

**The Gothic Monster and the Cuckold:
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly in *Wuthering Heights***

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*The flock gets a sight of a spot of blood on some chicken
and they all get to peckin' at it see, till they rip the chicken to shreds,
blood and bones and feathers...And a few more gets spots
and gets pecked to death, and more and more. Oh, a peckin' party
can wipe out a whole flock in a matter of a few hours, buddy
(Keseey, Ken *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*).*

Like chickens at a pecking party, early modern audiences flocked to ridicule men who were injured emotionally by unfaithful wives. Husbands were held responsible for ensuring the faithfulness of their wives, and any failure to do so made them objects of scorn and ridicule. Betrayed men, labeled cuckolds, were mocked for being effeminate in public skimmingtons and charivaris, ballads, conduct books, pamphlets, and proverbs. By the Victorian era, however, Gothic writers began challenging the treatment of cuckolds by acting out societal fears and longings through their monster figures.

The notion that a husband can be cuckolded by his wife terrified British citizens, making it a fit topic for Gothic fiction. More and more, unconventional portrayals of cuckolded men began surfacing in works like *Doom of the Griffiths*, *Dracula*, and *The Great God Pan*. One can detect an emerging change in attitude towards cuckoldry disguised in the horrifying features of Gothic's monsters. Because these strange characters seemed so foreign, readers were able to evaluate societal

problems as if they were not their own. Gothic writers began casting the adulteresses and their lovers as the monsters to reassign blame to the true transgressors. Emily Brontë takes a different approach in *Wuthering Heights*. She challenges the societal treatment of cuckolded men by placing an aggressive monster in the emasculating role. Brontë's cuckold pecks back.

Derived from the word cuckoo, the term cuckold was inspired by the bird's habit of laying 'the wrong egg[s] within a strange nest' (Whiting 1968, 603). Countless stories circulated in the seventeenth century about men who became fathers unnaturally soon. The press reported on a 'Buxom Virgin' who gave birth two months after exchanging wedding vows. 'Tom the tailor's wife' produced a child just seven weeks after her nuptials. Paternity was a growing social concern that only became more intense after the 'Warming-Pan Baby Scandal' of 1688. Mary Modena, wife of James II, was accused of smuggling a strange baby into the birthing room in a warming pan (Fissell 2007, 214). Like with the victims of the cuckoo bird, men often nurtured alien offspring planted in their nests. Because of the ongoing societal fascination with cuckoldry, it is little surprise the issue comes home to roost in *Wuthering Heights*. The cultural attitude toward cuckolds may have elicited Brontë's particular notice because of her fascination with birds. She owned four birds including a strange domestic acquisition—a Merlin Hawk named Hero (Frank 1990, 135). Her leisure time was spent copying illustrations from Thomas Bewick's *History of British Birds* with 'remarkable patience and fidelity' (Frank 1990, 89). Brontë remained charmed with birds throughout her life, explaining her impressive insight into feathered creatures and their habits. The issue of cuckoldry, with all of its connections to the cuckoo bird, would not have easily escaped her attention.

Naturally reflecting her hobbies and interests, Brontë's only novel features flocks of birds in imagery and theme. *Wuthering Heights* details the history of the

Earnshaw family after the patriarch invites a strange child, or cuckoo, into his nest. The inhabitants of the home are each, in turn, associated with the species of bird that shares their personality traits. For instance, Catherine Earnshaw's mercurial spirit is emphasized by Lockwood when he concludes, 'she must have been a changeling—wicked little soul' (25)¹. Catherine aptly describes Heathcliff as a 'bird of bad omen' (102). Heathcliff classifies his peevish son Linton as a 'puling chicken' (206), but Linton's gentle mother Isabella is described as having 'dove's eyes—angels' (105). Throughout the novel, the dispositions of characters become illuminated by their comparison with birds of a feather (Craig 1994). It becomes quite significant, then, when Nelly Dean sums up Heathcliff's history by saying 'It's a cuckoo's, sir' (33). Lacking a nurturing instinct, cuckoos avoid the responsibility of parenthood by laying their eggs in other birds' nests. The unknowing adoptive parents hatch and sustain the needs of the alien chick. In time, the baby cuckoo typically grows larger and more aggressive than its foster siblings. The bird eventually usurps the nest by pushing all of its rivals out. Without the competition for resources, the cuckoo then enjoys the exclusive benefits imparted by its custodians (Craig 1994, 157). Compared with such ruthless fowl, Heathcliff indeed promises to be a 'bird of bad omen'.

