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Résumé
Dans Wuthering Heights, Catherine s’inscrit dans la généalogie des héroïnes gothiques et le fait que le roman ait été perçu comme un exemple du gothique féminin renforce l’idée selon laquelle le gothique a une influence considérable sur Wuthering Heights. Isabella et Cathy Linton offrent par ailleurs des liens de ressemblance avec les héroïnes gothiques. Il ne s’agit pas ici d’envisager ces personnages féminins comme des héroïnes persécutées. Ce que je souhaite montrer dans cet article, c’est comment Emily Brontë percevait le gothique et comment le genre a influencé ses héroïnes. Emily Brontë transforme peu à peu ses personnages féminins en figures plus vivantes, et les héroïnes gothiques évoluent selon plusieurs versions de femmes animées qui se font écho, qui se reflètent, qui s’associent les unes aux autres pour proposer une vue d’ensemble. Chaque personnage aide les autres à s’identifier. Elles explorent autrui pour se trouver elles-mêmes, et voient les autres comme des miroirs déformants selon lesquels elles ne sont pas ce qu’elles sont. Les figures féminines de Wuthering Heights créent une vision globale de femmes ensemble.

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Among the literary works Emily Brontë (1818-48) read, the genre that is most noticeable in her own writing is probably the Gothic. Wuthering Heights (1847) is notable for its atmosphere, and for its typical characteristics such as multiple narration, framework narratives, inhuman characters, ghosts, violation of graves, the revenge motif, sadism, doubles and captive heroines, which explain why the novel is often placed in the Gothic genre.

For this reason, the relation between Wuthering Heights and the Gothic form has been thoroughly discussed in various ways, and it has been demonstrated in most research that Emily used the Gothic to explore her own creativity, but that her novel reached new levels of originality; the book is filled with Gothic themes but is not—in the final analysis—merely a Gothic novel. Edith M. Fenton, for instance, has discussed how Emily Brontë produced the realistic features and individuals in her theatre of the moors, taking Gothic Romance as a

1 I would like to express my thanks to the FUT Research Promotional Fund, which supported a part of my research.

“stage”. Patrick Kelly distinguishes the sublime in *Wuthering Heights* from the Gothic: “[i]n Catherine’s words, ‘Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same’. It is this last and deepest mystery of character, finally inexpressible though it is, that Emily Brontë intimates through the sublime.” Sydy McMillen Conger, taking a feminist view, states that the novel demonstrates women’s right to be respected as human beings in the convention of the Gothic.

Given that Catherine Earnshaw is a persecuted woman, as Conger states, the novel can be read as typically Gothic, though it cannot reasonably be assumed that Emily’s focus was on women’s suppressed feelings. Since Ellen Moers defined “female Gothic” in 1978 as a “paraphernalia of claustrophobic castles, villainous dominating men, and beleaguered heroines to thematize women’s sense of isolation and imprisonment within a domestic ideology fast becoming hegemonic by the end of the eighteenth century”, the Gothic and women have often been associated. Frequently, the focus is on the experience of the female characters within such tales, as Tamara Heller states that the Gothic novels are “particularly compelling fictions for the many women who read and write them because of their nightmarish figuration of feminine experience within the home.” Although her main interest seems elsewhere, the fact that the novel has also been characterised as female Gothic suggests that Emily’s use of female characters is a matter that demands further consideration.

It is also noticeable that there are two additional characters in the novel who resemble Gothic heroines, Isabella and Cathy Linton. Though they have not often been the object of critical consideration, they both share the necessary quality of being enclosed heroines: they cannot read Heathcliff’s real intentions, for instance, and are confined in the Heights, where they undergo a struggle before they are liberated from the villain’s binding force. It is worth remarking that Isabella and Cathy clearly resemble Gothic heroines in their upbringings and sufferings, but,

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although the theme of the persecuted woman inevitably arises when we consider *Wuthering Heights* in the light of Gothic fiction, I do not intend to discuss this topic here, but rather to see here is how Emily Brontë received the Gothic and how her female characters are influenced by (and also alter) the genre.

The primary purpose of this article is thus to show how the figures most resembling Gothic heroines are introduced and how they express Emily’s creative world. The comparison between these female characters in *Wuthering Heights* and archetypal heroines in Gothic novels will give us a further indication of where the writer’s interest lies. Though the female figures have not been seen exactly as heroines, we will consider them in this light and examine how they reach self-realisation compared to the way in which Gothic heroines, particularly the favourite figure of the Gothic virgin, do so. There is no doubt that the Gothic atmosphere in *Wuthering Heights* will be illuminated by looking at the female characters in comparison with Gothic virgins.

