

## **Othering the Outsider**

### **Monsterring Abject Bodies in *Wuthering Heights***

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#### **Abstract**

The gothic villain functions as a reminder of social groups that exist on the margins of society, whom, to many observers, are viewed as the ‘graphic smear’ or the ‘Other’, a distortion that interrupts the normative progression of the homogenous space. Its position as the literary antihero instructs its audience on how societal and cultural norms force a deprecated identity, whether it be the ethnic, gendered or foreign Other, to be seen only as an ambiguous disturbance to the status quo. A universal preoccupation with labelling the Other as monster has engendered a plethora of inconsistent meanings of the term. The monster can be seen to act as a metaphor for those who transcend the limits of acceptable behaviour, and subsequently become identified as ‘abnormal’, victimised by inflexible expectations and intolerant stereotypes. Essentially, this essay will contribute to existing studies of Heathcliff as the *Unheimlich* monster, but it will also investigate his role as the human monster, and probe what that meant for the development of the Gothic genre. Building on an analysis of Brontë’s well-established Gothic villain, this analysis will also deconstruct traditional monstrous identities, and reconstruct new interpretations of what we consider evil or ‘Other’. Through use of the anamorphic lens, or as Lyle Massey calls it ‘distorted perspective’, Heathcliff is no longer excluded to the margins but is transformed within the contemporary literary sphere. Anamorphosis reveals the need for dual perspectives, highlighting previously ignored insights concerning distorted identities. Its value stems from its ability to deconstruct the error of the first depicted image, and shows the need for multi-perspectival approaches as the Gothic genre develops. For Heathcliff, this allows him to be reborn and to balance on the binary of villain and victim.

#### **Keywords**

Uncanny, the Abject, *Wuthering Heights*, the Dichotomy of Self and Other, Anamorphosis

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*'from the very beginning, he had bred bad feeling in the house' (Brontë, 1847)*

### **Introduction**

Where scholarly discourse has depicted the character Heathcliff as the racialised Other in Emily Brontë's illustration of 19th Century England, his function in *Wuthering Heights* transcends evoking just a 'bad feeling' in the reader. His very presence challenges how we define human nature, where social categories become insignificant in an evolving climate. Heathcliff being presented as monster illustrates a symbolic expression of cultural unease that pervades a society, and a fear that shapes the collective behaviour of the ruling class. It is the indeterminate nature of his being that designates him a disruptive force in the text, where outside the parameters of society his fate as 'monster' and 'Other' is sealed. He is set up as "a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being" (Brontë 1847, 179). Heathcliff functions as the 'outsider' or 'monster' due to his representation as the unidentified intruder within the familiar domestic space. Embodying both human and inhuman qualities at the same time, he becomes a manifestation of our fear of hybrid identities that refuse participation in the natural order. He is the half-civilised Other

that illustrates debates concerning fear of the unknown racial Other and serves as a complicated image of ethnic otherness, the incarnation of 'foreignness' in the eyes of the native British.

The Gothic as part of *Wuthering Heights* can be seen to be the "internalisation of that which is supposed to be foreign to thought" (Cottom 2003, 1067). Reflecting the menace of alien identities that threaten the dominant social order, Brontë's novel subverts preconditioned understandings of cultural difference and challenges rigid categorisations of the racial 'Other'. Attributing Heathcliff with foreign features, the novel marks him as the ethnic outcast, disallowed entry into the homogeneous space of British tradition. Heathcliff as the Gothic figure fits into recent studies on monsters that present them as telling products of their time and "embodying the anxieties and exhilarations of the moment in which they are born, they are ciphers for the culture, misshapen blank slates who tell us everything about their world while revealing next to nothing about themselves" (O'Connor 2000, 212). Due to the exclusory politics performed against him, Heathcliff is refused an identity and firmly positioned on the fringe of society, where he must exist as the foreign monster. He is essentially the deviant Other, a body whose radical aberrations work to reveal the limits of what is considered as acceptably human. From his decentralised position in society, Heathcliff can draw other characters, as well as the reader, away from a homogenous way of thinking. He is constantly on the border of structures and categories, diluting and blurring the lines of power. His place in the narrative serves as a representation of the disorderly aspects of human nature and the potential for a 'wuthering' taking place within the Self. The twofold nature of good and evil is diluted by Heathcliff's position as tortured villain, damaged by a childhood of discrimination and familial neglect. His position as victim of racial othering both subverts and undermines the notions of innocence, redefining locations of moral legibility.

