Chapter II

Wuthering Heights : A Palimpsest of the Tradition

The Brontës' novels have an array of unique traits that set them apart in a class of their own. Emily Bronte’s fiction is no exception either. There is a queer fusion of tradition and individuality that leaves one wonderstruck. Emily’s novel leans heavily on the traditional gothic paraphernalia to engage the attention of the reading public. Yet, there is originality the treatment of the theme. Moreover, a closer look reveals more than meets the eye. She has woven a pattern of themes and ideas beneath the apparent guise of a ‘spooky’ tale of love, hate and horror in her one and only novel Wuthering Heights.

Emily Bronte, the queer, rebellious reclusive soul that she was, expressed her thoughts and feelings, in a narrative mode that was remarkable for various reasons. In her adolescence, she began with the Gondal manuscripts — with their eerie, outlandish settings and strange characters bringing forth her inherent longing for the romantic. Her adulthood saw Wuthering Heights, which, though couched in elements of supernaturalism, reveals a mature outlook as well as an insight into complexities of life.
One wonders why she chose the veneer of the gothic genre. It may be said that Emily's creativity may have been moulded by a number of influences gathered right from childhood. Patrick Bronte's tales told to the children by the parsonage fireside, centred round forlorn waifs lost amidst moorlands and heaths. Emily Bronte's grandfather was a ballad singer with a ready repertoire of tales about ghosts, witches and vampires. Then there were the chilling stories of Blackwood's Magazine which the Brontes read. In fact, a close scrutiny shows a striking similarity between Wuthering Heights and a story titled The Bridegroom of Bama, by one Bartholomew Simmonds, published in Blackwood's Magazine (November 1840). Again, there are numerous instances, which shall be pointed out later on in this chapter, which suggest a close similarity between Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights and Mrs. Ann Radcliffe's novels. There is of course no historical proof that Emily had got round to reading the Radcliffean stories, but the overall gothic ambience indicates a resemblance. Anyway, all these influences of the gothic must have egged Emily Bronte on to adopt a 'gothic' style. Moreover, the gothic as an element of Romanticism, had been one of the reigning styles of the day, for various reasons, as pointed out in the previous chapter. And Emily was clever enough to choose for her novel the genre which was most popular at the time. But then, as said earlier, the gothic facade of the novel veils tiers of complex ideas and thoughts that are too radical and revolutionary to be blurted out openly in a conservative Victorian society. New ideas about women and their rights of self-expression, rights of children, class struggle and its socio-psychological effects, and the gingerly forays into the world of psychoanalyses of passion and emotions -- all these are there in Wuthering Heights.
couched in an experimentally different style, behind the unassuming masquerade of a gothic story. Emily does a wonderful job in unfurling her stormy ideas little by little, in a very unostentatious way, by deliberately letting the gothic ‘feel’ creep all over the novel.

The very first trait that lends a gothic air to Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* is the polarisation of characters a la the gothic romances. The whole novel revolves round Heathcliff, who, right from the beginning is drawn in the lines of a gothic villain. He is introduced in infernal terms per se. In chapter IV, when Mr. Earnshaw first conjured him out of his great coat, he looked “as dark almost as if it (Heathcliff) came from the devil” (p 28). As a baby, too, Heathcliff looked a “dirty, ragged, black-haired child, big enough to walk and talk: indeed its face looked older than Catherine’s, yet when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish, that nobody could understand.” (p26) Heathcliff looked like a ‘gypsy brat’.

Emily etches out the character of Heathcliff and his personality along the lines of the ‘Spirit of Pride’ in Anne Bronte’s poem, *The Three Guides* in the 1846 collection, and the picture of Julius, Emily’s Gondal companion. Such spirits with basilisk eyes which ‘like lightning’ shine with a ‘false’ and ‘destructive’ blaze have bounded ‘fearless, wild and free’ over the hills. But the spirit of pride leads them astray and abandons them, forcing them to lose their track and hurtle headlong towards ruin and destruction. Emily draws the same arrogance and haughty coldness in Heathcliff’s eyes too. Nelly Dean points out the cold, murky villainy in Heathcliff’s eyes:
'...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".

The same unmistakable devilish glint of cold fire lurks in the eyes of the older Heathcliff, when Nelly observes him on his unexpected return into Catherine's life:

"A half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified, quite divested of roughness, though too stern for grace". (p74)

Now, as pointed out earlier, this description of Heathcliff that establishes him as a gothic monster of villainy and dark deeds, is quite close to the description of Hugh Lawlor -- the character in *The Bridegroom of Bama*. (published in *Blackwood's Magazine*). There too, one finds a veritable grim-faced 'dark-hero', with flashing eye and a terrifying stare. Heathcliff, again resembles the figure described in Mrs. Radcliffe's *The Italian*:

his countenance and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate at a single glance into the hearts of men and read their most secret thoughts". (42)
All of these men, have the same distinctive looks, the heart of their darkness being betrayed only by the cold glint of an infernal fire of rage, fury and vengeance burning within. The similarity in the description of Heathcliff in the mould of the gothic villain highlights the probability of the influence of gothic literature on Emily Bronte.