**Isabella Linton**

From the very first Gothic novel, Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto: A Story* (1764), tyrants and obedient female characters seem to be character types that are indispensable to the genre; Walpole’s Isabella is seized with fear of Manfred’s coldness and his devious scheme to marry her, while Manfred’s daughter, Matilda, is forced to marry Frederick for money, and she is mistakenly killed by her father who mistakes her for Isabella when she meets Theodore, her lover. The type is continued in later novels: in *The Old English Baron, A Gothic Story* (1778) by Clara Reeve, Lady Elizabeth Lovel escapes from Walter Lovel, who murdered her husband, Baron Arthur Lovel, and imprisoned her; similarly, in *Caleb Williams* (1794) by William Godwin, Miss Melville refuses to marry a boor of Tyrrel’s selection, is then locked up and indicted by Tyrrel for not paying her living expenses, and dies in the house of detention, calling for help to Falkland, whom she admired. In Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Emily St Aubert’s aunt, Madame Cheron, is incarcerated by her husband, Montoni, and Emily suffers from his atrocious actions too; another of her aunts is also persecuted and later killed by her husband, the Marquis de Villeroi and his mistress. Radcliffe’s novel was one of the most popular and also one of the most influential examples of the Female Gothic and probably had a particular bearing on Emily Brontë. As such Emily St Aubert will serve as a good basis for comparison with our three main women in *Wuthering Heights.*

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Generally, Gothic heroines are cautiously and delicately educated, kept away from male coarseness and sexuality as far as possible Emily St Aubert is no exception; it seems however that the heroines’ carefully cultivated decency itself often makes them defenceless against tyranny and persecution. Radcliffe presents Emily’s upbringing in a positive light, nevertheless, by insisting that alongside his protection of her from the world’s corruption, her father sought to give her some power to defend herself against her own feelings, which might otherwise lead to unhappiness in the future, for he had too much good sense to prefer a charm to a virtue; and had penetration enough to see, that this charm was too dangerous to its possessor to be allowed the character of a blessing. He endeavoured, therefore, to strengthen her mind; to ensure her to habits of self-command; to teach her to reject the first impulse of her feelings, and to look, with cool examination, upon the disappointments he sometimes threw in her way.  

St Aubert cultivated Emily’s virtue in order to strengthen her calmness and to reduce her dependence on “the first impulse”, which might lead her into traps and temptations, and make her vulnerable to men with some private and despotic end in view. Though her virtue is not in question, it is untested and seen in consequence as inevitably weak. Indeed, over-protective parents and their submissive daughters are almost helpless against evil deeds. It appears that the only way in which the heroine can “strengthen her mind” is by enduring the horrible situations created by men, their stratagems and desires.  

It seems that Isabella Linton’s tragedy also begins because she lacks a suspicious mind. She is raised in an upper-class family, without knowing any other men than her decent father and brother. The description of her arrival at the Heights “smothered in cloaks and furs” in the family carriage symbolises her protected life and ignorance of the world, and her naivety which makes her cry over trivial matters is the object of Catherine’s scorn. She falls in love with Heathcliff, without knowing who he is, and even refuses to listen to Catherine’s advice that he is “an unclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation” and “a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man” (90). Isabella obviously cannot see how dangerous it would be to marry Heathcliff, when he appears wearing the mask of a gentleman. She does not possess the ability to doubt male intentions and as such fulfils the type of the Gothic virgin, while also emphasising Catherine’s greater understanding and insight.

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When she runs away with Heathcliff, Isabella’s life becomes exactly like the great horrors depicted in Gothic novels. Heathcliff’s ill-treatment and violence, the half-crazed Hindley, and the uncooperative servant, Joseph, all remind us of Gothic heroines’ experience in castles or Roman Catholic churches. The description of the Heights is very similar to that of Gothic castles and although Wuthering Heights is set in England its remoteness and the roughness of its environs evoke the wildness not only of the Gothic Italian landscape, but also of Scotland, displayed by Radcliffe in, for example, The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne (1789). So Emily Brontë here quietly draws on a strand of Gothic fiction and unites it with the associations of the untamed North of England and its ruggedness to suggest that such elements may be found at home as well as abroad. Given the way she portrays the Heights, Emily was clearly conscious of Gothic horror and evokes Gothic associations when she makes Isabella ask Nelly:

How did you contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature when you resided here? I cannot recognise any sentiment which those around share with me.

and more revealingly still, in this context, when she continues:

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 - that is, when you call to see me; and you must call, Ellen, very soon. (120)

To Isabella, the Heights is the unknown world, and it is difficult for her to understand why its inhabitants act crazily. Her newly-married husband, Heathcliff, is the most insolvable mystery; he has transformed himself into something she cannot categorise: neither a gentleman nor a human being but an evil creature which baffles her understanding.

