He is unable to let her go even when she is dead and he has also tried to lie next to her by breaking the sides of the coffin of Catherine.

Further, critics have pointed out the hint of incest, the suggestion of incest in their relationship because they have been brought up as siblings, as brother and sister and some critics have suggested that since nothing is known of Heathcliff’s parentage, we do not know who the parents of Heathcliff are. It is a possibility that he could be the illegitimate son of Mr. Earnshaw, who brought him apparently from Liverpool. Of course, Hindley is the legitimate son of Mr. Earnshaw.

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The slide is titled "Gothic Wanderings". It features a central image of a woman in a long green dress standing in a field. To the right is the NPTEL logo. Below the title, there is a bullet point: "The protagonists' wanderings are motivated by flight from previously-chosen goals, so that often there is a pattern of escape and pursuit. Consider Catherine's marriage for social position, stability, and wealth, her efforts to evade the consequences of her marriage, the demands of Heathcliff and Edgar, and her final mental wandering". At the bottom, there are two source links: "Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/love.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/love.html)" and "Image source: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180725-heathcliff-and-literatures-greatest-love-story-are-toxic>". There is also a small inset image of a woman's face in the bottom right corner.


“The protagonists’ wanderings are motivated by flight from previously-chosen goals, so that often there is a pattern of escape and pursuit. Consider Catherine’s marriage for social position, stability, and wealth, her efforts to avoid the consequences of her marriage, the demands of Heathcliff and Edgar and her final mental wandering.”

Characters in this novel are in flight from certain goals, certain aspirations and desires. We know that Catherine married Edgar Linton even though she was in love with Heathcliff, she thought that Heathcliff was an inferior, that socially it was not appropriate to marry Heathcliff. So in order to retain the social position to which she belonged she marries Edgar Linton.


So she gets what she desires because she desires stability and wealth, which is what she gets out of that marriage. And when Heathcliff returns, there is instability in her world because she tries to get back the same kind of relation that she had with Heathcliff prior to her marriage. She wants to retain the friendship of Heathcliff and she also wants to retain her marriage. So it becomes very problematic for Catherine Linton because of these kind of stresses on her mind and body, she finally loses control over her sanity.

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## Transgressions



- “The protagonists are driven by irresistible passion—lust, curiosity, ambition, intellectual pride, envy. The emphasis is on their desire for transcendence, to overcome the limitations of the body, of society, of time rather than their moral transgressions. They yearn to escape the limitations inherent to life and may find that the only escape is death. The longings of a Heathcliff cannot be fulfilled in life.”
- Source:  
[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/romantic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/romantic.html)



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Characters in this novel are embedded with irresistible passion, unbridled passion, such as curiosity, ambition, lust and intellectual pride. They want to transcend the limitations of body and society. The limitations of bodies of course transcended, apparently in the presence of spirits, the spirit of the person who had died.



There is a kind of aspiration to transcend the regulations of society on the part of Heathcliff who desires people and possessions, which are not, I quote, rightfully theirs. And there is also a desire to seek some kind of escape through death. And Heathcliff’s desires, of course, cannot be fulfilled in life and therefore, he seeks his way out by starving himself to death.

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Death Obsession

- "Death is not only a literal happening or plot device, but also and primarily a psychological concern. For the protagonists, death originates in the imagination, becomes a "tendency of mind," and may develop into an obsession."

• Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_15/wuthering/romantic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_15/wuthering/romantic.html)  
• Image source: <https://theenglishmedialevel.weebly.com/miss-mess-blog/wuthering-heights>



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There is an obsession with death in this novel, *Wuthering Heights*. "Death is not only a literal happening or plot device, but also and primarily a psychological concern. For the protagonists, death originates in the imagination, becomes a tendency of mind, and may develop into an obsession."


So you can see how in addition to death being a literal event in the novel, and in addition to death being used as a plot device to push the novel along, to make it move on to the next event, towards resolution, death is also a psychological concern.