Heathcliff fulfills the expectations of the comparison so entirely it leaves little doubt that Brontë intended the connection. Like the cuckoo, Heathcliff is transplanted into a nest and raised by adoptive parents. Mr. Earnshaw requires Nelly to care for Heathcliff's needs in the same style as his other children. But when she fails to 'let it sleep with the children', Nelly is 'sent from the house'—making her the first to be cast out of the nest (35). Heathcliff monopolizes Mr. Earnshaw's affection, and his favor furnishes him with special benefits and privileges. He is able to appropriate

¹ Any references to page numbers in *Wuthering Heights* correspond with the 1905 edition published by Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Hindley's colt for himself, to which Hindley responds, 'be damned, you beggarly interloper! And wheedle my father out of all he has, only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan' (37). In time, Heathcliff takes over the nest entirely. Nelly Dean remarks that 'Hareton has been cast out like an unfledged dunnock' (33) when Heathcliff denies him his inheritance by birthright. Like a true cuckoo, Heathcliff eventually arrogates both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange by evicting the natural inhabitants (157-158).

In establishing Heathcliff as a cuckoo, Brontë is necessarily implying he is a cuckold, as well. According to Gordon Williams in his *Dictionary of Sexual Language* (1994), an age-old linguistic connection between the cuckoo and the cuckold has rendered the terms synonymous. The relationship between the words is exemplified in William Fennor's poetry collection of 1612 entitled *Cornu-copiae*,

The kindest men that euer wiu'd,
Whose titles from the Cuckoe are deriu'd,
And thereof Cuckolds named...
A homely bit in secret some digest,
Better then [sic] dainties, when their husbands feast;
Stolne bread is sweet (2-9).

Since before the early seventeenth century, the interchangeable use of the terms was widespread. Written in 1604, Michael Drayton's poem 'The Owl' illustrates the global nature of the association. He writes, 'No nation names the cuckow but in scorn, / And no man hears him, but he feares the Horne...' (Drayton 1876, 65). The understanding is universal. If Heathcliff is a cuckoo, then he is a cuckold as well (Williams 1994, 345).

At first glance, it may seem difficult to align Heathcliff into the role of a husband who is heartbroken by his wife's infidelity. However, the inseparable bond formed between Heathcliff and Catherine during childhood may represent their holy union:

The gothic genre frequently depicts a quasi-incestuous attraction between pseudo siblings, and in several ways that characterize the gothic novel, the early relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is meant to suggest a primitive pseudo marriage, a union of soul mates who do not engage in a sexual relationship but who act and think of themselves as a dyadic, androgynous unit (Hoeveler 1995, 192).

As strong as any marriage tie, the bonds of affection between Heathcliff and Catherine made them inseparable. Heathcliff portrays the union as nothing less than sacrosanct when he says, 'You love me—then what right had you to leave me? What right—answer me—for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it' (160). The attachment established in childhood held the same import and consequence as true wedlock. The broken vows of the pseudo marriage rendered Heathcliff, if only by his own estimation, a very authentic cuckold. By casting Heathcliff in the role of cuckold, Brontë subverts the societal expectations associated with the emasculating position. The Victorian attitude toward cuckoldry was inherited after centuries of use. For generations, cuckoldry was identified as a problem that threatened to destroy the family unit. It was situated as a societal issue of extreme consequence with ballads, pamphlets, conduct books, poems and whole novels dedicated to the topic.