On the day of her arrival at the Heights, the gate is locked, and when it is unlocked, she enters the Yorkshire equivalent of a Gothic castle. Her rapid and urgent questions show, however, that she realises there is something here which she cannot cope with, given her moral system and cultural expectations. To her, Heathcliff was the hero who rescued her from the Grange where people did not approve of her feelings for him. Heathcliff exploits these naive ideas, showing his awareness of the influence of literature on her ideas as he knows that she has been “picturing in [him] a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from [his] chivalrous devotion.” (133) Yet on the very morning of her wedding she weeps with longing to go back to the Grange, so is perhaps less caught up in a world of romance than she seems.
However, we cannot simply frame Isabella within Gothic conventions because of her incredible counterattack on Heathcliff. She breaks free from Gothic convention, and makes a great escape from the Heights. She enters the Grange, “out of breath and laughing” though she had “a deep cut under one ear, which only the cold prevented from bleeding profusely, a white face scratched and bruised, and a frame hardly able to support itself through fatigue” (150-51) and throws her wedding ring on the floor. Isabella speaks rapidly and excitedly, and even desires Heathcliff’s suicide or his murder by Hindley, as though she has been transformed into a different person far removed from the naive girl who burned with passion and then cried for help in the brutal environment of the Heights:

But what misery laid on Heathcliff could content me, unless I have a hand in it? I’d rather he suffered less, if I might cause his sufferings and he might know that I was the cause. Oh, I owe him so much. On only one condition can I hope to forgive him. It is, if I may take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; for every wrench of agony, return a wrench, reduce him to my level. As he was the first to injure, make him the first to implore pardon; and then—why then, Ellen, I might show [...] some generosity. (159)

Isabella’s speech shows no sign of the confusion or fear that she had at the beginning of her stay at the Heights. She even goes further and confesses her wish and plans for revenge. It is a remarkable transformation; Isabella was a conventional Gothic heroine until she married Heathcliff, but her experience at the Heights brings out her survival instincts and she sloughs off her naivety. Now that she understands how demonic Heathcliff is, and he is far from her idealised figure, she has to find her own way to escape from the critical situation without relying on the hope of a hero’s rescue. In some respects, we can see Isabella in the same light as Heathcliff, as if they were doubles. Oddly like Heathcliff, she begins to go her own way in order to protect herself; Heathcliff obtains power and gentlemanliness to conquer the domains of two families, whereas Isabella acquires the violence and fierceness which originally belongs to Heathcliff, for her own sake. Isabella’s change is also shared by Hindley and Hareton, who acquire some of Heathcliff’s original characteristics to survive at the Heights. In other words, there are more doubling pairs formed via Heathcliff’s negative side.

Nelly is even surprised by Isabella’s vicious words, observing “[o]ne might suppose you had never opened a Bible in your life” (159). Isabella’s speech and action no longer fit into the category of Christian morality, which is reminiscent of Antonia, in Matthew Lewis’s The Monk. Antonia’s mother tells her daughter not to read the Bible, which, in her view, contains inappropriate expressions for young girls.\footnote{Matthew Gregory Lewis, \textit{The Monk}, London: Penguin Books, 1998 [1796], 259-60.} Though Lewis
describes her with sharp satire, she is right to maintain that the real world is simply beyond the comprehension of the virtuous young female in the Gothic, and this is the salient characteristic of such heroines. However, Isabella goes far beyond the restriction Antonia’s mother has in mind and even astonishes others by her bold transformation. Gothic heroines similarly discover the need for self-protection and come to a point of self-discovery through the horrific adventure they undergo, but Isabella moves a step even further. Her previous experience makes her realise what she has by way of hope and while it means nothing in the savage state she now inhabits, she learns instead that she must act powerfully in order to counter the violence and the evil surrounding her. Importantly, Isabella overcomes her ignorance, and brings her persecuted life to an end by herself. Though she comes from the Grange, a place of culture and refinement, her stay at the Heights brings her close to the wildness and crudity which are associated with Catherine and Heathcliff. Initially and through Emily Brontë’s characterisation of her, Isabella carries on the convention of the persecuted Gothic heroine, but her shift from an ingenuous girl to an independent woman is a break from the Gothic, challenging both Lewis’s satire on the afflicted female and Radcliffe’s presentation of a woman’s ideally rational response to persecution.