Catherine especially dreams about death, dreams about dying, dreams about how it would be once she has died. So this obsession with death becomes an aptitude, a tendency of mind. She kind of inclines towards death and she obsesses with it. Likewise, Heathcliff also desires death. He becomes obsessed with the idea, he longs for it and in fact, he achieves it by his own will by starving himself.



So death is an ideal end for Heathcliff because in that way he can be with Catherine. As for Catherine, she wants to punish both Heathcliff and Edgar Linton and she thinks the best way to break their hearts is to break hers and she killed herself in a way in this novel.

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Gothic structures



- "As in Gothic fiction, buildings are central to meaning; the supernatural, wild nature, dream and madness, physical violence, and perverse sexuality are set off against social conventions and institutions. Initially, this may create the impression that the novel is two books in one, but finally Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights fuse."
- Source:  
[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/romantic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/romantic.html)



"As in Gothic fiction, buildings are central to meaning; the supernatural wild nature, dream and madness, physical violence, and perverse sexuality are set off against social conventions and institutions. Initially, this may create the impression that the novel is two books in one but finally, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights fuse."

There is an impression in the novel that Wuthering Heights stands for madness, for violence, for perverse sexuality, for wild nature, and Wuthering Heights is lawless, that it is set against social conventions and institutions. And Thrushcross Grange apparently it stands for everything that is normal and the ordinary.

As the novel progresses, we realize that violence is not particular to the world of Wuthering Heights and that violence is all pervasive, madness is all pervasive. Thrushcross Grange does not stand outside all these perverse attributes that one usually associates with Wuthering Heights.




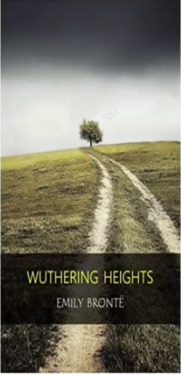
So ultimately the two, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights fuse together. They fuse together in another sense when once again we see Catherine and Hareton marry in this novel and there is a resolution of sorts at the end of Wuthering Heights.



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## Endings

- “Endings are disquieting and unsatisfactory because the writer resists a definitive conclusion, one which accounts for all loose ends and explains away any ambiguities or uncertainties.”
- Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/romantic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/romantic.html)
- Image source: <https://www.amazon.in/Wuthering-Heights-Emily-Bront%C3%AB-ebook/dp/B0779NRZ2W>



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“Endings are disquieting and unsatisfactory because the writer resists a definite conclusion, one which accounts for all loose ends and explains away any ambiguities or uncertainties.”

We have an end with the marriage of Catherine and Hareton. Catherine who has come from Thrushcross Grange, she is the daughter of the first Cathy and Edgar Linton and we have Hareton, who is the son of Hindley, the legitimate heir of Wuthering heights.

So it is a kind of a satisfactory ending in one way, but there is also a disquieting fact that Catherine, the ghost Catherine and the ghost Heathcliff are walking on the moors. So all uncertainties and all ambiguities are not eliminated from this novel.


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Open-endedness



- “The preference for open-endedness is, ultimately, an effort to resist the limits of time and of place. That effort helps explain the importance of dreams and memories of other times and location, like Catherine's delirious memories of childhood at Wuthering Heights and rambles on the moors.”

• Source:  
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“The preference for open-endedness is ultimately an effort to resist the limits of time and of place. That effort helps explain the importance of dreams and memories of other times and location, like Catherine’s delirious memories of childhood at Wuthering Heights and rambles on the moors.”

So what we see here is an interpretation, which supports open-endedness. Open-endedness is ideal because it resists finality, it resists being bound to a particular time and of place. Open-endedness gives importance to dreams and memories. For example, when Catherine is on her deathbed, she is between consciousness and unconsciousness, she is between sanity and insanity. And she goes back to her childhood memories, the memories that she cherishes and she dreams of running around, running about on the moors with Heathcliff.

So all these aspects are important, the unreal aspects, the intangible aspects of a person’s memories are important to the structure and psyche of this novel.