### **The Absence of Heathcliff**

Human nature continually seeks methods to solve problems in the semiotic field, such as optical and linguistic complexities present in the unknown 'Other'. The predisposition to categorise and define is what results in the Other being shrouded in darkness, lacking in both understanding and identity, because representation has been imposed on the subject. As Punday suggests "the monster is an entity created precisely by suppressing agency" (Punday 2002, 817). Forced to the margins and denied a narrative voice, Heathcliff becomes the deprecated subaltern whose identity is constructed solely by his superiors. Fulfilling any classification assigned to Heathcliff, such as 'demon' or 'monster', he acts as such for the rest of the novel so as to acquire some form of agency within *Wuthering Heights*. As a result of stereotypical characterisations in the novel, the reader's movements and thoughts become robotic because they are conditioned to act and think the way of the universal body. Daniel Punday delineates that "all human beings are "cyborgs" existing within and constructed by many different information circuits" (Punday 2002, 803). We are informed by these 'different information circuits' to become inordinately subservient to traditional tropes, continually relying upon these familiar recognitions. Heathcliff exists outside these circuits, and can no longer be recognised as human for living peripherally to the norm. Hence, the aversion to Heathcliff and the need to marginalise his being is consequent of "a general impulse to ignore someone disagreeable by averting one's eyes" (Sonstroem 1971, 52).

The familiar modes of representation, such as origin and name, that are absent in Heathcliff reduce him to an unknown alien presence. He becomes the personification of a 'tabula rasa', the blank slate on to which insecurities surrounding unfamiliar identities are imprinted. Heathcliff is designed as the faceless Other who encompasses uncertain origin and disconnection with the domestic space. In an attempt to construct an identity for Heathcliff, Nelly can only imagine foreign correlations to describe his birth:

‘Who knows’, says Nelly to Heathcliff, ‘but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week’s income, *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* together? ... Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppression of a little farmer!’ (Brontë 1847, 67)

We are never authorised entry into his mind and must rely upon the prejudiced perspectives of other characters. David Sonstroem states that none of the doors to understanding “opens wide enough to let the whole Heathcliff through” (Sonstroem 1971, 56). Knowledge of his motivations and ambitions are never allowed to fully surface. The refusal to accept Heathcliff’s abject thoughts and the desire to remain ignorant of his transgressive attitudes are exemplified by Isabella Linton’s marriage to Heathcliff. She separates entirely from her husband and prohibits both the physical door and the metaphorical door to understanding Heathcliff from remaining open stating “let the door remain shut and be quiet” (Brontë 1847, 208). It is in this action of forcibly excluding Heathcliff from the domestic space, there is emphasis placed on humanity’s tendency to overlook any sympathetic consideration of the cultural Other. An accurate reading of the Other is therefore sacrificed so as to ensure the door to alterity will ‘remain shut’. As a result, the reader is disallowed from seeing any personal growth in Heathcliff’s character. Barbara Munsen Goff outlines that Heathcliff is “not very complicated psychologically and does not ‘develop’ at all” (Goff 1984, 483). He becomes the ‘unnameable monster’ where endeavours to penetrate beyond his otherness proves futile. Due to monocular vision, Heathcliff’s form has been inadequately represented to the point that he becomes unrecognisable, and is projected far outside the reaches of the normative self.

The general failure to understand Heathcliff, as well as other characters in the text, is referred to by Sonstroem as the ‘nowt’-device in the perceptual field. In *Wuthering Heights* the belligerent Joseph calls everyone a ‘nowt’, a nothing, denying everyone a place in society, as well as an identity (Sonstroem 1971, 51).

