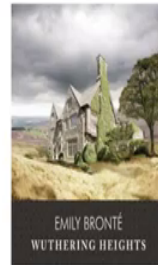


Wuthering Heights
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Lecture 24

Gothic Displacement: Family, Childhood, and Confinement

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Week 5:
Wuthering
Heights



Lecture 5D: Gothic Displacement: Family, Childhood, and Confinement

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Hello, and welcome to week five lectures on Wuthering Heights. In today's session, I am going to talk about Gothic Displacement in relation to Family, Childhood and Confinement.

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Review of Wuthering Heights, 1848



- "*Wuthering Heights* is a strange, inartistic story. There are evidences in every chapter of a sort of rugged power—an unconscious strength—which the possessor seems never to think of turning to the best advantage. The general effect is inexpressibly painful. We know nothing in the whole range of our fictitious literature which presents such shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity..."
- "... The work of Currer Bell is a great performance; that of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but it is a colossal one." (*Atlas*, January 22, 1848)

• http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_18/wuthering/content_m.html
• Brooklyn College Website.



Let us first look at a review of *Wuthering Heights*, which was published in 1848. The review states that “*Wuthering Heights* is a strange, inartistic story. There are evidences in every chapter of a sort of rugged power, an unconscious strength, which the possessor seems never to think of turning to the best advantage. The general effect is inexpressibly painful. We know nothing in the whole range of our fictitious literature, which presents such shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity.”

“The work of Currer Bell is a great performance that of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but it is a colossal one.” This reviewer refers to both Emily's *Wuthering Heights* as well as the work of Currer Bell, and we know Currer Bell is a reference to Charlotte Bronte.

Let us first take a look at the kind of character the writer of the story is given. There is a suggestion that the writer of this novel, *Wuthering Heights* possesses some very great unconscious strength, a kind of rugged power and unfortunately, according to the reviewer, the writer is not putting this rugged power, an unconscious strength to the best advantage. So there is a raw power, which can be harvested in a much more useful and advantageous way according to the assessment of this reviewer.

The reviewer further goes on to say that there are numerous shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity in this novel, *Wuthering Heights*. There are two things that we can think about in relation to the idea of the gothic. One is the element of strangeness. Gothic fiction possesses a wild character, a strange character and you can also see that there is also great power in the work, in a gothic work and that power is power over both the narrative as well as over the reader. There is a great power in the narrative because it is very suspenseful, there are twists and turns, it can hook the reader. So it possesses a lot of unconscious strength. That is one element of gothic fiction, the power it has over its own story and the power it has over the reader.

Secondly, the effect of gothic fiction, the horrifying kind especially is inexpressively painful and that phrase is used to describe the effect of *Wuthering Heights* too. The reviewer writes that the general effect is inexpressively painful. It is very difficult to express the nature of pain that is given to the reader through this novel. And we do know that the contents of this

novel is full of pain and suffering and sorrow and passion. There is nothing like this kind of work in literature that is apparently the view of this reviewer.

There is a comparison with Currer Bell. The work of Currer Bell, Jane Eyre comes to mind very quickly and it was a powerful book too in its own way, but it is quite different to the kind of wild passion and the rude and rugged pictures that we get of humanity. Jane Eyre is a different kind of gothic whereas Wuthering Heights is a class into itself. So you can see how the reviewer compares Currer Bell with Ellis Bell and suggests that work of Ellis Bell is full of promise, but it is a promise for colossal kind, a massive kind, a gargantuan kind whereas Currer Bell does represent great artistry, great performance.

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Emily and Wuthering Heights

- "Perhaps more significant than her misperception were the characterizations which Charlotte promulgated about her sister and which are still being repeated. First, Charlotte presented her sister as "a child and nursling of the moors" through whom nature spoke; this explained the novel's being "moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of heath."

• http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/mellen/novel_13/wuthering/charlotte.html

• Brooklyn College Website

• Image source: <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/photo/wuthering-heights-illustration-by-lydia-fox-wuthering-heights-illustration-royalty-free-image-image148748484>



“Perhaps more significant than her misperception were the characterizations, which Charlotte promulgated about her sister and which are still being repeated. First, Charlotte presented her sister as a child and nursling of the moors, through whom nature spoke, this explain the novel is being Moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of heath.”

Charlotte Bronte was in great pains to represent a particular character for Emily Bronte, her sister. She wanted to project Emily in a particular way and Charlotte's representations of her sister's identity was so powerful that we still continue to use the markers of Emily's character that was originally sketched by Charlotte Bronte.