According to legend, cuckolded husbands first appeared during the reign of King John. Every October 18th, the scandalized men were said to assemble at Cuckold's Haven on the bank of the Thames. '[W]ell fitted with a Basket, Pick-Axe

and shovel', the men marched in a parade toward the 'horn fair' in Charlton. Along the route, they repaired the roads so that their wives, alongside lovers, 'may have pleasure and delight in walking to horn fair' (Turner 2002, 83). When the paths of the husbands, wives, and lovers collided, a scuffle would ensue (Foyster 1999, 110-111). At the height of fascination with cuckoldry in the seventeenth century, Cuckold's Haven boasted a flag pole to commemorate the event 'in honour of all the English cuckolds or horn carriers' (Shellinks 1993, 47).

During this time, the term cuckold started being widely employed as society looked toward the family unit as a reflection of national stability. The structure of family life was modelled on the patriarchy of the kingdom. As the head of the family hierarchy, the husband was expected to maintain absolute dominion over domestic concerns (Gowing 1999, 4). A man's household management was judged by the faithfulness of his wife. In turn, a man's ability to govern society was judged by his success or failure in managing his household (Fissell 2007, 214):

Early Modern society was merciless in pillorying men who appeared to have surrendered mastery in this area...The man who was not master in his own house courted the scorn of his male associates well as economic ruin and uncertain paternity. Political thinkers held that the authority relations of the household were a microcosm of the state: disorder in one boded ill for the stability of the other (Tosh 1999, 3).

The infidelity of the wife became a reflection of the husband's overall inability to suppress and control. As a result, failure to prevent an extramarital affair signaled a deficiency in the male that related to both private and public competency.

Cuckolded men were considered victims of their own ineptitude or foolishness. More specific categories for cuckolds evolved, and men were subsequently classified by type (Turner 2002, 91). Despised for allowing women to

do whatever they pleased, weak men who knew of their wives' adultery and did nothing to prevent it were called wittols (Fissell 2007, 215). Bulls, on the other hand, were tempted to abandon their spouses upon hearing of the betrayal. Men who found voyeuristic pleasure in the extramarital affairs were called goats. Perhaps the most scandalous variety of all, pimping cuckolds arranged their wives' sexual trysts for pay (Turner 2002, 91-92). Forced to assume altered social definitions, husbands were held accountable for the infidelity of their wives.

In early modern ballads, the theme of cuckolded men served to both tease and offer guidance to the unwitting victims of adultery. In the ballad 'Rock the Cradle John,' a midwife laughs at a husband who attributes his wife's premature pregnancy to impressive fertility (Fissell 2007, 214). 'Cuckold's Haven' reveals the anxiety associated with the husband's impossible task of guaranteeing his wife's fidelity (Fissell 2007, 216):

Let euery man thai keeps a Bride
take heed hee bee not hornify'd.
Though narrowly I doe watch,
and vse Lock, Bolt, and Latch...
What euer I doe say,
she will haue her owne way
she scorneth to obey² (273).

After the English Civil War, cuckoldry was viewed as an inevitable consequence of female sexuality. For instance, 'The Catalogue of Contented Cuckolds' depicts a group of men who understand that 'the best of us all/ Cannot be our Wives Keepers,

² 'Cuckold's Haven.' 1638. *Rocksburghe Ballads*. i. 46, 47. London: M.P. for Francis Grove

they are subject to Fall' (67). The condition is considered widespread in 'The London Cuckold', which notes 'how many daily flourish, that are of the horned crew' (Fissell 2007, 218). Cuckoldry became a topic of keen interest in public discourse, as cuckolded husbands struggled to come to terms with their new social definition.