Heathcliff turns out to be typically gothic in his deeds, like Hugh Lawlor, who is "like the first murderer, a fugitive upon the earth, with a curse as deep as Cain’s, pursuing his footsteps" (p 698). Heathcliff, too, is driven from crime to crime, from one atrocity to another by his vengeance and his sadistic schadenfreude in making beings weaker than him writhe in the pain inflicted by him. His stony heart turns him into a villain.

Right at the outset of the novel, one finds Lockwood, being nearly torn to shreds by two hairy monsters—Gnasher and Wolf, while Heathcliff, with Hareton in tow, watches the charade with a delighted ‘guffaw’ until the old housekeeper Zillah comes to Lockwood’s rescue. Like the gothic monster, Heathcliff is tickled by cruelty. Emily Bronte occasionally exposes his subhuman propensities. In chapter XIII, one finds him tormenting Isabella like the gothic oppressor, so that he appears to be as hatefully ruthless to the hapless girl as ‘a tiger or a venomous serpent’ (p113). Heathcliff keeps up the villainous frenzy of torment as he metes out unbearable punishment to Hareton or more still to young Linton, as he forces the latter into a façade of a love-affair with the junior Cathy. None but a devil of a man could be so ruthless as to shove and prod his own sick son into luring a girl into love just to ensnare her for revenge. Cathy, too, did have to taste the rough side of Heathcliff’s character after she got fettered in a forced marriage with Linton. This attitude of Heathcliff
underlined him all the more as a man whose devilish mien had set him apart as one who is “lonely like the devil, and envious like him”, as Catherine describes him in chapter XXIX. Heathcliff reaches the rock bottom of cold-blooded gothic villainy as he exclaims “I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails!” (p118). True enough, Heathcliff, as Arnold Kettle says, “becomes a monster; what he does to Isabella, to Hareton, to Cathy, to his son, even to the wretched Hindley, is cruel and inhuman beyond normal thought.” Heathcliff’s diabolic character comes to the fore yet again in the chilling incident of his disinterring Catherine’s buried, lifeless body, just to feel her in his arms once more. This bizarre act of the paranoid lover is decidedly gothic. Heathcliff recalls the snowy night when the ghastly idea haunted his mind:

...being alone, and conscious that two yards of loose earth was the sole barrier between us, I said to myself – I’ll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I’ll think it is this north wind that chills me; and if she be motionless, it is sleep.(219)

This incident, grotesque as it is, vividly recalls the one in The Bridgegroom of Bama, which is said to be the chief source for Wuthering Heights. The hero of the former, Hugh Lawlor commits murder on behalf of his ladylove, Ellen Nugent, who entirely possessed his soul: “…to his lonely and affectionate spirit, Ellen was all the world – the only living thing that he felt necessary to his existence.” When Ellen dies of consumption, Hugh escapes, only to be rounded up in a churchyard where he is
found to have disinterred Ellen’s corpse to embrace it. He is killed and is buried alongside his ladylove:

-the strangers who dug his grave did not venture to separate in death the hapless pair who in life could never be united.

This incident finds its echo in Heathcliff’s necrophilia in *Wuthering Heights*.

The gothic mode of characterization extends to Hindley, as well, who at times takes on the form of a monstrous tormentor. His fiendish enmity with Heathcliff, his hardened resolution to kill—all point at his devilish mien. Indeed, when Isabella came to Wuthering Heights, she was greeted by a “tall, gaunt man ... extremely slovenly; his features were lost in masses of shaggy hair that hung on his shoulders.”(107) He glared at Isabella “like a hungry wolf.” This very description of Hindley evokes the picture of the old gothic monster.

II

Apart from characterization, Emily Bronte carefully builds up the backdrop of the story to create the usual weird atmosphere. In real life, the setting—the dwelling place or the countryside—may not be very significant. It might just serve as an ordinary space for human life—necessary, but neutral. But in fiction, the novelist deliberately paints out a background to show off the effect he wants to create to the best advantage. Wuthering Heights, introduced as “the name of Mr. Heathcliff’s dwelling”, bears testimony to the ‘atmospheric tumult’ in its very name. The north wind howls around it, slanting and twisting the gnarled firs and giant thorns. The house, very like
the gothic mansion of yore, with its slit windows and fortified corners -- seems to provide the apt ambience for the awesome game of love, hate, revenge and torment to be played out in. Like the twisted trees around, lives in Wuthering Heights are twisted by the predatory vengefulness of Heathcliff. Like the desolate façade of the house, the fates of those preyed upon by Heathcliff are sealed in ponderous gloom. Wuthering Heights is the inevitable place for torture and incarceration--the veritable gothic den of doom. In fact, the very landscape against which Wuthering Heights is set is gloomy, foreboding and haunting. Reminiscent of the bleak setting of Hoffman's "Das Majorat," the ambience of "Wuthering Heights" exudes a gothic touch per se. In "The Mysteries of Udolpho," Mrs. Ann Radcliffe paints the picture of the great gloomy castle frowning down from the edge of the precipice in the Apennines. The dark interior and vaulted roofs might have been Emily's inspiration for creating similar decors of Wuthering Heights.