Therefore, these set of criticisms that I am using from Brooklyn College is extremely useful to unpack the genuine from the structured. And these criticisms are also useful to see how certain myths get circulated time and again in order to preserve a particular myth about Emily Bronte who wrote this powerful novel Wuthering Heights. It is important to read the myth, it is important to understand the myth because the myth is also a gateway into understanding the nature of the Byronic hero Heathcliff and his beloved Cathy.

Now, let us go back to the second point there on the slide. First, Charlotte presented her sister as a child and nursling of the moors through whom nature spoke. Emily Bronte was represented as a child of the landscape, a child and nursling of the landscape, it is as if she is not just a human child, she is also a creature, a wild creature whose mother was the moors, the landscape, the wild landscape.

Because Emily Bronte was so much in communion with the landscape, the novel that she produced, that she wrote, was equally moorish in the sense that it had that ambience and aura and effect of the moors and it was just as the landscape, wild and knotty as the elements of the heath, as the roots of the heath.

Now, it is a very, very interesting comparison that Charlotte Bronte offers to her readers, to her contemporaries. And she is projecting a particular image of Emily Bronte as wild as an element of nature, as innocent and we also see that in the novel, in Wuthering Heights, Cathy and Heathcliff, especially the young Cathy and the young Heathcliff are full of wildness as they run about in their innocent childhood and later as they grow up, they retain that wildness, but it is a different kind of wildness.

Heathcliff turns into a monster because of rejected passion, Heathcliff becomes as knotty as a root of heath and Cathy herself, who is now married, thinks that the only way to resolve the knotty problems of her relations is to die.

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Emily and Wuthering Heights



- "Next Charlotte metamorphosed Emily into an accurate transcriber of the Yorkshire life and inhabitants. Then Charlotte transformed Emily, in turn, (1) into a Christian allegorist, with Heathcliff representing the sinner; (2) into the passive receptor of the creative gift; and, finally, (3) into the visionary artist".

- http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melan/novel_18/wuthering/charlotte.html
- Brooklyn College Website.



“Next, Charlotte metamorphosed Emily into an accurate transcriber of the Yorkshire life and inhabitants. Then Charlotte transformed Emily in turn into a Christian allegorist with Heathcliff representing the sinner, into the passive receptor of the creative gift and finally into the visionary artist.”

The critique here neatly summarises the way in which Charlotte's description of Emily is useful in a moral sense as well as in a creative sense. Charlotte turns Emily Bronte into an allegorist, she works with morality, Christian morality, where Heathcliff becomes the sinner. He sins against not just his family, but in a larger sense, he is the representative sinner and by offering Emily as an allegorist, a Christian allegorist, Charlotte Bronte turns Emily into a moralist, one who works with grand categories of good and bad, evil and virtue.

Secondly, she also simultaneously, that is Charlotte also simultaneously represents Emily into a kind of a passive vessel, into which the creative gift of writing is endowed, given to her by the divine, by nature. So Emily receives this great gift to imagine and produce Wuthering Heights, so she is just a passive vessel to let loose imaginative world. And finally, she becomes, Emily becomes a visionary artist because she is able to see into the psyches of men and women and transcribe their moods of life and moral views into that great book.

Now, what is interesting to us in relation to the idea of the Gothic is the second point. The passive receptor being Emily, the creative gift being the ability to write imaginatively and the end product is Wuthering Heights. If you look at the way some of the gothic fiction have

originated, we realise that these inspirations come to them. So writers, gothic writers stumble into the plots of gothic fiction one way or the other. They could either get it from a library and transcribe it, translate it or they can just get the inspiration from nature, from nightmares, from dreams.

We also should realise that Emily is also projected as a character who is accurate in the reality that she captures in her work. She is depicted as an accurate transcriber. She captures, apparently in a verbatim fashion, the life of the Yorkshire inhabitants, residents and she does do that when we look at the way the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights act and speak, you can see that the raw energy of that family is real in a material sense that these people resemble the real flesh and blood, Yorkshire folks.

So, you can see how Wuthering Heights and its creator have a lot of myths, accorded to them. And some of these myths make sense in relation to the way gothic functions and we should also realise that Charlotte Bronte is also working with the expected and well-worn conventions and regulations of society and she wants to fit her sister within the accepted moral compass of society. She wants Wuthering Heights to participate in the economy of the real, the moral, the domestic. She does not want to put that novel outside of the bounds of the respectable.

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Emily and Wuthering Heights

- "It did not matter to Charlotte that some of her characterizations of Emily were contradictory: Thus, Emily was driven by a creative gift which "at times strangely wills and works for itself," so that she was unaware of what she had created, **and** she was a controlled sculptor who saw how she could mold a granite block into "the vision of his meditations." She rarely spoke with the local people, **and** she knew them intimately, "knew their ways, their language, their family histories."

