

Exploring The Significance of Gothic Elements in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte

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Abstract

Wuthering Heights, a classic Gothic novel by Emily Bronte, examines themes of desire, revenge, isolation and supernatural aspects. The Gothic elements of the book are examined in this essay, with particular attention paid to Heathcliff's status as a Byronic hero, *Wuthering Heights*' gloomy atmosphere, and the existence of supernatural forces. Heathcliff, the epitome of the Gothic protagonist, is enigmatic and vindictive and plagued by feelings of love and treachery. The novel's otherworldly implications are further reinforced by his fixation with Catherine Earnshaw, which surpasses death. The isolated Yorkshire moors and the dilapidated *Wuthering Heights* home, in particular, contribute to the novel's sense of darkness and loneliness while reflecting the characters' inner struggle. By blurring the boundaries between the afterlife and reality, the supernatural presence, including Catherine's ghost and Heathcliff's belief in her lingering spirit, increases the Gothic intensity of the book. The novel's in-depth examination of human emotions and the unbreakable hold of the past is highlighted by the interplay of love, retribution, and psychological suffering. *Wuthering Heights* is a disturbing story that illustrates the devastating force of compulsive love and the enduring existence of unresolved feelings thanks to Bronte's use of Gothic clichés of darkness, decay, and lunacy. This research emphasizes how *Wuthering Heights*' lasting reputation as a Gothic literary classic is influenced by Bronte's depiction of Heathcliff, the novel's environment, and its supernatural themes.

Keywords: Gothic literature, Byronic hero, supernatural, isolation, revenge.

Emily Bronte was a renowned English novelist and she is best known for her novel *Wuthering Heights*. This work was published under her pseudonym Ellis Bell which is so powerful and unconventional in society. Emily Bronte's work *Wuthering Heights* is highlighted as a classic of English literature. Emily belongs to the Bronte family along with her sisters

Charlotte and Anne. Though she gave remarkable works to society, her works are limited by quantity and set only against bleak and wild Yorkshire moors. Her works include her only novel, *Wuthering Heights*, and a collection of poems which were published in her lifetime. Her notable poems are *No Coward Soul Is Mine*, *Remembrance*, *The Night-Wind*, *The Prisoner* and *The Old Stoic*. Her poem collection reflects her real life and deep connection with Yorkshire moors. Her works majorly expose the themes of confinement, freedom, solitude, mortality, separation from a loved one, spirituality and embracing a stoic approach to life.

Gothic genres of literature emerged in the late 18th century, which often explore themes such as death, darkness, madness and gloom, focusing on decaying settings and ambience. The atmosphere of Gothic is typically eerie and foreboding creating a sense of fear and suspenseful nature with the emotional intensity of humankind. These novels usually take place in old abandoned or remote locations or haunted castles or places of ruins. The tone of gothic literature is always dark and mysterious with the presence of unease and tension. The basic gothic literature used in America is significant towards the culture followed in America. Following the American writers, the prominent British writers too followed them which is portrayed in this novel. This gothic genre emerged in the period of enlightenment, embracing supernatural elements and sharing mysterious contents, particularly in the haunted culture. *Wuthering Heights* shows a narrative structure which is unconventional because of its dark and brooding atmosphere. The wild and untamed moors reflect the characters' unstable emotions, emphasising the gothic themes. The combination of these elements and the novel's exploration of supernaturalism shows this work, *Wuthering Heights* as a landmark in Gothic fiction.

It is a tale of intense passion, dark revenge and the power of love. The setting revolves around two families: the Earnshaws and the Lintons, sharing a deep complex relationship with an orphan adopted by the Earnshaw family who later became broody and vengeful, and his childhood companion named Catherine Earnshaw who later betrayed him. The love relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine is wild but also doomed. Catherine chooses to marry Edgar Linton who is wealthy and refined for her social status even though she loved Heathcliff and this insists on the desireful revenge on their family. Depressed Heathcliff decided to isolate himself and was not there for three years. Later he returns to *Wuthering Heights* with embittered vengeance and gains control of both *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* through manipulation,

cruelty and a series of calculated moves. His action caused immense suffering to the next generation, including his son.