Cathy Linton

Cathy Linton, too, can be recognised as a Gothic-heroine-like figure: she is raised by a gentleman, Edgar, who “took her education entirely on himself and made it an amusement” (167). And she is carefully protected from witnessing any perversity, especially as represented by Heathcliff.

Till she reached the age of thirteen, she had not once been beyond the range of the park by herself. Mr. Linton would take her with him a mile or so outside, on rare occasions; but he trusted her to no one else. Gimmerton was an unsubstantial name in her ears; the chapel, the only building she had approached or entered, except her own home. Wuthering Heights and Mr. Heathcliff did not exist for her; she was a perfect recluse, and, apparently, perfectly contented. (167)

This description reminds us of Emily St Aubert’s sheltered life, which may signify that Emily Brontë, if only unconsciously, was influenced by the Gothic heroines’ home environment. Like Isabella Linton, Cathy is educated at the Grange with care; she remains ignorant of the world, and is not able to understand that there are people who do not treat her as her father and servants do. When she goes the park at the Grange and visits the Heights, she is stunned and feels insulted that the people do not treat her in the respectful, almost flattering way she has
come to expect from her upbringing. It is incomprehensible to her to find that there are people who do not respect her and her family, as “she who was always ‘love,’ and ‘darling,’ and ‘queen,’ and ‘angel,’ with everybody at the Grange” (175). Even when Edgar, briefly cast in the role of a Gothic-style domineering father, warns her not to approach Heathcliff, Cathy does not understand how dangerous he could be, secretly writes to Linton, and even goes to see him at the Heights, swayed by passion. In this regard, she is also an inexperienced heroine who is not able to see beyond a person’s words, which is one of the essential features of the Gothic.

It is noteworthy, however, that Cathy possesses haughtiness and courage that traditional Gothic heroines do not show. Where Isabella as a girl is close to the innocent Gothic virgin types, who are distinguished by their frailty, and gain strength through their miserable experience, Cathy is presented as already a more liberated and powerful girl. This is one of the significant departures Emily Brontë makes from Gothic novels; Cathy’s character is a mixture of conventionality and liberality, convention and innovation.

Cathy’s forcefulness becomes more explicit when she is forcibly moved to the Heights. Being shut up there is a persecution in itself, of course, but it is also cruel that she is locked in a room to watch over her dying husband alone and without any help; Linton is a persecuted figure at the Heights too, but being forced to nurse a person in agony all the time is a torment, which exhausts Cathy, physically and mentally. Her persecuted life does not end after Linton’s death. Indeed, it is remarkable how the Heights preserves its Gothic atmosphere just as before; the gate is always locked, the fierce dogs are kept just as Lockwood sees them, and there is a mysterious, sinister room which should not be used except for compelling reasons. Cathy, here, becomes a prisoner and so her narrative reminds us of Gothic heroines who are locked in forbidding castles. Likewise, Heathcliff remains the Gothic tyrant figure; his continuing violent behaviour and his restraint of her freedom of action is presumed when he “lift[s] his hand, and the speaker [Cathy] spr[ings] to a safer distance, obviously acquainted with its weight” (25) when she makes impertinent remarks.

Cathy, however, still finds a way to make a space for herself in the Heights, by approaching Hareton, and eventually achieves a happy marriage. Though her struggle is not comparable with Isabella’s physical resistance to Heathcliff, Emily uses Cathy to suggest that there are other ways for heroines to escape or combat the Gothic plots that surround them. Cathy learns to compromise and be patient in order to understand Hareton and the father-son-like relationship that has arisen between him and Heathcliff. As Nelly observes, “Cathy showed a good heart, thenceforth, in avoiding both complaints and expressions of antipathy
concerning Heathcliff, and confessed to me her sorrow that she had endeavoured to raise a bad spirit between him and Hareton.” (286). She represses, almost to the point of extinguishing, her ill-will towards Heathcliff.