Conduct books and pamphlets began circulating which detailed the ways to avoid infidelity and warned about cuckoldry's harmful effects. Juan Luis Vive's 'The Instruction of a Christian Woman' advises females to 'make thy soul gay with virtue, and he shall kiss thee for thy beauty.' Vive discouraged husbands from allowing their wives to wear makeup, warning that such adornments attracted lovers (Henderson and McManus 1985, 60). A pamphlet called 'The Schoolhouse of Women' by Edward Gosynhill details the social effect of being called a cuckold, describing it as the harshest of insults:

And be he never so fearful to fray³,
So stark a coward, yet will he rage
And draw his knife, even straightaway;
But he never so far in age
Call him once Cuckold and his courage
Forthwith will kindle and force him strike
Worse than ye named him heretic.
(Henderson and McManus 1985, 147)

The pamphleteer goes on to caution that a man who was cuckolded became the punch line of jokes, was thought handicapped by inferior sexual prowess, and was even considered unfit to hold public office (Henderson and McManus 1985, 59). Discussion of female conduct and cuckoldry dominated what has been described as 'the pamphlet war' of the sixteenth century.

³ 'To quarrel or fight' as translated by Katherine U. Henderson and Barbara F. McManus.

By the Victorian era, the chastity of women only became more crucial in the minds of English citizens. According to Esme Wingfield Stratford, in her book *The Victorian Cycle* (2005), 'there was never a time when the home had played such an important part in the social system' (158). With the success of capitalism in the Industrial Revolution, women were left to preserve the integrity of the home while men sought employment without. As a result, the 'Angel in the House' ideal emerged, in which women were prized for being expert home-makers, infinitely selfless, emotionally sensitive, and devoid of sexual desire (Ingham 1996, 23). Sexuality, esteemed as the exclusive property of husband and wife, became banned from public discussion:

Victorians were careful to invest the marriage chamber with a taboo of absolute secrecy. Gone was the time when the bridal bed had been covered with flowers, and the guests had escorted the happy pair in triumph thither. That room was now the Holy of Holies in the vast temple of middle class domesticity (Stratford 2005, 157).

Sexual expectations evolved to accommodate the needs of the changing society. During the Renaissance, the virtuousness of females was regarded as a feat of disciplined restraint. The Victorian woman, however, was advertised as lacking even the impetus for sexual desire (Ingham 1996, 23). Because women were considered asexual, they were held responsible for acts of adultery. Divorce was nearly impossible, and infidelity was treasonous (Henderson 1985, 59). Either course led to social ruin.

Though cuckolded men could now expect their wives to share culpability in domestic strife, they had greater expectations for appearing masculine than ever before. Male roles, like female, had to adapt to compliment their new station outside of the home. Men were still expected to maintain exacting control over their

households, but now they must do it from afar. Masculinity needed to answer the obligations of the capitalist marketplace. Victorian men were required to be aggressive, self-interested, fiercely competitive, and endowed with overwhelming sexual thirsts (Ingham 1996, 20). More than ever before, society wanted its men to be men.

Throughout the social upheaval of the Industrial Revolution, cuckolds remained the target of jokes and disparaging remarks. Victorian men were expected to laugh at themselves, alongside society, when they had been cuckolded. Demonstrating this stress on humor, the proverb ‘a malcontented cuckold has no wit’ was a favorite during the Victorian period (Tilley 1950, 883). The social disgrace of cuckoldry is highlighted by the practice of holding skimmingtons and charivaris. In these public displays of ridicule, victims of infidelity were impersonated by their spouses in processions through the streets (Fissell 2007, 215). Husbands who had been cuckolded by unfaithful wives were ridiculed for being effeminate and weak by the very women who had betrayed them.

Challenging these unfair social practices, Gothic writers started incorporating the theme of cuckoldry in their work. Disguised as a characteristic of the monster, audiences were able to evaluate a problem as if it were not their own. Because the confrontation is veiled by ‘the seemingly unreal, the alien, the ancient, the grotesque’ (Hogle 2008, 6), Gothic writers were able to subtly cast doubt on cuckoldry. According to Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, authors ‘abject’ or throw off inconsistencies that prevent individuals from forming coherent identities (1982, 4). She explains that these ‘dark revolts’ are ‘directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable’ (1). It is through its vampires, ghosts, and monsters that Gothic reveals the problems of the common man.