- http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19c/wuthering/charlotte.html
- Brooklyn College Website.



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“It did not matter to Charlotte that some of her characterizations of Emily were contradictory. Thus, Emily was driven by a creative gift, which at times strangely wills and works for itself, so that she was unaware of what she had created and she was a controlled sculptor who saw how she could mold the granite block into the vision of his meditations. She rarely spoke with the local people, and she knew them intimately, knew their ways, their language, their family histories.”

The critique here very quickly and easily points to some of the contradictions in Charlotte Bronte's representations of Emily's character. You can see how that there is a contradiction between this creativity, which seems to work for itself without Emily controlling that creative gift and at the same time, Emily was also very controlled in the way she sculpted the novel as a sculptor would sculpt, mold a granite block into the intended vision, into the intended object. So this act of sculpting becomes a very controlled meditation and the vision becomes reality in the object.

So, as is apparent, there is a contradiction in the nature of this creativity, which seems to work in an uncontrolled fashion and at the same time in a very controlled manner yet, yet we can also see that imagination and creativity in those times were seen as something which, which was not entirely under the control of the receptor that is the writer. Imagination and creativity had their own way of working itself out through the medium. Romanticism envisioned creativity in this fashion and Charlotte Bronte was participating in that myth, in that legend, in that perception of creativity.

So one can see that there is no deliberate falsehood that is being structured and offered by Charlotte Bronte. She was pleasing Emily in that tradition of creative imagination, which was being circulated in that time period. The last point in that set of ideas on the slide is interesting because, again, there is a contradiction, apparent contradiction because Emily rarely spoke with the local people but yet, she knew their lives intimately.

So she seems to be a wizard of sorts when it comes to knowing the most intimate narratives of the people of that landscape, yet we also saw in our previous sessions, lecture sessions, that Emily was a great listener, she could let people talk and patiently listen to their stories.

And that is perhaps one of the ways that Emily adopted to transcribe Yorkshire life and landscape.

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Emily and Wuthering Heights



- “Charlotte claimed that Emily was impervious to the influence of others and could grow only through time and experience by following the dictates of her own nature. In one form or another, all these characterizations continue to appear in critical discussions of Emily Brontë and her novel”.

- http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melan/novel_18/wuthering/charlotte.html
- Brooklyn College Website.

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“Charlotte claimed that Emily was impervious to the influence of others and could grow only through time and experience by following the dictates of her own nature. In one form or another, all these characterizations continue to appear in critical discussions of Emily Bronte and her novel.”

Again, the belief that Emily was not influenced by others is offered to the readers by Charlotte Bronte. We do know that that is not entirely true, Emily was very well read, their family home had a fantastic library, their father, the father of Emily and Charlotte and Ann encouraged them to read extensively.

Emily was familiar with the gothic stories that appeared in Blackwood’s magazine. They enjoy the poetry of Scott, Wordsworth was also read by Emily Bronte. So we know that Emily was in touch with the literary currents of her time and age. Therefore, the idea that Emily was not influenced by the literary culture of her time is also a myth which participates in this idea that Emily was purely imaginative, that her inspiration was from nature, was from life and not through books.

What is interesting to us in relation to the narrative of gothic is that Emily's character in itself takes on a gothic hue of sorts. Emily becomes a wild creature herself, Emily kind of works just with imagination and creativity, she works with raw nature. So all these ideas feed into the gothic nature of the novel itself. The writer has a gothic subtext and the work too has a very forceful gothic trajectory. So it is important that we kind of understand and assess the various legends that are associated with Emily Bronte.

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Gothic: "Clash of elemental forces".

"The universe is made up of two opposite forces, storm and calm. Wuthering Heights and the Earnshaws express the storm; Thrushcross Grange and the Lintons, the calm. Catherine and Heathcliff are elemental creatures of the storm."

http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/novel_19/wuthering/charlotte.html
Brooklyn College Website.
Image source: <https://medium.com/@KevinRedmayne/wuthering-heights-b5ac68425340>



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This novel shows us a clash of elemental forces. You remember that we saw how Charlotte Bronte projected Emily as a Christian allegorist. We can see that kind of reading working well with this viewpoint. "The universe is made up of two opposite forces, storm and calm. Wuthering Heights and The Earnshaws express the storm, Thrushcross Grange and the Lintons, the calm. Catherine and Heathcliff are elemental creatures of the storm."