Heathcliff's inaccessible identity refuses categorisation, making him a corrosive force that parallels the decaying house. The broken down walls of Heathcliff's dwelling are suggestive of the unstable boundaries and binaries within the text. Brontë emphasises this decay through the descriptions of the home "when beneath its walls, I perceived decay had made progress, even in seven months – many a window showed black gaps deprived of glass; and slates juttèd off" (Brontë 1847, 394). Consequent of the malfunction in identifying Heathcliff, he is dehumanised to the point that he, in turn, cannot distinguish any humanity existing within the self. Representing an invasion of both ambiguity and the uncanny, Heathcliff is essentially an 'out-and-outer' where Lockwood even mentions how he "did not feel as if [he] were in the company of a creature of [his] own species" (Brontë 1847, 191). Brontë constructs her infamous antagonist upon the foundations of misplaced information and vacant perspectives. The incongruity of his character can be placed at the heart of our fear of the unfamiliar and unknown Other. However, where his rebellion against definition may be interpreted as monstrous, his ability to transgress reductive categorisation allows conservative perspectives to be challenged. In similar ways to the literary monster, Heathcliff manifests "confusion about what might constitute the boundaries of human society and the limits of acceptable human being" (Wright 2013, 15). More than being seen as inhuman, Heathcliff is also uncontainable and attacks all endeavours to name and categorise him. He effectively complicates our fixated efforts to reduce the Other to a non-identity and to ignore its profound alterity. By infiltrating the domestic space, Heathcliff problematises society's attempt to disregard the foreign Other and all that he/she represents. His lack of second, or family name, is an ongoing index of the inability of society to domesticate and categorise him. He essentially embodies the forces of Gothic fiction that disrupt civilised society, the symbolic monster that threatens the fabric of patriarchal society that has excluded him.

### **The Connection Between Monster and Other**

Heathcliff's bodily transformation in the text is made to serve a political rhetoric designed by Brontë, an indication of the political problems to be remedied. In doing so, his character reveals the limitations of our ways of ordering the world and the insufficiency of traditional categories in attempting to define subjects of alterity. Daniel Punday reveals that interest in monstrous or othered identities and their associated curiosities "reflect an attempt to come to terms with epistemological questions" (Punday 2002, 806). The fundamental debate challenged by *Wuthering Heights* is why we choose to monster the unknown and exclude the cultural Other. Heathcliff as the cultural Other addresses the socio-limitations of cultural difference. Paul Goetsch states that the monster "dwells at the gates of difference" and polices the border between inside and outside, known and unknown (Goetsch 2002, 17-18). Therefore, monstrous bodies, such as Heathcliff, symbolise the strangeness of the Other, and help to structure the self and the group the self belongs to. Accordingly, they draw boundaries between us and them, between 'I' and 'not I'. Heathcliff is confined to monocular vision attributed to race where his introduction to the reader as being "a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and in manners" (Brontë 1847, 6) The gaps in Brontë's explanation of Heathcliff are filled by prejudiced perspectives concerning the object, focusing the viewer's attention on him as the outsider. He exists always at the threshold, as an in-between identity, remaining forever an ambiguous construct that proves difficult to understand. This positions him as manifestly different from all other characters in the text where "not a soul knew to whom it [Heathcliff] belonged" (Brontë 1847, 43). Heathcliff serves as a cautionary sign that informs the reader of a change in the architecture of class and status. The significance of the Gothic within the Victorian era was how it became a platform for resistance, and a stage to perform subversive narratives. Chris Baldick explains the purpose of the abject identities, in this case Heathcliff, was to reveal "the results of vice, folly, and unreason, as a warning ... to erring

humanity” (Baldick 1991, 256). Heathcliff’s indistinguishable origin and race makes him an unquestionable source of ambiguity and danger. With Heathcliff being defined as an aporia, as a definitively unknowable being, Brontë contests established assumptions concerning the complexities of human nature.