The gothic surfaces in the novel through yet another motif -- incarceration. The motif crops up often enough both figuratively as well as literally. One is reminded of the archetypal captive princess when we see junior Cathy entrapped by Heathcliff before her marriage to the frail and weak Linton. Figuratively, too, life is a bondage of sorts for many of the people in the novel. Heathcliff is a prisoner of his vengeance, his furious plans of destruction set forth by his schadenfreud and his morbid nature. Marriage is a captive state for Catherine, locked in the fetters of an unhappy union with Edgar even though her soul reaches out for Heathcliff. "The thing that irks me most," says she, "is this shattered prison....I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there..." (124). Linton, too was forced into the shackles of
marriage by his ruthless father, Heathcliff. Isabella, helplessly pinned down to a devastating marriage with Heathcliff, found the marriage to be no better than captivity.

This gothic theme of incarceration in Emily Bronte's writings trails back to the old Gondal times. Jonathan Wordsworth, in an article for *Bronte Society Transactions* vouches for the fact. A poem, dated 9th October, relates how Rochelle, a beautiful young captive is kept in 'chains' and 'fetters' by a 'jailor grim' – 'the surly keeper who to and fro, paced by the bolted door and shivered as he walked and as he shivered, swore'. Rochelle stands out as a symbolic figure for all that is feminine and sweet, and her imprisonment is that of the bright soul. Jonathan Wordsworth likens the 'jailor grim' with the older Heathcliff who later imprisons and then shoves the younger Catherine into 'a travesty of marriage'.

Traced down from the Gondal days, the theme of captivity stokes up the theme of the gothic in the novel in a newer form. The motif of physical incarceration from the old gothic, takes on a psychic dimension here.

Now then, notwithstanding these insinuations at the gothic, Emily Bronte tops off the eerie effect of her novel through a number of jittery happenings that send a chill down the spine. The night which Lockwood spent in Wuthering Heights held many an eerie illusion for the bewildered man. Scarcely had Lockwood had a wink of sleep when he started up, as "a glare of white letters started from the dark as vivid as spectres – the air swarmed with Catherines". (15). The weird feeling of delving down memory lane is further enhanced by the surrealistic, nightmarish experience of Catherine scrabbling and scratching at the window in a bid to get into her long-lost bedroom after having been "a waif for twenty years". This is an instance of supernaturalism where Lockwood, in a fit of
terror and agony, “rubbed it (Catherine's cold, clammy, spectral hand) to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes.” The gory, ghastly sight is typically and appallingly gothic. The continual, agonizing wail of the spectre is both distressing and dismal, creating a uniquely 'unheimlich' situation. This is reminiscent of the hand that seizes Adeline's hand in the *Romance of the Forest* (1891) by Mrs. Radcliffe. One remembers the 'gigantic hand in armour' that inspired Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), too, in this respect. The spooky 'hand' at Lockwood's window positively sets the atmosphere of the uncanny in *Wuthering Heights*.

The spookiness is heightened all the more in chapter XXIX, where Heathcliff, maddened by grief, exhumes Cathy's body to hold her in his arms. Heathcliff recounts how he felt Catherine's presence umpteen times. Just as he shovelled the 'loose earth' off Catherine's grave, he felt an almost palpable presence:

"...it seemed that I heard a sigh from someone above, close at the edge of the grave and bending down...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... certainly I felt that Cathy was there...Her presence was with me." (219 – 20)

Heathcliff vividly remembers how the feeling stuck to him all the way home.
This sort of eerie feeling of some extra-natural presence in the novel has its roots in Emily’s own life and emotions. Biographical records have it that Emily started having such ‘visions’ at the age of six, at Cowan Bridge, when she is said to have suffered a fit. Her poems, too, reflect these mystic presences. In the poem, ‘I saw the child, one summer’s day’, written in July 1837, she talks of a child, who desperately wants to know of the future, but ends up being overcome by an almost physical presence which rather foreshadows Heathcliff’s intuitive perception of Catherine’s presence:

A fluttering blast that shakes the leaves
And whistles round the gloomy wall
And lingering long lamenting grieves,
For it is the spectre’s call…
A fearful anguish in his eyes
Fixed strainerly on the vacant air,
Heavily bursts in long-drawn sighs
His panting breath, enchained by fear.

The gothic crops up again in the twelfth chapter of the novel when Cathy falls sick in her attempts to frighten the wits out of Edgar Linton, by a simulation of anger. The mentally pseudo-paranoid Cathy sees things that are not there; she exclaims at her
own veiled reflection in the mirror and cries: 'The face ... is behind there still! Who is it? Oh Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone.'

The atmosphere of gloom and premonition is thus heightened by the glimpses of Catherine's ordeals of mental disintegration and death. Madness—or paranoia— for that matter, is yet another element of the gothic which was made much of by modern American gothic authors like Edgar Allan Poe in his *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The situation in Chapter XII, where Catherine seems to run *detraque* with her wandering ranting about the lapwings, her painful surrealist hallucinations in the mirror, her illusion of her old room of childhood in Wuthering Heights shows the remarkable range and depth of the new gothic. Incarcerated as she is in a hapless marriage, her mind sways dangerously between sanity and insanity thereby lending a new gothic touch to the fiction. Later days would see American authors like Edgar Allan Poe making much of this *clou* of a paranoid mind, alongside the normal use of the conventional gothic as in books like *The Fall of the House of Usher*. The psychic state of characters is the focus here. The clanking and jangling within the story are used only to highlight the state of a mind driven to distraction with horror and panic.