In the Gothic novel *Doom of the Griffiths*, Elizabeth Gaskell portrays a patriarchal line that is destroyed by a preoccupation with cuckoldry rather than salvaged by it. Owen Griffiths secretly marries and has a child with Nest, ‘a fine woman without her reputation’ (2000, 116). When the family patriarch, Squire Griffiths, discovers the secret he questions paternity: ‘poor, weak fool that you are, hugging the child of another as if it were your own offspring’ (2000, 123). The squire throws the baby at his mother, killing him. The ghost of the child urges Owen to murder his father, thus fulfilling a prophecy to end the patriarchal line. Because of the patriarch’s fear of cuckoldry, the family is destroyed and a ‘Saxon stranger holds the lands of the Griffiths’ (391). *Doom of the Griffiths* reflects the cultural fear that unfaithful wives will undermine, and thus annihilate, the structure of society. In the end, it is not cuckoldry that destroys the family, however, but the societal fear of it.

Other Gothic novelists challenged the role of the cuckold by having their monsters play out the roles of adulterous wife and lover. Just like the linguistic connection between the words cuckold and cuckoo, Williams’ *Dictionary of Sexual Language*, likewise outlines an association between the words cuckold and monster that has been recognised since the sixteenth century. Because the cuckold is said to be ‘horned,’ the term has been linked with abominations, time and again. Written in 1607, a husband in ‘Dumb Knight’ is told he has become ‘cornuted, A creature uncreate in paradise, And one that’s only of a woman’s making’ (1994, 173). The connection is exemplified in ‘Northward Ho’ when a character asks, ‘Not of gods making? What is he? A Cuckold?’ (18). Gothic writers capitalized on this allusion by exploring the theme of cuckoldry through their monster.

Written in the *fin de siècle* of decadence, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* features a ruthless monster and cuckold-maker in its title character. Dracula seduces Jonathan Harker’s demure fiancée, Mina Murray. In an overtly sexual allusion, Mina drinks

Dracula's blood and becomes telepathically connected with him. Because Dracula can only bite a willing victim, Mina's transformation into a vampire is nothing less than a chaste woman becoming a fallen woman. Like the lovers of adulteress wives, Dracula explains that he is able to destroy men by tempting their women: 'Your girls that you all love are mine already; and through them you and others shall yet be mine' (1995, 486). By making an evil creature a cuckold-maker, the blame for cuckoldry is assigned to the lover instead of the husband.

Jerrold Hogle calls the 'criminalization and deifying [of] women' characteristic of the Gothic genre, which is represented by the 'Gothic antiheroine and the dead/undead Gothic mother' (2008, 4). Mina's transformation into a fallen woman coincides with her becoming a seductress men are powerless to resist. Vulnerable to her wiles, the men see no other choice but to destroy the fallen woman that threatens their very existence. The fear and intolerance displayed by the men parallels the societal desire to extinguish the female sex drive. Still more dangerous, the three insatiable brides of Dracula are rendered deadly from their lust. Through these 'femme fatales,' or dangerous women, the Victorian anxiety over female sexuality is revealed. Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* features a female monster so powerful she drives men to suicide rather than murder. Helen Vaughan becomes a particularly potent vixen as a daughter of the god Pan, who is famous for his considerable sexual prowess. As Pan's offspring, Helen represents the ungovernable nature of female sexuality. Characterized as a monster of 'deceit,' 'cruelty,' and 'lust' (1895, 308), she shares the exact attributes of adulteress women. Helen is eventually sent away, and is 'now with her companions' in the grave. By making the adulteress a monster, Machen assigns the culpability for female adultery not to the cuckold but the wife.