The high-handed and naive girl learns to moderate her attitude and adjust to the environment she has to deal with, but it does not mean she surrenders to the will of the oppressive villain; whereas Isabella needed to be bolder in order to protect herself, Cathy has to soften her temper to make friends with Hareton, the person who could support her and who may give her pleasure in the future. Through their experiences, both Isabella and Cathy achieve self-development beyond the scope of the traditional Gothic virgin; their self-realisation is more independently and actively accomplished, and this may be the key to understanding how Emily Brontë received and remoulded Gothic heroines. Her development of the Gothic female may owe something to Radcliffe, who, in her The Italian, or the Confessional of the Black Penitents (1797), does not repeat the formulaic plot in which the hero rescues the heroine at the close; instead, the heroine reaches her happy ending via a series of accidents, and not strictly as a result of rescue by the hero. 12 Emily Brontë’s heroines thus seem to be a development of Radcliffe’s female characters, marking a further stage in emancipation and self-realisation. 13

An alternative version of the unconventional heroine can be found in Jane Austen’s Northanger Abbey (1818), an exceptional Gothic novel, which begins with the famous line, “[n]o one who had ever seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine”. 14 The explanation of Catherine’s ordinary figure and talent as making her unsuitable for the role of a conventional heroine continues in the novel in order to impress on readers the truth that there is nothing of the graceful heroine about her. Austen attempts to set an everyday sort of girl as a heroine, far from the well-behaved Gothic virgins, partly in order to make her story more real, but more centrally to make ironical remarks about the unreality of Gothic itself. The setting in Northanger Abbey is still similar to that of Gothic novels, even with the heroine’s emphasized ordinariness: Catherine Morland is from a decent family, and a happy marriage awaits her at the close of the book. Austen’s irony is brought to

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13 This aspect of Ann Radcliffe’s work aligns her with the advocacy of rational education for women made by Mary Wollstonecraft in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) and Maria Edgeworth in Letters for Literary Ladies; To Which is Added, An Essay on the Noble Science of Self-justification (1795).

effect, nonetheless, as she disappoints the reader’s expectations of Gothic revelations one after another, but it does not necessarily mean that she is hostile to everything in the Gothic genre; parody often depends for its success on a degree of fondness for the object of parody. *Northanger Abbey* engages humorously with the Gothic genre and especially with Radcliffe, whose praise of rational thought and behaviour Austen agrees with. The jokes in the novel are designed to point out Radcliffe’s inconsistency more than her absurdity. In Isabella at least, Emily Brontë seems to be moving in just the opposite direction, showing the ineffectuality of a rational mind. She shows the absence of a dispassionate standpoint in the quasi-supernatural and more intense characters in her novel, whereas Austen adds reason and plainness to the fervid emotions of the Gothic.

**Catherine Earnshaw**

The same approach can be found in Emily Brontë’s depiction of the central heroine of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Earnshaw, who from her early days is far from being a lady of eminent virtue by nature. Her father’s early death deprives her of protection from any anticipated danger to which a girl might be exposed, and moral understanding is cultivated instead by her experience of affinity with Heathcliff, while Nelly’s and Joseph’s conventional views become examples to her of what she should not follow. Hindley’s non-interference policy, which is just the opposite of St Aubert’s and Elvira’s, further heightens her intense disposition. The lack of proper cultivation and protection against the outer world makes her wild, and because of this she becomes approachable for Heathcliff:

But it was one of their [Catherine and Heathcliff’s] chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at. The curate might set as many chapters as he pleased for Catherine to get by heart, and Joseph might thrash Heathcliff till his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again, at least the minute they had contrived some naughty plan of revenge. (40)

This creates a different kind of openness to Heathcliff than Isabella’s. This is an affinity of character, where Isabella’s relies on the attraction of opposites. Heathcliff is usually considered the type most unacceptable and dangerous for a Gothic heroine to encounter, but Catherine handles him; she understands how cruel Heathcliff can be as she advises Isabella not to approach him, but at the same time, she knows how to get along with him. To Catherine, Heathcliff is never a tyrant; she loves him, including those qualities in him that place her “virtue” in
jeopardy; such elements in his make-up are no longer a danger to her as she knows them well and dwells with them.