The main sphere of observation remains the psychic plane. This is the gothic of the mind. This eerie gloom of a demented psyche is further heightened in the novel by a weird feeling of premonition. Premonition of evil prevails upon Nelly Dean in Chap XI, when childhood memories of Hindley flood her mind, causing her to rush over to the Heights to see if everything is alright: 'I felt an irresistible yeaming to be at the Heights. Superstition urged me to comply with this impulse. Supposing he should be
dead! The same sense of foreboding surfaces through Lockwood's dreams and the
eeriness that grips him even before listening to Ellen Dean's story or the latter's
anxiety. This definitely adds a new dimension to the gothic part of the story.
So much is for the gothic aspects of the novels--aspects that boosted the work to the
heights of success. But as stated earlier, behind the seemingly innocent façade of
fireside gothic storytelling is an ideas galore highlighting all her rebellious thoughts in
mellow acceptability to the reading public.

IV

The very first thing that strikes one on reading Wuthering Heights, is the frank
portrayal of tumultuous passion. Emily Bronte exploits the gothic genre to mask the
blitz of passion in the major characters. Hers was the iconoclastic breaking of barriers
to feature stormy passionateness that would have been outrageous or tabooed in
ordinary narrative form. Heathcliff's love for Catherine -- deep as it is, borders on
sensuality without the least hint of vulgarity:

"...she put up her hand to clasp his neck, and bring her cheek to
his, as he held her, while he, in return, covering her with frantic
caresses ..."(124)
But this very passion sways dangerously on the brink of fury that takes a turn for slight sadism or sado-masochism as in Catherine, when in chap (XV) she, on her way to death, flares up with a last spurt of angry passion as she tells Heathcliff that he has 'killed' her and 'thriven on it'. When Heathcliff tries to rise from his position at her feet, 'she seized his hair and kept him down': 'I wish I could hold you ...till we were both dead...'. A wild vindictiveness in...white cheek and a bloodless lip and scintillating eye' completed her tensed up looks. The passion of love simmers up into a passion of masochistic fury in Heathcliff, when he, hearing about Catherine's death, dashes his head against the knotted tree trunk and howls like 'a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears.' But masochism slowly takes a turn for sadism as Heathcliff sets his mind on avenging his lost love on others like the junior Cathy, Isabella, Hareton and Linton. The gothic here traverses the realm of the mind and comes to explore tumultuous emotions, and thus serves as a veneer for psychoanalysis.

The gothic elements are there in the awesome display of violent passion that borders on the paranormal. It is only that the focus has shifted away from the physical plane to the psychological one. In fact, this is yet another aspect of modernism that makes Emily's work one of the 'new gothic' type. Later on, in the American literati, one would find Sheridan Le Fanu stressing more on the psychological sources and effects of terror rather than external sources of horror. Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne too, prefer to explore the mysterious realms of the labyrinthine depths of the human psyche. Emily Bronte's 'fresh dark air of tragic passion' as Swinburne calls it, goes much beyond the sweet emotions of love and chivalry of the gothic of yore. Set
against the elemental beauty of the sprawling moors and the hilly landscape, Heathcliff's love, hate, vengeance and curious necrophiliac passion attain an awe-inspiring dimension that is curiously tragic in its welter of gloom and destruction. The splendid use of nature to mirror moods and passions and its grand denouement that is in perfect symmetry with the rest of the novel lends an air of poetic beauty to the whole novel with its spatio-temporal narrative frame. This definitely adds to the intellectual aspect of the novel that sets it apart in the 'new' gothic genre, as something remarkably different from a run-of-the-mill gothic horror story. This is the New Gothic that adds a definitive literary tinge to make-believe, and flavours it with reality. Emily's was the gothic with a purpose -- a purpose other than simple story telling--a purpose of waking society up to the harsh truth of reality. Emily even bends nature to reflect the human sphere, so that the macrocosm mirrors the microcosm. Emily Bronte believed that human beings were either the children of calm or the children of storm. Passion — be it of vengeance, love, hatred or fury — ruled the roost over the children of storm, while the children of calm were soothed with the cool disposition of an even temper. Children of calm or those of storm had to find their own sorts as mates or else there brewed a chaos of disorder. Mismatches and mismarriages of souls followed — bringing in their wake destruction and debilitation all around. Heathcliff, Catherine, Hindley are all children of storm. Edgar, Isabella and Hindley's wife (Frances) are all children of calm. Naturally, their children, Hareton, Cathy and Linton, fall in neither division, but carry the traits of both the sorts. Thus Cathy's 'anger was never furious; her love never fierce.' She had the kindness and constancy of Edgar Linton — the child of calm,
coupled with the strength and courage of her mother, a child of storm. Linton, born out of a mismatched ‘hate-marriage’ combines the cowardly weakness of Isabella, the child of calm, and the cruelty and ruthlessness of Heathcliff, a child of storm. Naturally, when Heathcliff and Catherine were together, all was well with their world, which cracked apart as the mismatch between Catherine and Edgar, Heathcliff and Isabella came about. But later, Cathy and Hareton both being of the same a-little-of-both cosmic build, rejoiced in their perfect match.