The narrative of Heathcliff’s identity can be taken apart to expose the aspects of humanity we attempt to suppress. The narrator Nelly Dean is the first to label Heathcliff as ‘Monster!’ and wishes that “he could be blotted out of creation and out of memory” (Brontë 1847, 204). There is an obscure void surrounding forbidden perspectives where society chooses to remain in the dark, ignoring the repressed desires of the unconscious. Within *Wuthering Heights* this metaphorical darkness is accentuated by the darkness that pervades the text where there:

was no moon, and every thing beneath lay in misty darkness; not a light gleamed from any of the house, far or near; all had been extinguished long ago; and those at *Wuthering Heights* were never visible. (Brontë 1847, 148)

With the fear of delving too deep into the unconscious, there is a predilection to ignore the darker elements of life. This extinguished thought therefore denies authentic identities to be realised and results in Brontë’s characters never being fully ‘visible’ in the text. As Heathcliff acknowledges “You’ll neither see nor hear anything to frighten you, if you refrain from prying” (Brontë 1847, 384). Therefore, we determine not to interfere into the unknown or unfamiliar, preventing self-recognition in the process of protecting our minds from the oppressed psyche. Maria Beville determines that personalities who have been attached to the semiotics of monstrosity, are confined to such, because they are “frequently acknowledged as indefinable, remain[ing] indefinitely within the cultural spheres of the ‘repressed’” (Beville 2014, 1). Heathcliff shatters the divide between the conscious and unconscious self, externalising abject thought and illicit behaviour. Heathcliff serves as an admonition of the darker aspects of the human mind, representing all that is forcibly inhibited. He becomes an emblem of untamed otherness, representing internally and externally all that is subjugated by the dominant class.



### **The Contagious Nature of the Abject**

Upon the margins of traditional behaviour, Heathcliff transports others to the outskirts of the norm, manipulating his relationships to destabilise class definitions. In the case of Catherine, it is after she falls in love with Heathcliff's untamed quality that she abandons "the elegancies, and comforts, and friends of her former home, to fix contentedly, in such a wilderness as this" (Brontë 1847, 177). It is Heathcliff's presence at Wuthering Heights that allows others to challenge their given role. His arrival at the Heights is to divide Catherine from her father's governance, reconstituting her as 'a wild, wick slip' who transgresses Earnshaw's will and repudiates her own role as the quiescent daughter of patriarchy. According to Steven Vine, Heathcliff "metaphorises Catherine's otherness to the patriarchal world of the Heights-and Catherine 'is' Heathcliff insofar as he images her own eccentricity to that world" (Vine 1994, 345). Catherine as the unusual feminine is an othering presence due to her challenging stature towards patriarchal structures. In their different trajectories, both Heathcliff and Catherine move from a position of deviant subordination to socially dominant positions, thus interfering with the prevalent stable hierarchy. Catherine's statement that Heathcliff is 'more myself than I am' can be seen as a collapse in the barrier between Self and Other, as well as another example of how the monster is not just an external force but in fact lives within us. Catherine and Heathcliff encompass a love that denies difference and the binaries that force them apart. They share an intrinsic bond that stretches as far as Catherine admitting she is Heathcliff. She does not say 'I love Heathcliff', but "I am Heathcliff" (Brontë 1847, 96). Catherine's intricate connection to Heathcliff stems from her own feeling of isolation within the household unit of Thrushcross Grange and her marriage to Edgar. She reflects on her difference to Edgar saying "whatever our souls are made of, Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightening, or frost from fire" (Brontë 1847). Catherine sees herself only in a

position of alterity stating “My God! Does he know how I’m altered” (Brontë 1847, 142). Her estrangement from the social structures that constrain her does not propel her toward insurrection but toward illness. In her disorientated state, she becomes incapable of recognising her own face in the mirror. In contradiction to Lacan’s ‘Mirror Phase’, Catherine’s recognition of herself in the mirror fragments her being rather than finding unity in the moment of seeing one’s reflection. Only when alongside Heathcliff can Catherine surpass the regulatory ideal, including the rules that clearly define and separate man and woman. However, as soon as Catherine inhabits Thrushcross Grange, she loses her source of transgressive power in Heathcliff and falls from female autonomy into conformist femininity.