Syndy Conger points out that “such assumptions [Catherine’s affirmation ‘I am Heathcliff’ (73)] viewed from the perspective of Gothic tradition, however, are actually not new at all. Catherine’s words echo sentimental love declarations in the pages of Radcliffe and Maturin.”

Admittedly, it is conceivable that Emily was influenced by such sentiments, as well as by other Gothic features she introduced in her novel, but what we need to consider here is what the declaration really means. It is not only a matter of love but also a cry for identity. What Catherine has to confront seems more complex than the conflicts of duty and emotion experienced by more stereotypical Gothic heroines. Conger states that:

Gothic heroines were traditionally placed in a conflict situation between a dark seducer and a fair lover, but theirs was an external conflict; they never felt – admitted they felt – a pull in two directions. Catherine is the first important exception to that pattern, for she internalizes her conflict completely. She is not simply placed between two lovers; she feels divided between two lovers.

However, this does not necessarily imply that Gothic villains are thoroughly wicked – even Schedoni in The Italian and Ambrosio in The Monk show partiality towards their blood relatives, and are tortured by their consciences. As Fred Botting states, “[g]ood was affirmed in the contrast with evil; light and reason won out over darkness and superstition. Antitheses, made visible in Gothic transgressions, allowed proper limits and values to be asserted at the closure of narratives in which mysteries were explained or moral resolutions advanced.”

Gothic characters can usually be divided into two types, the good and the evil, and although it is not easy to explain how human beings fall into evil ways, it is not difficult to tell right from wrong. Gothic heroines belong almost invariably to the good, and wish to escape from the evil to the other, without experiencing any difficulty in choosing between them; their ways of thinking are conventional, and they do not consider the possibility of any middle ground lying between these extremes.

Catherine, on the other hand, has Heathcliff—who is almost the personification of evil and negativity—beside her, even though she chooses Edgar as a marriage partner. Catherine knows something is wrong with her decision: “In whichever place the soul lives—in my soul, and in my heart, I’m convinced I’m wrong!” (70), and suffers from the self-contradiction it commits her to. Catherine knows that she ought to

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15 S. Conger, *op. cit.*, 407.
marry Heathcliff, but cannot give up the wealthy and respectable life that awaits her on becoming Mrs Linton. Catherine does not follow the stereotypical moral injunction; instead, she is divided into (as well as between) her lovers, and struggles to have them both; she cannot choose one of them, but wants them to co-exist in her life.

One element of such ambiguity is evident in Catherine’s willingness to use the kind of categorical judgement of good and evil that we associate with stereotypical Gothic heroines. Though for readers it might not be appropriate to define Heathcliff as an unequivocally evil presence, such a mode of identifying good and evil is at work in Catherine’s psyche: she says Heathcliff is an “unreclaimed creature” (90) to Isabella, but he is her “own being” (73). Catherine knows what is considered to be evil and Heathcliff is not to be categorised as good, but at the same time she cannot simply ignore the fact that Heathcliff is a fundamental part of her existence. However, it is almost surprising that Catherine knows how crafty and dangerous a man might be, whereas other Gothic heroines (like her peers in the novel) show a blind faith in human nature; her unblinking insight into Heathcliff’s characteristics and her sense that he is typical of one kind of man make her stand out in the Gothic genealogy. Emily presents her discriminations and assumptions as being in accordance with the categories of Gothic fiction. Catherine’s desire does not follow her judgement, and it overturns the narrative Emily has inherited and the morality it articulates; she desires both men in different ways, and her choice depends on a system of values of her own which is not identical with, or even in many ways comparable to the general, socially ratified concept; the Gothic definition of the good does not apply to Catherine’s philosophy, though she seems willing to play by its rules, and the bad as the Gothic presents it does not necessarily mean the bad to her, though she sees that others see it to be bad. The contradictions she lives within—not least that between the forcefulness of her disposition and the indecisiveness of her actions—engenders a noncommittal and confusing state of mind and heart, which is the most remarkable difference between Catherine and other Gothic heroines.