In Victorian Gothic we see the fears and longings of society disguised in both male and female monster figures. Though cuckolds were objects of scorn and ridicule in the early modern period, Victorian Gothic writers began to challenge the societal treatment of cuckolds. In *Doom of the Griffiths*, *Dracula*, and *The Great God Pan*, adulteresses and their lovers are cast in the role of the monster in order to show the ruthlessness of their acts and cast doubt on their innocence. In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë takes a different approach by disguising her monster in the seemingly human form of the cuckolded villain Heathcliff. Throughout *Wuthering Heights*, characters are related to sheep and Heathcliff to ‘an evil beast [who prowls] between it and the fold, waiting his time to spring and destroy’ (106). It may be the characters in *Wuthering Heights*, however, who do the most to cast doubt on Heathcliff’s humanity. After marrying Heathcliff, Isabella Linton struggles to identify him asking, ‘Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? I shan’t tell my reasons for making this inquiry; but I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married’ (135). Later she calls Heathcliff a monster directly when she says, ‘He’s a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being’ (151). Remarkably, even Catherine Earnshaw, Heathcliff’s greatest friend and love, levels this accusation stating, ‘Monster! Would that he could be blotted out of creation, and out of my memory’ (134). When Nelly Dean tries to defend Heathcliff, Catherine reiterates, ‘He’s not a human being’ (170). Despite Nelly’s public defense of Heathcliff, her private observations are revealing when she remarks, ‘I did not feel I were in the company of a creature of my own species’ (160). Later, Nelly draws a direct comparison between Heathcliff and creatures of Gothic when she reflects:

‘Is he a ghoul or a vampire?’ I mused. I had read of such hideous incarnate demons. And then I set myself to reflect how I had tended him in infancy, and watched him grow to youth, and followed him almost through this whole course, and what absurd nonsense it was to yield to that sense of horror. ‘But

where did he come from, the little dark thing, harboured by a good man to his bane?' Muttered Superstition, as I dozed into unconsciousness (325).

From the beginning of the novel to the end, Heathcliff is referenced by descriptors like 'savage,' (89) 'repulsive,' (12) 'wicked,' (48) 'an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation,' 'a fierce, pitiless wolfish man,' (101) and a 'black villain' (110). In the moment Heathcliff discovers Catherine's death, Brontë compares Heathcliff to the Gothic monster as it is being attacked by society, writing that he 'howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast goaded to death by knives and spears' (166). The evidence is overwhelming that even though Heathcliff is a cuckold, he is a terrifying Gothic monster, as well.

In Heathcliff, Brontë challenges the societal treatment of cuckolded men by creating a character who is a fiercely masculine, powerful, even frightfully aggressive cuckold. While cuckolds were traditionally thought to be dominated by their wives, weak, and ineffectual, Heathcliff is the epitome of masculine strength and resolve. Even as a cuckold, Heathcliff manages to become an extraordinary example of the Victorian ideal prescribed for the new male role. Fiercely aggressive, self-interested, and competitive, Heathcliff is endowed with the requisite traits for success in the capitalist marketplace. As the novel develops, he quite literally becomes a financial success as evidenced by Nelly Dean's exclamation, 'Rich, Sir! He has nobody knows what money and every year it increases. Yes, yes; he's rich enough to live in a finer house than this' (31). So perfectly conforming to the masculine ideal, Heathcliff becomes an archetypical Victorian male:

Heathcliff classifies as predominantly masculine due to his self-reliance, defense of his own beliefs, independence, athleticism, assertiveness, strength of personality, forcefulness, willingness to take risks, decision making

abilities, self-sufficiency, dominance...aggression, competitiveness, and ambition. He displays few if any feminine characteristics (Lane 1999, 201).

All of Heathcliff's qualities suggest an abundance of testosterone. In an essay discussing gender in Victorian literature, Marilyn Rose Lane writes that Heathcliff represents the 'grotesque hyper-masculine gender-typed personality which reflects stereotypically the worst of masculinity' (1999, 207). In effect, Heathcliff is a man's man.