### **Transgressing Normalcy**

Much of the recently analytical attention to Heathcliff dwells on his oppositional stance and moral dissidence, figuring him as “a form of protest against the bourgeois capitalist forces of Thrushcross Grange” (Vine 1994, 342). Even though Heathcliff achieves the same social standing as his fellow counterparts, he never succumbs to the behaviourism or mannerisms of the elitist class. His disposition remains a rebellious one throughout the narrative where his role as outsider never dwindles. It is noted that “though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable and unchanged” (Brontë 1847, 118). It is his ability to threaten established ideals that casts a dark shadow over *Wuthering Heights*. From the outset, his mere presence and physical exterior cause discomfort where Lockwood comments on how he “beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under the brows” (Brontë 1847, 3). The use of the word ‘withdraw’ sets the premise of Heathcliff’s position throughout the text, taking the place as outsider and withdrawing from the inflexible frameworks through which society operates. On the margins, he haunts the landscape and serves as an unwanted mirror that reflects back the uglier elements of all other characters. Like the “undefined shadows [that]

lurk in the corners of the numerous projecting portions of the building” (Brontë 1847, 108), Heathcliff stalks the novel, a shadow of the unconscious self.

Peter K. Garrett determines that the aim of the Gothic is “to disturb its readers, and the disturbance it produces can be cognitive or ideological as well as affective, but is always accompanied by a strong concern for control” (Garrett 2003, 2). His untamed animalistic character is further emphasised by the feral dogs that reside at Wuthering Heights. Rena-Dozier digresses that “dogs represent all who would resist or despoil the perfection of domestic cleanliness and purity: they are opposed to the forces of domestic authority and must be punished and tamed” (Rena-Dozier 2010, 772). In turn, Heathcliff is seen as an intrusion that despoils the perfection of domestic cleanliness and purity. He is the undomesticated animal that changes the sacredness of the family unit and refuses all attempts to be trained in the customs of Victorian etiquette. Even in Heathcliff’s final moments, he remains a force of resistance. In the moment where Nelly tries to shut his eyes “they would not shut – they seemed to sneer at [her] attempts” (Brontë 1847, 392). This opposition even in death is symbolic of Heathcliff’s refusal to shut his eyes to the injustices and prejudices of the world. He ‘sneers’ at those who grasp onto linear perspectives and inflexible traditions, forever avoiding the stereotypical gaze. Even upon his death, he forces the reader to keep their eyes open to accepting cultural difference, and not allow others shut off that perspective to them.

Heathcliff demonstrates the prospect of a change in vision in his ability to transgress socio-limitations. According to Peter K. Garrett, one of the main appeals to Gothic was how it came from “such resistance, from its promise of release from the limitations of cold reason and the commonplace” (2003, 1). Thus, the presence of the abject other in any text is used to reimagine the power relations that mediate, and all too often determine, the limits of human possibility. Its contribution to literature is how it disputes binary oppositions and represents the extremes of identity. The resistant Other, especially in the case of Heathcliff “describes the

simultaneous violation of physical and metaphysical boundaries” (O'Connor 2000, 210). A psychoanalytic observation of the Other determines it as an articulation of the edges of humanness; the embodiment of something deviating from the norm. Due to Heathcliff's name being “the name of a son who died in childhood” (Brontë 1847, 43), his very title signifies something unfavourable and is reflective of the pervasive darkness that haunts the Heights. His ability to disobey conventional definition is seen as an infection that weakens and convolutes standards of upper-class decency. Edgar comments on how his “presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous” (Brontë 1847, 134). Solidifying the link between monster and Heathcliff, James Twitchell compares his parasitic nature to that of a vampire. He contends that he evidently is not a vampire but “his relationships with other people can be explained metaphorically and that the metaphor Emily Brontë developed was one of parasite and host, oppressor and victim, vampire and vampirised” (Twitchell 2004, 81). The plague that Heathcliff carries infects and weakens the systematic routine of Victorian convention and tradition. Heathcliff falls under the category of ‘monster’ or Other because he infringes upon cultural limits and escapes the semiotic field, rendering established boundaries unstable. Due to the discomfort he causes to other inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff becomes “the scourge, the infector carrying the plague to all he meets” (Twitchell 2004, 87). He scourges aristocratic customs in how he climbs the social ladder and obtains ownership over two estates, enabling a transgression of class prejudices. Reducing difference to a negative, Heathcliff is confined to be nothing more than a strange outsider who is disallowed entry into the status of the upper class. From an early age, he is a victim of exclusory tactics where his position within Wuthering Heights teeters on his ability to follow the rules. Catherine gives an account of his tainted childhood where her brother Hindley would not “let him sit with us, nor eat with us anymore . . . and threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders” (Brontë 1847, 26). It is on the margins of the status quo that