Her affection for Heathcliff, which lies outside her marriage and borders on the adulterous, is one aspect of the novel that provides critics with a basis for their assertion that *Wuthering Heights* belongs to the Female Gothic genre. It seems, however, too much to say that Emily denies the foundation of marriage and sexuality. In addition to Pykett and Conger, Diane Hoeveler also argues that Emily is attempting to describe the ideal for women:

She would like to destroy the foundations as well as the generational power of the family, and her scathing depictions of all the marriages in the novel stand as her clearest attempt to do so. Emily Brontë dreams of a world in which there is
neither marrying nor giving in marriage; she dreams of a world populated by passionate but nonsexual force of energy. She dreams of a world not dependent on the use and abuse of female bodies.\textsuperscript{18}

Certainly, Emily does describe an unconventional bond between Catherine and Heathcliff, outside the social standard, but even so, it might be better to say that Emily is not captured by the concept of marriage. Of course, it cannot be denied that Emily is aware of women’s situation and takes that into account, but what she attempts to portray seems to be the close relationship between two people, beyond marital status, and their suffering from self-contradiction. To this end she invokes the recognisable characteristics of Gothic fiction and the plight of its heroines in particular and does so in order to make her readers think beyond the bounds of the typical Gothic plot. We can see this at work when Catherine says:

“The thing that irks me most is this shuttered prison, after all. I’m tired, tired of being enclosed here. I’m wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it.” (141)

The “shuttered prison” could be partly Catherine’s marriage to Edgar, which she recognises as a mistake, but it should be seen also to mean the world in general, which does not understand her reason for suffering. She wants to escape into the “glorious world”, where she can be herself, without being caught by worldly views which do not allow her to satisfy her two different desires at the same time. Catherine wants to be understood: she wants her love Heathcliff by her side, but she also has a desire for a wealthy and peaceful life which she has never experienced before. While recognising that Emily focuses on women, it seems that her intention is not limited to engagement with feminism or the place of women in Victorian society; her reference is more universal and touches on questions of identity as a whole.

Joseph Wiesenfarth says that the riddle both in Gothic novels and in \textit{Wuthering Heights} is “the romantic quest for identity”; Catherine “ciphers but she cannot decipher; therefore, she must die” and Cathy “solves the riddle and lives.”\textsuperscript{19} The “romantic quest for identity” is to find one’s identity within oneself, not in the relations with others. Heathcliff struggles to retain his identity, which depends upon the existence of Catherine, and Catherine forms her identity by thinking of Heathcliff as her perfect sympathiser. Catherine marries Edgar, believing that her


identity has already been secured with Heathcliff; this is where she “ciphers” her own quest for identity, but she fails to “decipher” that of Heathcliff who cannot rest content with the form of relationship she seeks to establish after her marriage. She tries to make her life more affluent with Edgar, but the effect is to drive Heathcliff mad with jealousy and anger, and, as his identity must affect hers, the consequence is far from her ideal of a better life for them both. Instead, she loses her identity and so she feels she cannot live any longer. Thus Catherine works out the wrong solution to the “romantic quest of identity” and dies. As for Heathcliff, he attempts to keep Catherine to preserve his identity via her existence, but it is half gone with Catherine’s marriage, and then the rest is also lost when Catherine dies. Heathcliff’s quest never comes to an end in this world, though he makes a great effort to regain his identity. He also arrives at the wrong answer to the riddle of what he is, and dies. As Terrence McCarthy says, “In Wuthering Heights, love is given in terms of identity, of the pull of forces, of commitment, and of the crippling nature of error.”20 Catherine and Heathcliff’s lives are survival games in the name of pursuit of identity, games which they both lose.

With this idea in mind, it is possible to reread the famous passage in which Catherine recounts her dream. In heaven, Catherine broke her “heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung [her] out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where [she] woke sobbing for joy.” (71) This can be seen as a hint about the “quest for identity”; her marriage to Edgar, presented as a journey to heaven, only causes her pain and death because it runs counter to her true nature. It would be more fitting for her to marry Heathcliff (manifestly unsuitable in the world’s terms) because by doing so she would be earth-bound and be herself. Though knowing that “the heaven”, the easy life with Edgar, is not right for her, Catherine cannot despair of rising above the earth, above her indigent life with Heathcliff, to the promised land Edgar offers, and consequently she follows a path to destruction, in which her identity is broken. In doing so, she also breaks the mould of the Gothic heroine. Rather than achieving a perfect, romantic union with her rescuer and defeating evil, or of dying tragically and leaving the text entirely, Catherine’s fate recasts the apparent happy ending (with Edgar) as a new form of imprisonment and deprivation. On the other hand, her eventual union with Heathcliff rejects the concept of final peaceful happiness and a quiet death, insisting instead on a new identity, uncontained by either marriage or grave. As for Cathy, she reaches a form of life close to the happy conclusion associated with simple romance or “fairy-tale” plots, but she can achieve

this only by being the descendant of both the untamed Catherine and the surprisingly forceful Isabella.