Now, coming back to the iconoclastic ideas couched in the deceptively simple genre of the gothic, one finds yet another very contemporary touch in Emily Bronte’s raising of the issue of child-torment, which continues to be a raging topic even today. Emily, by far advanced for her age, pondered about it in her novel. Hindley, in a drunken fit, swore to break Hareton’s neck and flung him over the banister. Hareton, the cowering, unloved child, learnt to fear his father forever. Again, Linton, the moment he dismounts at Wuthering Heights, finds his travails beginning. Trembling and bewildered, he is met by a rapacious Heathcliff, who mutters threateningly at him: “....the whelp. I despise him for himself and hate him for the memories he revives.”

Later on in the novel, one shudders to find Heathcliff coercing Linton into pretending to be in perfect health, even through the poor lad was in an extreme state of illness with the sinister purpose of getting him married to Cathy and thus annexing Edgar’s estate, Thrushcross Grange.

This open display of child-torment in Emily’s novel strikes one as very similar to the portrayal of infantile despondency and torment in modern American gothic novels like The Cannibal by John Hawkes or Expensive People by Joyce Carol Oates. In the
latter, one feels shocked to the bone to realize the devastating effect that can overwhelm a teenaged child because of peer pressure. A mother who goads her child on to prove himself more and more successful in life, never imagines that she is making a life-long arch enemy out of her own son.

Now, in *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff, the tormentor who metes out torture to others weaker than him, could not have been a born sadist. Life had dealt out some of its bitter doses of mortification and abuse to him while he had been a child. Heathcliff, the perpetrator in later life had himself been the victim once. He too had been a tormented child. No one had pampered him like they did Cathy. Over and above that, there was the continual disdain in Hindley's hateful eyes. His childhood was spent little better than that of a servant. In Chapter VII, Hindley calls out to Heathcliff, who was simpering away in a corner: "you may come and wish Miss Cathy welcome, like the other servants." For a moment, the picture of Cathy on horseback, dressed immaculately in splendid robes deigning to hold her dainty gloved hand out to be kissed by a dirty, smudgy, shabbily-dressed Heathcliff, evokes the image of the old feudal world — the lady and her servant — the bourgeois and the downtrodden. Even old Mrs. Linton stokes up the scathing fire of humiliation, by her derisive comments, as Heathcliff lands upon the grounds of Thrushcross Grange, with Cathy: 'Where did she pick up this companion?...a strange acquisition...a wicked boy...quite unfit for a decent house...' Vengeance coiled in Heathcliff's heart like a sleepy serpent. It must have been at these times that he had secretly pledged to avenge himself and his buffeted dignity on these aristocrats — the inmates of these
‘decent’ houses. Bitterness, agony and humiliation of an abused childhood turned him into the demon that he grew up to be.

Now, this deliberate portrayal of a class distinction was subtly brought out by Emily Bronte to highlight yet another issue that was quite modern at that time. The central motif of conflict in Wuthering Heights spreads on to the plethora of moral, emotional, social issues. Right from the outset, readers are made aware of differences—both, social as well as cultural—between the two worlds of the novel—the stormy world of Wuthering Heights, and the calm, composed one of Thrushcross Grange. The former, in its own ways, represents yeoman economy while the latter stands for the capitalist economy of the property-dealing class. Standing amidst a park, surrounded by a wall (a frontier between civilization and boorism.), the Grange stands in stark distinction from the Heights. When in Chapter VI, the two children are caught peeping into the privacy of the Grange, the Lintons react with the typical landowner’s instinct—with guns and dogs against the ‘robbers’, ‘thieves’ and ‘rascals’. Yet, Catherine is accepted into the folds of the grange while Heathcliff is singled out as the villainous criminal:

‘the villain scowls so plainly in his face, would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his villainy in acts as well as features?’ (39)
Catherine, on grounds of being the daughter of a wealthy family, is allowed into the upper class circle. But, Heathcliff — the dark, gypsy-like stranger of uncertain origin, is forsaken. The class-distinction becomes even more evident when Catherine returns to the Heights, transformed into a ‘lady’— as Hindley calls her — ‘lady’ not as an adult, but as a member of the privileged class. Catherine holds up her trailing ‘cloth habit’ with hands which are ‘wonderfully whitened with doing nothing, and staying indoors’. Catherine has come to know of a life of class status where people are used to having men working for them, where her dress, speech and manners separate her from toiling classes. Catherine brings a whiff of the social values of snobbery and uppitiness into the Heights, thereby posing a threat to the natural, cosmic state of matters. Her choice of a life-partner now is ascertained by social values of class, money and fame. Catherine decides on Edgar Linton, because with him there was a chance to ‘be rich’: ‘...I shall like to be the greatest woman in the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband.’ (60) Catherine forgets completely, in her intoxication with social status that it was Heathcliff who was closer to her nature. They were both of the same mettle — both were the children of storm. The cosmic order is set a-tumble by Catherine’s decision to retain her ‘ladyship’ by marrying Edgar Linton. And disaster looms large. Emily Bronte takes pains to hint at the fact that Heathcliff’s vengeful attitude, his passion for revenge was but a natural corollary of the turn of events. Had Catherine not made the wrong choice, all would have been well with the cosmic set-up. But as it was, there had to be an upheaval when social class distinction overthrew the natural order of life.
Emily Bronte's preoccupation with class-struggle had its roots in the social milieu of the
age. *Wuthering Heights* was published in 1847 — when the European world was going
through great economic changes, industrial unrest and political instability. The Brontes,
growing up in the second phase of the Industrial Revolution, were aware of the influx of
power-driven machinery which consolidated the factory system, thereby leading to a full—
scale capitalism. Trade unionism came forth in the 1830s, with struggles against the Poor
Law and for improved factory conditions. This grooved up the class struggle all the more,
strengthening the feud between the privileged class and the toiling masses. Tucked
away in the depths of Haworth parsonage, the Bronte sisters kept track of all the
happenings around. Patrick Bronte was actively involved in championing the causes of
the locked-out workers of his parish. Moreover, Emily had visited Leeds, Bradford,
Keighley, Halifax and Brussels, thereby gleaning up first-hand knowledge about the
turbulent mid-nineteenth century world. Heathcliff, a symbol of the proletariat --
propertyless, grimy, sweaty with toil, rejected, victimized and mortified — is made to use
his endless energy and determination to bring about a painstaking rise in social position
and dignity. His vengeance against the Lintons might as well be interpreted as the
struggle against social inequality — a strife for social justice, an effort to rectify the
injustice of his exploitation and dispossession. Heathcliff, more sinned against than
sinning, is the typical rebel meting out rough nemesis to the ruling class oppressors,
trying to beat them at their own game, yet getting reviled himself in the process. Terry
Eagleton in *The Myths of Power* lends a Marxist tinge to the motif as he highlights
Heathcliff as 'contradiction incarnate' who harnesses the 'agrarian capitalist forces' of
Thrashcross Grange only to avenge himself on the upper stratum, but he does this 'with an un-Linton like' extremism because his real commitment is to Catherine — thus to a more ancient world of 'absolute personal value' which capitalist social relations cancel.'