In a very superficial manner, you can divide these two families into categories of passion and control, storm and calm. You can also categorise them as the norm and the one that is outside of the norm. Wuthering Heights represents the abnormal. Wuthering Heights and its inhabitants, the Earnshaws and later, Heathcliff who becomes the master of Wuthering Heights represents the not so ordinary folks. And the Lintons, of course, represent what is accepted, the regular, the respectable, and the genteel class of society.

So the allegory can also work if you look at the novel in this fashion and Catherine and Heathcliff become figures who do not make it to the genteel class of society. You can also look at it, look at the novel as a representation of two elemental forces, forces of nature. The storm is part of nature just as the calm is, so the Lintons represent the calm, the quiet, the peaceful, whereas the Earnshaws, particularly represented by Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff become embodiments of this powerful elemental force of passion and wildness.

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“The clash of economic interests and social classes”.



- “The novel is set at a time when capitalism and industrialization are changing not only the economy but also the traditional social structure and the relationship of the classes. The yeoman or respectable farming class (Hareton) was being destroyed by the economic alliance of the newly-wealthy capitalists (Heathcliff) and the traditional power-holding gentry (the Lintons).”

- http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/lindler/ncwv_13/Heathcliff/Hames.html
- Brooklyn College Website.

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“The novel is set at a time when capitalism and industrialization are changing, not only the economy, but also the traditional social structure and the relationship of the classes. The yeoman or respectable farming class, Hareton, was being destroyed by the economic alliance of the newly wealthy capitalists Heathcliff and the traditional power holding gentry, the Lintons.” This novel’s gothic can be read in relation to sociocultural factors such as capitalism and the idea of gentility.

Capitalism here is represented by Heathcliff, the new wealthy capitalist. We know that when Heathcliff returns to Wuthering Heights, he returns as a wealthy man. We do not know how he made his wealth but he becomes certainly very wealthy, wealthy enough to buy Wuthering Heights out of the hands of Hindley. So, what is suggested here is the slow failure of respectable farming classes, which is represented by Hareton, the son of Hindley and the gradual supremacy of newly wealthy capitalist represented here by Heathcliff.

And interestingly, the capitalists are gothic, they are evil masters, they have no sympathy whatsoever for the weak and the powerless and the Lintons from Thrushcross Grange represent the traditional power-holding gentry, the respectable gentry. And you can see how Heathcliff is becoming a strong oppositional force to both the farming class represented by Hareton and the traditional power-holding gentry, here embodied by the Lintons.

So even when we are looking at the gothic facets of Wuthering Heights, we can still connect the idea of the gothic to real material forces that was criss-crossing the society at the time.

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“Striving for transcendence”



- *“transcendence: passing beyond a human limit, existing above and independent of this world].”*

- “It is not just love that Catherine and Heathcliff seek but a higher, spiritual existence which is permanent and unchanging, as Catherine makes clear when she compares her love for Linton to the seasons and her love for Heathcliff to the rocks. The dying Catherine looks forward to achieving this state through death.”

- <http://www.englishliterature.com/2013/07/20/Wuthering-Heights.html>
- [www.englishliterature.com](http://www.englishliterature.com/2013/07/20/Wuthering-Heights.html)



The novel is also about striving for transcendence and of course transcendence means passing beyond a human limit, existing above an independent of this world. This spiritual idea, again connects it to the gothic notion. The spiritual here is not really a reference to the religiosity, the spiritual here is a literal reference to spirits as well because we do have the ghosts of Cathy and later of Cathy and Heathcliff walking the moors. But there is a duality to the idea of spirituality or transcendence.

One is literally transcending the physical body and becoming spirits, the other is existing above the material world, becoming independent of this material world by quitting it and wandering in an intangible manner.

“It is not just love that Catherine and Heathcliff seek, but a higher spiritual existence, which is permanent and unchanging, as Catherine makes clear when she compares her love for Linton to the seasons and her love for Heathcliff to the rocks. The dying Catherine looks forward to achieving this state through death.”

So this is a fantastic piece of criticism, which once again tells us that the spiritual existence is not primarily a religious existence that Catherine, Heathcliff are seeking, but it is an existence which is about the two figures being together in a kind of a childhood state of innocence and friendship. So it is an existence which is permanent and unchanging, nothing can change their association, their identification with one another.

And it is also interesting that Catherine compares her love for Linton, whom she later marries to the seasons, it is changeable, there is nothing permanent about it. It is changing and changeable as the seasons and she compares her love for Heathcliff to the rocks, the eternal rocks, which does not, the rocks that do not change, it is always there permanently. She is a part of Heathcliff and just as Catherine is a part of Heathcliff.

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