"The quintessential Byronic hero: passionate, brooding, and isolated, with a deep capacity for love and hate. His moral ambiguity and mysterious origins make him both a hero and an anti-hero, embodying the Gothic themes of the novel." (Bronte 45)

These above lines describe him as a quintessential Byronic hero for his character aligned with complexity, dark nature, isolation and brooding. A Byronic hero, named after the poet Lord Byron, is typically portrayed as a rebellious, isolated, and flawed individual with a troubled past. His character is portrayed as a person with an unidentified origin and a bitter past after his adopted father Earnshaw's death. The struggle he went through the days by his stepbrother because of the love, he got from Mr. Earnshaw. He faced many struggles between the love and hate of the other characters in the novel. The thing which makes him an embodiment of a gothic novel are his vengeful nature, mysterious things around him such as his origin, the sudden wealth which he gained during the time, he left Wuthering Heights and so on.

The character Heathcliff is well-defined for his isolation both self-imposed and enforced by others. He is known for his dark and brooding figure and is often depicted alone, wandering the desolate moors or brooding within the confines of Wuthering Heights. His isolation is physical, emotional, and social, intensifying his role as the Gothic hero. Gothic Byronic heroic character Heathcliff embodies passion and is depicted as a villainous character with deep emotional and psychological complexity. He is an outsider, both socially and emotionally wellbeing of state of mind.

All over the hate and struggles in his past, he was very obsessed in love with Catherine and also her. At a point of time, Catherine who was with him in his struggle, leaves him because of the societal norms that provoke him towards death, striving him to seek revenge on those who wronged him. This obsessive nature is the source of this power and his downfall indicating the gothic theme of destruction that consumes the individual. The mystery and the supernatural quality are shrouded in Heathcliff death. He appears to will himself to die, perhaps to reunite with Catherine in death, to continue the plot, his death is described as suggesting that he may

have seen or felt her presence. It heightens the gothic nature of the novel in the context of Heathcliff.

Wuthering Heights, the residence is almost the character itself with cramped interiors, and bleak and dark surroundings mirroring Heathcliff's mental state. After Catherine's marriage with Edgar Linton, Heathcliff's mental state becomes imbalanced, because he feels Catherine's behaviour as a betrayal of his love though he dreamt of her as a soulmate. The atmosphere of the house imitates the emotional and psychological characteristics that Heathcliff tends to imply and experience in others. Also, the atmosphere is the big reason for Heathcliff's mental state to become worse. His inner confusion and his strong feelings of anger and revenge are mirrored in the environment of Wuthering Heights. The isolation he felt after Catherine's marriage was more like a trap in the house surrounded by the moors. The obsessive love towards Catherine and the desire for revenge are the root cause of many deaths in the novel.

Heathcliff's descent into madness is not only self-destructive but also brings about the ruin of those around him. His act of chasing vengeance leads him to destroy the lives of Hindley, Isabella, Linton and his son. This makes Heathcliff, an ambivalent protagonist of the novel. The way he treats others, manipulation, abuses, and dehumanizes, made Wuthering Heights, a place of torment. The root cause of his madness was his isolation which is consuming in the way of revenge towards others. Not only his isolation but also the childhood trauma inflicted by Hindley Earnshaw plays a crucial role in shaping his character as a bad and vengeful person. But Heathcliff cannot be seen as a wholly bad person rather all his acts of revenge are just because of the childhood trauma he had and the betrayal of his soulmate.

When it comes to gothic elements, both his good and bad characters play their roles sufficiently in the novel. Throughout the novel, Heathcliff is only portrayed as a bad person but his good nature and the reason for his act are not shown by the author explicitly to the readers and they cannot connect to the reason or good side of Heathcliff. Though the readers mostly see his revenge act and the abuses he did to other characters, they finalise him as a villainous character. Heathcliff is just like a Jackfruit; his outside may be harsh but deep inside he is good-hearted and understood as a Byronic hero.

Another element of the gothic novel is the setting of the novel where the author tries to convey the dark and eerie atmosphere of the novel. *Wuthering Heights* is an isolated foreboding mansion located in desolated Yorkshire moors and stands as the symbol of wildness and untamed nature.