Thus, Emily Bronte's Heathcliff is the antihero — villainous, yet powerfully portrayed. The combination of this portrayal of villainy and undoubted power of poetic style led many a critic to call *Wuthering Heights* a poetic drama. Swinburne, speaking of the 'fresh dark air of tragic passion in the book', places it alongside Shakespeare or Webster.

VI

*Wuthering Heights* comes close to poetry in its stylistic uniqueness. Emily weaves an intricate network of symbols and images that lends a singularity to the texture of the whole novel. Nature in the book, besides couching the whole drama of life as a quiet backdrop, helps in imaging passions and tempers too. Catherine, in chapter IX, talks to Nelly about the natures of Heathcliff and Linton:

Nelly,...he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.(62)

A little later, she goes on to liken her passions for the two men in macrocosmic terms:
My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it; I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: Nelly, I am Heathcliff. (64)

This rare show of passion gives out its best when edged with the nature imagery that Emily so efficiently uses. Nature reflects mental states on the night when Heathcliff, smitten by Catherine's unwittingly scathing remarks, leaves the Heights, unseen. The skies broke apart to let loose an inferno of storm, lightning and thunder, providing the most perfect setting for the broiling, raging mind of a child of storm (34). Again, the very name Wuthering Heights harps on the focal symbolic motif of the novel. 'Wuthering' is 'a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather'. The central motif of vengeance and hatred is embodied in the elemental symbol of the wind clearly enough, when on the day of Hindley's funeral, Heathcliff greets the orphaned Hareton with a malicious glint in his eye:

Now my bonny lad, you are mine! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another with the same wind to twist it. (144)

The elements of fire, wind and water as basal metaphors feature to personify human feelings, emotions, expressions and actions. Thus, a serving woman 'heaves' like a sea after a high wind. Nelly rushes to welcome Lockwood, exclaiming 'tumultuously'. Spirits are, in rare moments, 'at high water mark', again Edgar's being is as different from
Heathcliff's, as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire. Abuse is either lavished in a 'torrent' or it pours forth in a deluge. Illnesses are 'weathered...through'. Hair 'flies', bodies 'toss' or tremble like reeds and tears stream down. Discord and distress arise in a tumult when sensations are felt in a 'gush'. The agitated Catherine sardonically nettles Edgar: "your veins are full of ice-water but mine are boiling..." Atmospheric phenomena, too, are harnessed to mirror human countenances, gestures, states and looks: A 'cloud' of meditation hangs over Nelly's ruddy face. At times, Catherine's brow is 'clouded' over. Heathcliff's facebrightens a moment when Nelly compares him favourably with Edgar, but then a second later, it was 'overcast afresh'(44). His forehead was shaded over with a heavy cloud and his eyes were 'the clouded windows of hell.'

Daughter of the moors that she was, Emily replenishes her characterization through ample use of animal imagery. Heathcliff, the pivotal anti-hero with his 'basilisk eyes...quenched by sleeplessness' and his 'sharp cannibal teeth' which he 'gnashes', is a 'fierce, pitiless, wolfish man', 'a bird of bad omen', 'an evil beast.' He 'foams like a mad dog' when he torments the 'lamb' of a boy --- Linton. Interestingly enough, Emily uses the wild, ferocious animals to portray passion, anger, fury. Yet she uses all sorts of domestic animals to highlight sadism, satire, weakness or mortification. Edgar Linton, projected as the 'soft' one, as much as a 'cat', possesses the power to leave a 'mouse' half killed or a 'bird' half-eaten. He is a 'lamb' and a 'sucking leveret'. His sister Isabella, the 'pitiful, slavish, mean-minded brach', is among those 'worms', who 'the more they writhe', the more Heathcliff longs to 'crush out their entrails.' On the other hand, Isabella describes her own self as if she were a deer: 'I bounded, leaped and flew down the steep road; then...shot direct across the moor, rolling over banks, and wading through
marshes'. Again, Hareton is an infernal calf who is obstinate as a mule, while Linton is a 'puling chicken' and a 'whelp'. He always 'shrinks' close to the fire like a 'mouse'. He is a poor 'perishing monkey'. Catherine, on the other hand, is a 'cunning little fox', she runs like a 'mouse', yet, she is soft and mild as a dove.