Emily gradually makes her female characters shift into more lively figures; through their horrible experiences, Isabella shows her hidden violent nature, Cathy learns to adjust to others as well as to confront them, and Catherine approaches the question of identity, facing it through encountering self-contradiction and the relentless force of her will. Thus, in *Wuthering Heights*, the traditional Gothic heroines are transformed into several versions of more animated women. More interestingly, these figures, who are different types of women, echo each other, mirror each other, and collaborate with one another to compose a complete picture.

The heroines in *Wuthering Heights* have a fundamental positivity, which enables them to confront Heathcliff and his negative force. They see their own negative sides through Heathcliff, but their positive individual sides, a strength the stereotypical Gothic heroine does not possess, do not permit them to remain as they are. They overcome the negative mode in the novel, and go their own ways: Isabella leaves Heathcliff, Cathy marries Hareton, and Catherine finally draws Heathcliff into her spirit world and perhaps finds peace there. Before the negative force Heathcliff produces, their positivity seems concealed, but there certainly is another force which opposes his power. In *Wuthering Heights*, negativity and positivity co-exist, colliding with each other, and the positive force finally surfaces in the world after Heathcliff’s death.

We should go a step further, however, to see the female characters from a different angle. They certainly share positive sides but in some ways they are different and almost opposite to one another, and what we need to remark here is the differences themselves. Isabella, Cathy, and Catherine, and probably Frances, Hindley’s young wife, as ladies, perhaps unconsciously observe one another and identify themselves by recognising their differences. Each of them shows what others do not have, where they do not belong, what they cannot be, and what they should or should not do. In short, as an opposite or an incomprehensible example, each character helps others to identify themselves. They explore others to find themselves, and see others as distorted mirrors showing that they are not, conversely speaking, what they are.

In other words, the female figures in *Wuthering Heights* provide a counterbalance together, and present an overall picture of women together. This is also an example of doubling pairs that identify themselves with each other, and is one of the Gothic characteristics in *Wuthering Heights*. It would be better to describe them as conflicting doubles as they do not share many aspects, but taken together they create a unity. They are not literally fused into one, but as a group, they
contribute to the novel’s obscure, less intense tension, as each female character throws the others into relief. This is the most significant characteristic of the female characters in *Wuthering Heights* and is the mark of Emily’s individual imaginative world. Rather than regarding these characters as realistic portraits of individual contemporary women’s experiences, or as examples of established literary types, we can take them as a whole, as offering a commentary on the female figure in Gothic fiction and so see how that figure was released by Emily Brontë’s creation from the narrow confines of the Gothic to take part in the more complex and ambiguous world of *Wuthering Heights*.

It seems that Emily deliberately chose to remain closer to the Gothic genre for her creation, and used its characteristics not as they are but transformed through her own imaginative power. Marianne Thormählen states, “[Emily] may have registered the impatience felt by many readers of the Gothic novel with the overly neat explanations which writers like Ann Radcliffe provided by way of conclusions to their stories. Leaving the matter as an open mystery while supplying plenty of subtle indications for readers to deal with or overlook as they see fit was a far more suggestive approach.”

Unlike Radcliffe’s employment of and redirecting of the Gothic so that it travels from superstition to reason, or Jane Austen’s related satire on the unreality of the form, Emily attempts to create a world which neither denies the validity of nor unconditionally approves of the Gothic. It seems that Emily’s interest lies not in simply using the Gothic form itself, but in creating something new from it. Some critics have asserted that she is particularly interested in the sublime of the Gothic, not in the beauty or in the happy ending, but in the moments of ecstasy of such a form. However, I hope that I have shown that Emily is also interested in presenting her own new twist to an old plot, and that readers expecting a Gothic tale (rather as Lockwood expects a ruralist wilderness) come to realise the difference between Gothic and *Wuthering Heights*. What Emily presents in *Wuthering Heights* is fusion, multiplicity and complexity: the supernatural is never explained and it is never surpassed by the natural; they stay together as negativity and positivity restrain one another.

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22 Following Edmund Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), the sublime has been linked with Gothic literature. Among others, see Alison Milbank, “Milton, Melancholy and the Sublime in the Female Gothic”, *Women’s Writing*, 1:2, 1994, 143-60.
Bibliography

Literary Works

Critical Sources