Heathcliff goes beyond the limits of what is acceptably human, providing a tangible site for the inscription of disobedience and transgression. He disrupts this social paradigm in a Machiavellian way where “so much had circumstances altered their positions, that he would certainly have struck a stranger born and bred gentlemen” (Brontë 1847, 173). The irrational terror that he provokes emerges from his attempt at violating boundaries and forcing others to abandon naturalised beliefs. David Sonstroem comments on how, during the reader’s encounter with Heathcliff, he/she experiences “vacillating allegiances, his sense of being afloat on a troubled conceptual and ethical sea” (Sonstroem 1971, 51). This ‘troubled conceptual and ethical sea’ reflects the semiotic field with which we are habitually familiar, yet Heathcliff’s character creates ripples that both unsettles and confuses the reader. His narrative function is to open up fixed meanings and identities to otherness, to invade the seemingly natural and turn it on its head. To Fred Botting “the effects of such novels are that they warn of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form” (Botting 1996, 7). Therefore, this calls into question is the Other merely perceived as such because they do not follow the existing social order and escapes the dialectics of the general economy. It is Heathcliff who seems most insistent to shake the fixed structures of the novel's world. As Vine contends:

An unquiet and contradictory presence, Heathcliff can be seen as a trope of radical displacement: lacking a knowable origin... Heathcliff comes from outside, from the other, introducing an instability into the world that precariously incorporates him, and he is never stably lodged in any of the social places he assumes. (Vine 1994, 341)

Throughout the novel Heathcliff’s unquiet presence articulates and exacerbates the internal instabilities of the world he invades.

The transcendent nature of both Heathcliff can be connected to the sublime effect, that which is seen as without boundaries and beyond the imaginable. With the ‘sublime’ being a fundamental element of the Romantic period, Heathcliff cannot be examined without reference to its rationalisation of elevated thought

and untamed emotion. The sublime allows us to perceive an imposing object or figure in a different light, so that it may “be ultimately transformed into self-enlarging, quasi-spiritual transcendence” (Barney 2010, 2). It looks at digression from the norm not as a deviant encounter, but as a transformative experience. Therefore, a re-imagining of the character of Heathcliff will look into how he shares a common purpose with the sublime in his transgression of cultural limits. Heathcliff exploits a number of contemporary insecurities, among which is the fear of being outside the ordinary. The ‘splenetic sublime’ coined by Richard E. Barney assists an understanding of our concern for the unknown while also uncovering the need of the unidentifiable subject for the functioning of all society. Linking mystery and the sublime to the human spleen, Barney reflects on how it “provides a dislocated, ungraspable centre around which is palpable” (Barney 2010, 4). Heathcliff can be put forward as embodying the ‘splenetic sublime’ in how he constitutes an unknown and incomprehensible presence who is able to transcend his ‘ungraspable’ identity as Other and utilise his abjectness to offer new meaning and challenge the dominant modes of thinking. Barney sees the sublime as “having emerged from the contentious function of stretching, distending, and pushing to extreme limits the historically dominant modes of representation or perception” (Barney 2010, 8). Heathcliff therefore embodies the threatening sublime by stretching Victorian thinking and testing prevailing representative classifications.

Heathcliff becomes a catalyst for the personal suffering of other characters in the narrative, inducing both a sombre and sublime experience. He is the embodiment of the sublime that emerges from both uncertain and inexplicable mannerisms. He is positioned as “an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone” (Brontë 1847, 120). Even though his association with monstrosity is linked to his tentative behaviour, he still serves as a universal explanation for humanity’s tendency to monster the

outsider and to equate uncanniness with evil. It is his combination of both the sublime and the uncanny that inflicts a metaphorical 'wuthering' upon narrative development.