Heathcliff's manliness is only underscored by the way he rules his home. By becoming the head of the Wuthering Heights estate, Heathcliff acts as the instrument of patriarchal control in the domestic sphere. Under Heathcliff's management, the house is entirely lacking in the comforts furnished by the Victorian 'Angel of the House.' Lockwood describes a utilitarian interior decorated with furniture that 'would have been nothing extraordinary as belonging to a homely, northern farmer' (10). He observed 'no signs of roasting, boiling, or baking about the huge fireplace, nor any glitter of copper saucepans and tin cullenders on the walls' (10). Anything traditionally domestic was described in terms of being annexed:

One step brought up into the family sitting-room, without any introductory lobby or passage. They call it here 'the house' pre-eminently. It includes kitchen and parlour generally. But, I believe, at Wuthering Heights the kitchen is forced to retreat altogether into another quarter— at least I distinguished a chatter of tongues and a clatter of culinary utensils deep within (10).

Any vestige of femininity is buried deep within the house if present at all. Lockwood is able to outline, instead, the masculine tropes evident before his eyes. The chimney was laden with 'sundry villainous old guns and a couple of horse pistols' and other

‘primitive structures’ (10). The house is quite literally stamped with the date ‘1500,’ a time when men ruled the home. Heathcliff’s regime is a representation of the patriarchal structure of the domestic sphere in action.

The strength and power of this masculine position is reinforced by both his appearance and manner. Accordingly, Heathcliff possesses the hulking figure of a veritable he-man. Juxtaposed next to Edgar Linton’s effeminate form, Heathcliff’s large stature becomes exaggerated. Nelly notes the difference between the two, saying ‘...Edgar Linton shall look quite a doll beside you; and that he does. You are younger, and yet, I’ll be bound, you are taller and twice as broad across the shoulders. You could knock him down in a twinkling’ (54). As an adult, Nelly again remarks on the contrast between Heathcliff and her effeminate master: ‘Heathcliff...had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man, beside whom my master seemed quite slender and youth-like’ (94). Tall, powerful, and athletic, Heathcliff commands the body of the perfect Victorian he-man.

It is his remarkable stoicism and self-sufficiency, however, that establishes Heathcliff as adequately tough enough to satisfy the masculine role. Nelly learns of Heathcliff’s tenacious, independent demeanor when nursing him through a childhood illness. Though he was an undemanding patient, Nelly clarifies that ‘...hardness, not gentleness, made him give little trouble.’ Heathcliff exhibited the same quiet strength even when he suffered from intentional wrongs. When pained by a stealthy blow or pinch, Heathcliff would ‘without winking or shedding a tear...draw in a breath and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident and nobody was to blame’ (36). Through his patriarchal station, impressive stature, and hardy disposition, Heathcliff emerges as an ideal Victorian male. He stands in stark contrast with the effeminate image of cuckolds depicted by society. Heathcliff is masculine in the extreme.

Strong, dominant, and independent, Heathcliff is a cuckold who refuses to be emasculated.

Further distinguishing himself from the typical cuckolded, Heathcliff does not passively accept convention or laugh along with society at his injuries. Instead, he brings the entire world down around its ears when he is wronged by Catherine. He rebels against the standards he disagrees with, promising Catherine that he will exact revenge. In a speech for all cuckolded men, Heathcliff says:

I want you to be aware that I *know* you have treated me infernally— infernally! Do you hear? And if you flatter yourself that I don't perceive it, you are a fool; and if you think I can be consoled by sweet words, you are an idiot; and if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary in a very little while (111).

Though cuckolds were assigned blame for the adultery of their wives, Heathcliff bitterly confronts his lover in an address that rightfully places blame squarely on the adulterer's shoulders. Furthermore, Heathcliff assures his disloyal partner that he will not let the betrayal go without likewise inflicting injury on those who have hurt him. For Heathcliff, this means injuring the society that has thwarted and insulted him. In order to level revenge on the tyrants who tried to demoralize him, Heathcliff targets the children of his oppressors. Just as the 'tyrant grinds down his slaves,' Heathcliff explains, 'they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath him' (111).