Emily Bronte's imagery oftentimes takes on sexual overtones, although never too ostensibly, Emily is quite inclined to portray Heathcliff as the symbol of potent sexuality, which surfaces usually in contrastive comparison to a lesser sexual being—either a woman like Nelly Dean or else Edgar Linton, the weaker man. Writing as she was in the conservative Victorian society, Emily could not have possibly made explicit Heathcliff's masculine sexuality, hence the veiled insinuations. In the eleventh chapter of the book, one finds the showdown between Heathcliff and Edgar, as the latter comes to know of Heathcliff's intentions to marry his sister. Edgar, determined to shove Heathcliff out of the house, orders his 'instant departure', but Heathcliff only sniggers: "Cathy, this lamb of yours threatens like a bull!" The very appellation 'lamb' signifies weakening and emasculation. Cathy adds fuel to the fire as she slams the door shut, thereby barring and locking out the way of escape. When Edgar attempts to snatch the key out of her hands, she throws it into the fire — again the element which symbolizes Heathcliff and herself. Edgar knocks Heathcliff off-balance and beats a hasty retreat through the front door. But Heathcliff heaves up the poker from the fireplace, breaks the lock down and escapes through the 'innerdoor'. He is the one that breaks through the barriers posed by femininity. He is the masculine force par excellence. Again, as Dorothy Van Ghent suggests, (though in a different context) that barriers are symbolized by windows, too. And here too, Heathcliff is the one who tackles it all. The barriers, symbolized by
windows are somehow stringed up with Cathy, and Heathcliff overcomes it. At the very outset, when the two children invade the premises of Thrushcross Grange, Cathy is kept back, while Heathcliff is ignominiously turned out. Yet, he lurks in the vicinity for a while. Later, he tells Nelly, 'If Catherine had wished to return, I intended shattering their great glass panes to a million of fragments.' The window here, is the barrier between the civilized and the uncivilized, the gentry and the populace. Years later, when Heathcliff re-emerges out of oblivion, he appears on the porch of Thrushcross Grange with his hand on the latch – "as if intending to open for himself". The barrier here again separates himself from Cathy. After Cathy's funeral, Heathcliff returns from the cemetery to find the door barred to him by Hindley and Isabella. After tackling Hindley, who was wielding a curious pistol, Heathcliff breaks open the casement with a stone and enters. One wonders at this incident as there was apparently no one inside the barrier except Isabella. But eighteen years and sixteen chapters later, we find that here too, it was the urge to get to Cathy that had driven him to breaking down yet another barrier. He had been unearthing Cathy's newly-filled grave when he felt her warm breath upon his neck:

"Her presence was with me; it remained while I re-filled the grave, and led me home...having reached the Heights, I rushed eagerly to the door. It was fastened; and I remember that accursed Earnshaw and my wife opposed my entrance. I remember stopping to kick the breath out of him, and then hurrying upstairs to my room, and hers -- I looked round impatiently -- I felt her by me -- I could almost see her..." (220)
Apart from symbolism, Emily Bronte makes good use of some other traits which are definitely very modern. The gothic in Emily’s hands turns into a new mould to create the New Gothic. Emily uses something close to surrealism at times, as the symptomatic expressions of extreme dementia. The disturbed psyche of Cathy finds its way out through surrealistic visions and dreams:

I see in you Nelly...an aged woman -- you have grey hair, and bent shoulders. This bed is fairy cave under Penistone Crag, and you are gathering elf-bolts to hurt our heifers, pretending, while I am near, that they are only locks of wool.]

She dreams fitfully as she sleeps: Nightmares torment her to distraction:

Oh, dear! I thought I was at home... I thought I was lying in my chamber at Wuthering Heights. Because I'm weak, my brain got confused, and I screamed unconsciously... I dread sleeping, my dreams appal me. (96)

The pitiful portrayal of paranoia, enough to move one to tears, becomes almost modernistic on account of its surrealistic overtones. Again, a hint of defamiliarisation
could be discerned in places. A befitting instance could be the event of Lockwood's
terrifying vision of the hand that scrabbles at the window pane, and then gets rubbed and
torn bloodily by the frenzied Lockwood. The spectral hand could as well be a
defamiliarised objective interpretation by Lockwood's sleep-dimmed brain of a branch or
twig brushing and tapping against the window pane on a windy night. All this only adds
to the modernistic effect of Emily's style.

The narrative technique too, with its telescopic lay-out is Conrad-esque in its multiple
perspectives and hence adds to the modernist style, which may be defined as the style of
the 'New Gothic'.