### **Heathcliff as a Wuthering Force**

Ambiguity not only surrounds his character but also permeates the framing devices of the text. *Wuthering Heights* is skewed by extremity: it is an architectural torsion wuthering between stability and instability. In Brontë's own words she states "'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, [is] descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which [the house's] station is exposed in stormy weather" (Brontë 1847, 4). The narrative is full of interruptions, with the perplexing transfer from past to present disallowing a fluidity and progress in both plot and character development. David Sonstroem states that "far from wholeheartedly endorsing an order, Emily Brontë depicts conceptual wuthering" (Sonstroem 1971, 51). The term 'wuthering' simultaneously describes both nature and human nature, and when used to describe Heathcliff, it in many ways acts as a metonym for the place which he eventually comes to own. It is consequent of confusing identities and the inability to categorise abnormal elements in the text that demonstrates a failure in storytelling. The narrative is full of interruptions, with the perplexing transfer from past to present disallowing a fluidity and progress in both plot and character development. Lockwood even highlights how "time stagnates here" (Brontë 1847, 32). Knowledge of the Other, in this case Heathcliff, is denied to us through narratorial failure and narrative inadequacy. According to Scheider "fragmentation seems to refuse to tell the story from one reliable point of view, mirroring the confusion of what to believe and the possibility of erring fatally" (Scheider 2015, 10). Heathcliff represents an outside force that enters into the internal world of the prohibited gentry, attacking and convoluting it. The chaotic weather can be paralleled with the anarchy that follows Heathcliff, demonstrating an instability of

both internal and external, where “a high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney: it sounded wild and stormy” (Brontë 1847, 49). He mirrors the corrosive storm in how he too can invade the home as an exterior force, disrupting every corner of the family household. In a similar way to the tumultuous weather, he threatens *Wuthering Heights* with his unpredictable and uncontrolled strength. Vine suggests that the ‘wuthering’ embodied by Heathcliff “becomes a movement of othering: a passing of boundaries that takes the outside in and the inside out, where the familiar is made strange” (Vine 1994, 340).

It is Heathcliff’s ability to ‘wuther’ narrow definitions of identity, which allows for him to participate in a multi-faceted identification process. Brontë’s novel adopts the multi-narrative voice which opens a forum for multiple perspectives and demonstrates through this narrative device the possibility of alternative interpretations of Heathcliff’s character. If the reader were to rely on the perspective of Lockwood or Nelly alone, then Heathcliff would only be seen in a negative light. In *Wuthering Heights* Brontë outlines man’s refusal to overlook his prejudices is what augments his inability to discern what lies beyond his limitations. Nelly and Lockwood present the limited eye, whereby the reader must actively reshape their interpretation of Heathcliff through an alternative lens.

### **The Villainous Victim**

To a contemporary audience, the distorted form of Heathcliff can therefore be transmuted into a recognisable image. Heathcliff underscores that presented monstrous or othered identities are not intuitively immoral and are pushed by external influences toward malevolence. Lockwood admits how fear and anger can turn someone into, what Stephen T. Asma described as, an ‘accidental monster’ (Asma 2011, 13), whereby external forces that are out of our control dictate to us how to behave. In his words “terror made [him] cruel” (Brontë 1847, 29). It is consequent of society’s prejudiced stance and perspective that disallows the



outsider to enter the realm of cultural norms. From the very beginning of the novel, Heathcliff is cast in the role as the hostile foreigner, and is demonised only for being his position outside the norm. From the moment of birth, external forces condition Heathcliff to see himself as unworthy and monstrous. Even before Lockwood is allowed access to this outcast's full history, he is aware that a series of unfortunate events have shaped his aversive character. When speaking to Nelly he acknowledges Heathcliff "must have had some ups and downs in life to make him such a churl" (Brontë 1847, 40). Rather than just being 'evil', when looked at from an alternative view he can be seen to be a product of his upbringing. It is only his passion and emotion that shows us Heathcliff is not the presented 'unfeeling child' and validates to the reader the victim existing beneath bestowed villainous facade. Nicholas Mosley introduces the idea of the 'hopeful monster' that is not inherently evil but is simply born too early to be accepted by a conventional society. Mosley notes however that there is hope that the Gothic villain will be received by modern audiences where progressiveness is translated through contemporary perspectives. It is from this observation that monsters "are things born perhaps slightly before their time; when it's not known if the environment is quite ready for them" (Mosley 1993, 71).