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## Cruelty and Normalcy



- “Moers sees subversion in Brontë's acceptance of the cruel as a normal, almost an energizing part of life and in her portrayal of the erotic in childhood. The cruelty connects this novel to the Gothic tradition, which has been associated with women writers since Anne Radcliffe.”
- Source:[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)

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“Moers sees subversion in Brontë’s acceptance of the cruel as a normal, almost an energizing part of life and in her portrayal of the erotic in childhood. The cruelty connects this novel to the Gothic tradition, which has been associated with women writers since Anne Radcliffe.”

There is a lot of cruelty as we know in Wuthering Heights. There is physical brutality, physical attack on Heathcliff, on Hindley, on Hareton. These elements of cruelty are represented in such a way that they become almost a part of the normalcy of Wuthering Heights, the novel as well as the house.


So this idea of cruelty connects this novel to the Gothic tradition and this Gothic tradition is also as we know, associated with women writers such as Anne Radcliffe. So what is horrifying to us as readers is the notion that cruelty has become the norm, it has become ordinary.

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Gothic elements



- “The connection was, in fact, recognized by Brontë's contemporaries; the *Athenaeum* reviewer labeled the Gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights* "the eccentricities of ‘woman's fantasy’" (1847).
- Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)
- Image source: <http://englishtutorhome2.blogspot.com/2013/05/narrative-point-of-view-in-wuthering.html>




“The connection was, in fact, recognized by Brontë’s contemporaries; the *Athenaeum* reviewer labeled the Gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights*, ‘the eccentricities of woman’s fantasy’.”

The connection between cruelty and violence and women is the connection that is being talked about. The relationship between women’s writing and the attributes of violence was thought of as the eccentricities of a woman’s fantasy.

So that is how the reviewer in *Athenaeum* characterized the presence of the brutality in this novel. They were part of a woman’s fantasy, but critics have seen this novel as not just capturing the fantasies of a woman. They argued that the representations of cruelty and barbarity in *Wuthering Heights* are derived from lived experiences, from real life experiences in the Victorian world.


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Perversities



- “Moers thinks a more accurate word than *eccentricities* would be *perversities*. These perversities may have originated in “fantasies derived from the night side of the Victorian nursery—a world where childish cruelty and childish sexuality come to the fore.”
- Source:[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)

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So Ellen Moers who has written on the female gothic argues that the accurate word is not eccentricities, but perversities. And she writes that these perversities may have originated, may have come from the night side of the Victorian nursery, the childhood space where cruelty and childhood sexuality had originated, had come to the surface, have come to the forefront.


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Sibling Relations



- "In childhood, sisters were the equal of their brothers, played just as hard, and felt the same pleasures and pains; girls clung to this early freedom and equality, which their brothers outgrew, and displaced them into their writing":
- Source: [http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)

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"In childhood, sisters were the equal of their brothers, played just hard, as hard and felt the same pleasures and pains; girls clung to this early freedom and equality, which their brothers outgrew, and displaced them into their writing."

So what is being argued here is that while girls enjoyed a measure of equality and oneness when they grew up with their brothers in childhood, but when they grew up they displaced all their pains and inequities in their writing.

So writing became a space in which they were able to let loose all their aspirations and desires and pains that they have suffered.

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Gothic fantasies



- “Women writers of Gothic fantasies appear to testify that the physical teasing they received from their brothers—the pinching, mauling, and scratching we dismiss as the unimportant of children's games—took on outsize proportions and powerful erotic overtones in their adult imaginations.”
- Source:[http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel\\_19c/wuthering/gothic.html](http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/gothic.html)



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“Women writers of Gothic fantasies appear to testify to the physical teasing they received from their brothers – the pinching, mauling, and scratching, we dismiss as the unimportant of children’s games – took on outsize proportions and powerful erotic overtones in their adult imaginations.”

So the kinds of cruelty that a child would experience, cruelty is just pinching, and mauling, and scratching, they are kind of retreated, reimagined in their adult output, in their literary output that they produce in their adulthood.

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