“On that bleak hill-top the earth was hard with a black frost, and the air made me shiver through every limb. The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed...” (Clery 19)

These lines set the novel with a vivid description of a cold, desolate environment, which helps to mirror the emotional chill and isolation of the mansion *Wuthering Heights*. The word ‘bleak’ immediately suggests a sense of emptiness thus the setting on the hilltop implies a place that is isolated, exposed to the elements, and far removed from the comfort of humans. In the above lines, the ‘black frost’ term gives a sinister and gothic tone to the novel. Black frost is a severe type of frost that not only covers the ground but penetrates it, making the earth hard and unyielding suggesting that even the ground is inhospitable and deadened. Even the air and cold in the surroundings give a physical discomfort feeling to the narrative, which also stands as a branch of gothic elements. The narrator experiences a horrific feeling in the surroundings of the mansion *Wuthering Heights*. The blend of reality and the supernatural is been portrayed in the above lines which strongly supports the gothic element.

The mansion is always surrounded by harsh stormy weather which mirrors the turbulent emotions and violent nature of the characters. In order to enhance the sense of mystery, the moors with their vast, bleak expanses, evoke danger and underscore the theme of madness that is spread in the story. The setting heightens the sense of doom and gloom which the author used as a key element for gothic in the novel. The setting sets a strong foundation for supernatural elements like ghosts and some mysteries which try to blur the vision between good, nature and bad, supernatural.

The supernatural element revolves around the story in many forms like Catherine’s ghost, and Heathcliff’s obsession, also setting the atmosphere of the mansion as in a gothic novel. The gothic identity that is being gained from the elements of the supernatural things in this novel

shows the haunting, sense of danger, violence and intense emotions of the characters. These elements are not simply fitted rather they symbolise the enduring impact of the past relationship, the inevitability of fate, and the way the dead continue to influence the living ones.

“The supernatural in *Wuthering Heights* is not merely an external force but is inextricably linked to the characters’ emotional landscapes. Catherine’s ghost, for instance, is a manifestation of unresolved passions and the enduring power of love and revenge, making the supernatural deeply personal and psychological.” (Eagleton 45)

This novel is different from other novels in the way the external force that haunts the character but also closely connected with the inner emotions and the psychological state of the characters. These above lines also tell that the supernatural elements are connected to the internal experiences and emotions of the characters. Also, these lines insist that the ghostly events are not just random rather they are a direct reflection of the intense feeling that the characters harbour. The supernatural in the novel is a vehicle for exploring powerful, enduring emotions. Catherine's ghost represents the unresolved emotions, particularly love and vengeance, that make her stay even after her death as a ghost. Her spirit's inability to rest is symbolic of the unfinished business and unfulfilled desires that plagued her in life.

Catherine and Heathcliff's love is so intense that it transcends death, while the desire for revenge continues to drive the plot even after Catherine's death. The supernatural events highlight how these emotions persist and influence the living characters. They arise from the characters' minds and hearts, making them more about psychological hauntings than traditional ghost stories. The novel also explores psychological aspects of the supernatural, where characters' intense emotions manifest in ways that feel otherworldly. Heathcliff's experiences of hearing Catherine's voice and his belief in her continued presence can be seen as psychological hauntings where his guilt, love, and obsession create a sense of the supernatural that blurs the line between reality and imagination. Catherine's ghost, for instance, can be seen as a projection of Heathcliff's overwhelming guilt, grief, and obsession, making the supernatural a reflection of his inner turmoil.

Wuthering Heights highlights gothic literature with a dark atmosphere, complex characters and eerie settings by exploring and finding the significance of Emily Bronte's landscape as a quintessential gothic setting isolated on the Yorkshire moors. The gothic settings, leading to the natural disaster symbolise, realism, both psychologically and mentally through the characters portrayed in the novel. The landscapes in the gothic novels are always inspired by the terrifying characters, reflected in the romantic interest in the natural world. The characters' human psyche focuses on the darker aspects of the surroundings, exploring the themes of unusual and repressive desires, fears, and the unconscious mind of normal human beings.

The concept of damsels in distress shows females as weak and innocent characters who are always threatened by some malevolent force and always in need of support from their partner in the figure of a supernatural entity, highlighting the themes of power and control. The idea of mystery and suspense nature in this novel displays the secrets and unanswered questions. It often revolves around the hidden pasts and family secrets which shows the revelation of the secrets and keeps the readers in a state of tension and eagerness. Heathcliff, from *Wuthering Heights*, the central character of the novel, incorporates many of the quintessential elements of a Gothic hero and explores unconsciousness which emphasises the power of nature and its untamed forms which makes him a key figure of the novel's gothic atmosphere. To present Heathcliff as a Gothic protagonist, Bronte introduced him as a mysterious and enigmatic character with an obscure origin. Bronte's way of portraying this novel's setting highlights the dark and eerie mood which is characteristic of gothic fiction.