The characters populating *Wuthering Heights* represent society, for Heathcliff, through setting standards and passing judgments. By gaining control of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, he takes possession of society and makes it his own dominion:

The guest was now the master of Wuthering Heights. He held firm possession, and proved it to the attorney— who, in his own turn, proved it to

Mr. Linton—that Earnshaw had mortgaged every yard of land he owned for cash to supply his mania for gaming; and he, Heathcliff was the mortgagee. In that manner Hareton, who should now be the first gentleman in the neighborhood, was reduced to a state of complete dependence on his father's inveterate enemy, and lives in his own house as a servant, deprived of wages, quite unable to right himself, because of his friendlessness and his ignorance that he has been wronged (187).

Heathcliff usurps control of *Wuthering Heights*, thus succeeding in overturning the roles of the powerful and the weak. Nelly notes the change in social stations in Heathcliff and Isabella Linton when she remarks, 'So much had circumstances altered their positions, that he would certainly have struck a stranger as a born and bred gentleman, and his wife as a thorough little slattern' (146). With the old order annihilated, Heathcliff rises to power and gets to call the shots. Acting as a cuckold, Heathcliff has confronted society and taken control back for those who have been declared feeble and ineffectual.

In a poem entitled 'Honour's Martyr' published with *Wuthering Heights*, another example of Brontë fictionalizing social revolution by use of aggressive opposition emerges:

The dark deeds of my outlawed race
Will then like virtues shine;
And men will pardon their disgrace,
Beside the guilt of mine.

For, who forgives the accursed crime
Of dastard treachery?
Rebellion, in its chosen time
May freedom's champion be;

Revenge may stain a righteous sword—
It may be just to slay;
But, traitor, traitor!—from *that* word
All true beasts shrink away ('Poems' 1905, 92).

Writing of an ‘outlawed race’ of men who oppose societal norms and work as champions of freedom, Brontë suggests that outsiders like Heathcliff aren’t the ‘true beasts’ after all. Instead, the villain is the society that upholds unfair biases. Through her writing, Brontë wields what she calls a ‘righteous sword’ in order to bring justice to cuckolded men.

In casting Heathcliff as both a cuckold and a monster in *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë plays out a metaphorical rebellion against the gender rules imposed by Victorian social standards. Not only does Heathcliff refuse to conform to societal expectations, he also influences and changes those ideas by seizing a position of power. The weak, Brontë seems to suggest, can become powerful and influence—or even defeat—society’s strong:

Brontë shows that- helpless as we are to stop longing for a corrective transformation of our present circumstances- those circumstances determine the very nature of the ideal. The oppressions of society not only compromise our present, they condition the dreams of its reversal and defeat...Brontë sees that all these versions of personal and social desire are the shapes of their own repression’ (Matthews 1985, 54).

By comparing Heathcliff with a cuckoo, Brontë levels her own attack on the prejudices assigned to gender in Victorian society. She subverts the expectations for cuckoldry by making her cuckold strong, virile, and powerful. Despite the societal tendency to punish the husband for the wife’s infidelity, Heathcliff and Catherine are affected equally by the betrayal. Both characters are, in turn, obliterated as a consequence of Heathcliff’s cuckoldry. What’s more, blame for the adultery is appropriately assigned to the adulterous female. By the end of Brontë’s novel, what was good for the adulterous goose became good for the gander.

Through studying the fictional creatures of the Gothic, we are able to observe the societal moods that governed the Victorian period. Though cuckolds continued to suffer from gender expectations into the twentieth century, we can detect an emerging change in attitude hidden in the features of Gothic's strange abominations. The best and worst of Victorian society are reflected in the actions of these monsters. Representing society, Gothic monsters like Heathcliff are the good, the bad, and certainly the ugly in us all.

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