For Heathcliff to be transformed, his position as tortured victim must be considered in any debates concerning his role as the antagonist. He represents everything that is peripheral to the 'norms' of self and society. Even though his intentions are injected with revenge and immorality, his position as a gothic villain remains an ambiguous factor. Brontë's novel does not invite us to identify with Heathcliff—it only invites us to identify with those around him and interpret his character through their eyes. Clover comments on the stereotyped roles of victim and villain whose "roles no less prefabricated and predictable for their being performed by many or one" (Clover 2015, 12). It is these superficial categories, set up by the both the gothic and horror genre, that confines identities to one role and

disallows alternative modes of representation from being formed. From these postmodern viewpoints, Heathcliff can be shown to no longer be someone that is inherently evil or a manifestation of otherness, but instead is a falsified persona shaped by a misconception of deviance and difference.

Current criticisms now see Heathcliff as victim as opposed to the negative illustrations of him in previous analytic literature. According to James Twitchell “the second generation of critics sees Heathcliff in shades of gray” (Twitchell 2004, 80). Essentially Heathcliff cannot be labelled as a monster because his ferocity spawns from him being a victim of his own misery. It is only Nelly who recognises Heathcliff is a victim of his own dismal situation. She notes “you have nobody to love you; and, however miserable you make us, we shall have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty rises from your greater misery” (Brontë 1847, 337). Contemporary literature and thinking thus argue that people are not born cruel but become transformed into these vindictive beings as a result their own persecution. Readers therefore see Heathcliff from a different angle, from an anamorphic perspective, through which he can be seen “as a mortal, as a fallible man who does his best in a scurvy world” (Twitchell 2004, 80). Nelly also accedes to how it was the maltreatment of Heathcliff caused by the strict regime of eighteenth-century English life that turned him into the monster he became. Heathcliff even ponders his existence and inner monstrosity, asking whether his situation would be as dark “had [he] been born where laws are less strict, and tastes less dainty” (Brontë 1847, 317). Nelly notes that the upbringing of Heathcliff, as well as Catherine, encouraged the deviant and darker self to be released from within. She notes that “the master’s bad ways and bad companions formed a pretty example for Catherine and Heathcliff. His treatment of the latter was enough to make a fiend of a saint” (Brontë 1847, 76). It is through language and the semiotic field that the categories of Self and Other are solidified. Through demonisation of Heathcliff, he metamorphoses into what people expect of him, conforming to the category assigned to him. This

verbal conditioning of the monster is passed down onto Hareton where he confesses:

papa talks enough of my defects, and shows enough scorn of me, to make natural I should doubt myself- I doubt whether I am not altogether as worthless as he calls me. (Brontë 1847, 298)

The internal chaos Heathcliff possesses is that of a tormented man, and not of what we might traditionally term a monster. He is more human than most of the characters because he expresses his mortal passions and only instinctively acts on the emotions he holds. He is dominated by ardour, and his decisions are wrought with animal instinct and primal urge. *Wuthering Heights*, then, becomes a psychological study of an elemental man whose soul is torn between love and hate.

### **Conclusion**

Misguided readings of Heathcliff's character have driven audiences away from his representation as victim. However, a re-reading of the novel both subverts and undermines the relationship between normalcy and the abject, redefining his role as the antihero. Heathcliff essentially incites a debate on the contributing agents to aberrant behaviour and challenges whether it is a socially constructed attitude or born from the deeper scopes of the mind. Through the postmodern lens, one can thus re-evaluate why we are uncomfortable with representations of otherness and how any form of difference will continue to be demonised by prejudiced eyes. In the context of monster studies, manifestations of the cultural Other as 'monster' or 'demon' places emphasis on the ongoing debates in the humanities and social sciences regarding cultural difference. Placing a magnified lens on the acts of monstering the Other and the dislikeable aspects of humanity will show how observations of the cultural Other are rendered incomplete, as any true understanding of the Other will locate them outside the realm of unknowable and unfamiliar, making the subject harder to dehumanise and marginalise. Even though Heathcliff is without a narrative voice or any distinct identity, his actions speak to

many transgressive ideas concerning gender, otherness and understandings of the abject. Where he lacks in definition, his obscure identity allows Brontë's audience to displace their own trauma onto this tragic gothic villain. Thus, the once unfamiliar Other is exposed to share a familiar face to the differing insecurities of the reader.

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