Emily takes up the Gothic genre, maybe not so very consciously but from her insatiable
urge for the mysterious — the 'unheimlich', the unknown, the hidden — a longing she
used to feed during her long, lone walks down the gloomy moors. Her novel, *Wuthering
Heights* on the very first reading, makes the reader shudder with a feeling of horror—
hence the gothic prevails. Yet, it is not the horror roused by the clichéd paraphernalia of
the erstwhile gothic-clanking chains, ghosts, dungeons or dismal ululations. It is horror
stirred solely by the vivid revelation of the nadir of Satanism spurred on by implacable
vengeance. Sure enough, she does give a liberal sprinkling of the normal tools of the
gothic novel. At the very outset — the hand on the window sill, Heathcliff's necrophilia,
Nelly's vision of ghosts walking hand-in-hand on moonlit nights, all vouch for the ur-
gothic. Yet, the real feeling of gothic comes from Heathcliff's savage revenge and other
issues like child-torment, incarceration and so forth. These, again Emily enriches with her
poetic imagery and symbolism. In fact, the horrific process of revenge that is terrifying in
its sadistic vindictiveness, leads on to other issues — issues that are very much modern
in their ramifications, thereby transmuting Emily's use of the gothic into a new genre. Class conflict, sexualism, passion, to name a few -- are the issues that have triggered off many a criticism -- both favorable and otherwise -- in later days. The stormy portrayal of the gothic of passion, with its precocious undercurrent of daring ideas was enough to draw in a fair share of adverse criticism too. The Victorian prudish society, complacently used to Austenesque novels of happy domesticity, castigated Emily's brashness in no ambiguous terms. The January issue of the Atlas, 1848, had a lot to say about the unreined in highlighting of the unchecked passions of hatred, vengeance and spite in the novel:

"Wuthering Heights" is a strange, inartistic story... the general effect is inexpressibly painful. We know nothing in the whole range of our fictious literature which presents such shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity. Jane Eyre is a book which affects the reader to tears; it touches the most hidden sources of emotion. Wuthering Heights casts a gloom over the mind not easily to be dispelled....it is a sprawling story, carrying us with no mitigation of anguish, through two generations of sufferers though one presiding evil genius sheds a grim shadow over the whole and imparts a singleness of malignity to the somewhat disjointed tale. The book wants relief...there is not in the entire dramatis personae a single character, which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible.
The answer to this rather scathing criticism could perhaps be given best by quoting a few remarks from Charlotte Bronte’s own ‘editors’ preface to the new edition of *Wuthering Heights*, brought out in 1850. Charlotte patiently explains away and refutes the accusations of an overuse of gloom and foreboding in the whole novel, which lacks a single good character to brighten it up:

My sister’s disposition was not naturally gregarious; Circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church or take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though her feeling for the people round was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought; ...and yet she knew them, knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest,...hence, it ensued that what her mind had gathered of the real concerning them, was too exclusively confined to those tragic and terrible traits of which, in listening to the secret annals of every rude vicinage, the memory is sometimes compelled to receive the impress. Her imagination, which was a spirit more powerful than sunny, more sombre than sportive, found in such traits material whence it wrought creations like Heathcliff, like Earnshaw, like Catherine..."
As for the novel being chockfull of characters steeped in gloom, the very same prefatory
ex cathedra comment by Charlotte sets all criticism at rest:

Having avowed that over much of “Wuthering Heights” there
broods “a horror of great darkness”, that, in its storm heated and
electrical atmosphere, we seem at times to breathe lightning, let
me point to those spots where clouded daylight and the eclipsed
sun still attest their existence. For a specimen of true
benevolence and homely fidelity, look at the character of Nelly
Dean; for an example of constancy and tenderness, remark that
of Edgar Linton...there is a dry saturnine humour in the
delineation of old Joseph, and some glimpses of grace and gaiety
animate the younger Catherine. Nor is even the first heroine of
the name destitute of a certain strange beauty in her fierceness,
or of honesty in the midst of perverted passion and passionate
perversity.

The January 1848 issue of Douglas Jerrold’s weekly newspaper sums it up pretty well
when it comments on how “In Wuthering Heights the reader is shocked, disgusted,
almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity, and the most diabolical hate and
vengeance....yet, towards the close of the story occurs the pretty, soft picture, which
comes like the rainbow after a storm.”
In fact, one feels obliged to think that the plethora of gothic suggestions bring *Wuthering Heights* quite close to the German sentimental novels penned by Kotzebue, Tieck, Weit Weber, Musaus and Heinse. The January 1848 issue of the *Britannia*, mistaking Emily Bronte’s pseudonym, Ellis Bell to be that of a man, noted the close likeness of the novel with the sentimental tales:

His work is strangely original. It bears a resemblance to some of those irregular German tales in which the writers, giving the reins to their fancy, represent personages as swayed and impelled to evil by supernatural influences. But they give spiritual identity to evil impulses, while Mr. Bell more naturally shows them as the natural offspring of the unregulated heart.

To round off, one must say that after taking all pros and cons into consideration one feels inclined to think that Emily does fill her one and only novel with a variety of horror at times, but never does she let her fiction plunge into the nadir of distasteful abhorrence. Her gothic, serving as the attractive lodestone for a fastidious Victorian reading community, offers a variety of modernistic ideas that were expressive of the revolutionary mind of Emily Bronte.
Chapter – II : Works Cited


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