Even the house itself is depicted as dark and gloomy, creating an atmosphere of decay and menace. This environment's setting creates a world that is both physically and emotionally isolated, denotes the boundaries between the living and dead, natural and supernatural which are blurred. To enhance the gothic atmosphere, supernatural elements in this novel blur the line between life and death, reality and unseen. The supernatural events in the environment show whether real or manifestations of the characters' inner confusion which heightens the novel's gothic tension and is used to keep readers in a state of suspense.

Bronte in this novel *Wuthering Heights* leaves some phenomena unexplained, which are the key features of gothic fiction. The unexplained phenomenon events enhance the sense of

mystery, suspense and foreboding spread throughout the novel. Altogether these elements create a narrative structure where nature and the supernatural coexist, reflecting the mysterious environment and the characters' inner turmoil.

The themes of death and the afterlife play an important role in shaping the novel's gothic atmosphere. Death is not just an event but a lingering presence that haunts the characters and the narrative itself. Death is a pervasive presence in the novel, with many characters dying young and often in tragic circumstances. Many characters, such as Catherine Earnshaw, die young, and their deaths are often surrounded by intense emotional turmoil and tragedy. The constant presence of death, coupled with the lingering spirits, adds a morbid, gothic atmosphere to the story.

Catherine's death is particularly significant, as it becomes a focal point for the novel's exploration of love, obsession, and the afterlife. Her death is not the end of her influence; instead, her presence seems to permeate the lives of the characters left behind, especially Heathcliff. Heathcliff yearns for a connection with her beyond the grave, demonstrating the gothic theme of love transcending death. This desire manifests in his longing to be reunited with her in the afterlife, leading him to open her grave and express his wish to be with her even in death.

This portrayal of the afterlife as a continuation of earthly suffering is crucial in understanding the novel's gothic depth. Catherine's ghost, whether a literal apparition or a product of Heathcliff's tormented mind, represents the idea that the past is never truly gone and that death is not a final release but a continuation of unresolved emotions and desires. Moreover, the idea that Catherine's spirit cannot find peace reflects a broader gothic theme of unrest and eternal suffering.

The character of Heathcliff, the eerie setting, and the supernatural elements intricately weave together to create a quintessential Gothic atmosphere, amplifying the novel's dark, brooding tone. Heathcliff embodies the archetypal Gothic hero—mysterious, vengeful, and consumed by an all-encompassing passion that borders on the supernatural. His presence casts a shadow over the entire narrative, intensifying the novel's sense of dread and melancholy. The

gothic elements in this novel are integral to the exploration of the darker aspects of human experience, such as love, revenge, and the inescapable influence of the past. These Gothic elements are not merely for dramatic effect; they serve to underscore the novel's central themes.

The setting of the novel particularly the desolate moors and the isolated Wuthering Heights serves as a key Gothic element. The harsh, unforgiving landscape mirrors the tumultuous emotions of the characters and contributes to the novel's pervasive sense of isolation and despair. Supernatural elements, such as ghostly apparitions and eerie premonitions, further enhance the Gothic atmosphere. The novel's exploration of the afterlife deepens its gothic elements by emphasizing the inescapability of the past and the idea that death does not provide an escape from suffering. Instead, it suggests that the emotions and conflicts that define the characters in life will continue to torment them in death, creating a sense of eternal haunting that is central to the gothic genre.

These elements blur the line between reality and the supernatural, adding to the novel's sense of unease and highlighting the characters' emotional torment. The supernatural in *Wuthering Heights* is a manifestation of the unresolved passions and psychological turmoil of its characters, making the Gothic a vehicle for exploring the profound and often destructive power of love and revenge. The novel's Gothic atmosphere amplifies the sense of inevitable doom and the cyclical nature of suffering that pervades the story. The Gothic is not just a backdrop but a fundamental aspect of the novel's narrative, symbolizing the haunting persistence of the past, the destructive nature of obsessive love, and the enduring impact of unresolved emotions. The Gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights* are not mere embellishments; they are integral to the novel's exploration of human nature and the darker aspects of love and obsession. By incorporating these elements, Emily Brontë crafts a narrative that is both haunting and profound, leaving a lasting impact on the reader. The Gothic components of the novel serve to heighten the emotional intensity of the story, making *Wuthering Heights* a powerful exploration of the complexities of the human psyche.

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