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Exploring the Emanation of Victorian Gothic in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë

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Abstract:
Victorian Gothic is an amalgamation of psyches tormented by social inheritance and the navigation of the self, while still promulgating the scientific and medical anxieties that were prevalent in the Victorian era. The ideological conflicts and unsaid or rather unprocessed emotions create a substantial foundation for ulterior motives to dwell upon, and move towards more psychologically driven tropes than the primal dispositions of the antecedents of Gothic literature in terms of resurrection, haunted castles etc. *Wuthering Heights* is a quintessential Victorian Gothic novel, with a family setting, a quest for identity and the inherent gesture of Victorian societal construct to look at the uncivilised while portraying a rigidity towards their own framed mannerisms. The evocation of laceration on the psyche, accentuating the psychological concepts of 'The uncanny' by Sigmund Freud, 'The Burkean sublime' by Edmund Burke,'Wolfreys's framework of spectrality'and Freudian psychoanalysis navigates the atmosphere and psychological analysis of Heathcliff as a Byronic hero. Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë is not just a work but a verisimilitude, connoting the Victorian agitations, notions of spectrality and a cataclysm of love, hatred, revenge, perdition with a devoid sense of redemption. It has elements that question the pragmatism and beliefs of the human mind. This article argues that it is a Victorian Gothic text because the horror lies in the human psyche rather than the supernatural.

Keywords: Victorian Gothic, The Uncanny, Burkean the sublime, Wolfreys's framework of spectrality, Freudian psychoanalysis, Byronic hero, Lacanian Mirror Stage, Lacanian pyschoanalysis.

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Introduction

Victorian Gothic Literature explored the abrasions on the human psyche lurking in the Victorian era. While it may sound poetic, the idea holds true for the impact the era had on human cognition which was at the same time pervading in existence. Here the word 'Gothic' cannot be interchangeably used with the word 'Horror'.While the Victorian era was influenced by Romantic Era, morality pivots and was also a muse for the Modern Era, it dealt with a Gothic that delineated calamities based on realism from social and moral orientations. It extinguished a muse intrinsic to the human psyche and kindled one of rapid industrialisation, creating a space which was in concatenation with aberrant and ambiguous behaviour. The era was dealing with the vicissitudes of Humanism and Renaissance ideals, sailing simultaneously on the boat of humanism and industrialism. Victorian Gothic adopted the idea of internalizing and bringing forward the domestic settings. The predecessors of Gothic literature, predominantly the Foundational and Radcliffean Gothic, left an indispensable trace on the psyche of Victorian Gothic. This article intends to justify the Victorian Gothic angle in this work.

The notion of sophisticated, travelogue-like descriptions, torments of male will speak in favour of Catherine Earnshaw for the inclemency she deals with in the novel from the vantage point of Radcliffean Gothic. This predecessor of Victorian Gothic was a feminine promulgation of telling the atrocities and making it 'A gothic of terror'.The 18th century highly dealt with a hostile reception of Gothic Literature as it was pagan-like, derogatory, criticising the barbarity which was antithetical to their mannerisms. In the words of Robert Miles, cited by Susan Chaplin, the Gothic has become since its mid-eighteenth-century origins a ''coherent code for the representation of fragmented subjectivity''(qtd.in Chaplin 5) Victorian Gothic primarily dealt with social realism

and domestic settings. Victorian hauntings encompassed the anxieties as it was a period of rapid industrialisation.

Fabric of Spectrality

The conundrum of moral obligations, romantic predisposition, onset of scientific advancement and the constant chase for an idealistic persona led to fragmented psyches, confusion and much more. Gothic primarily does not accord with the concept of horror as it is a broader term, usually a renunciation of the ideals that are not obvious or receptive within societal or known grounds of morality and conscience. Victorian Gothic was the best way to depict the problems of Victorian society and embracing Gothic driven by phantoms, spectres, consternation, psychic exudation etc. However, what is spectrality?(qtd.in Wolfreys 10) For Derrida, ‘‘the spectral is a concept without concept’’(qtd. in Wolfreys 10) . According to Derrida ‘marks both the possibility and the limit of all idealisation and hence of all conceptualisation’’.Spectrality resists ‘conceptualisation and one cannot form a coherent theory of the spectral without that which is spectral having always already exceeded any definition’. Indeed, the problem is such – or, to put this another way, the condition of haunting and spectrality is such – that one cannot assume coherence of identification or determination (Wolfreys 10). Wolfreys’s framework of spectrality is applied to the narrators. Both Nelly and Lockwood are unreliable narrators:they deliver tales or re-tell the tale, ascertaining lack of coherence with actual incidents, driven by curiosity with Nelly being the mouthpiece of Heathcliff. This creates spectral hauntings and how the past keeps returning and being indifferent to the present. The chronology of events is solely reliant on the renderings of cognitive bias.

Social Atmosphere

Victorian Gothic paralleled the problems that Victorian society dealt with. The social class upheavals and the fact that people of all the 'classes' were now living in 'close' proximity did not leave much room for the people with generational wealth or aristocratic lineage to attest to their self-proclaimed domination in terms of 'Upper-Class'.

Art was more than a means of aestheticism; it was the obsession of Victorian society to create memorabilia, only to hide the shallowness and forged falsehoods of that society under the facade of its intricate and expensive collections. Their fixation on beauty and sophisticated images made them believe in their moral piety leading to a desperate attempt to portray their society as 'virtuous', when we cannot reject the fact that this was the period of significant importance for movements like feminism or the fount of 'the new woman' which contradicted the stereotypical notion of Victorian Women.

The rulebook, from protecting and justifying the purity of womanhood to treating women as monsters, was a reflection of the fear of female autonomy in the male-dominanted society. Another significant fear was that of 'reverse colonisation' where the primitive or colonised forces were believed to take up British society.

Heathcliff as Byronic hero

Heathcliff, who was in a manner adopted by Mr. Earnshaw was condemned by the Earnshaw siblings and was seen as an outcast; even Catherine disdained him. Even though her claim on and outward affection towards Heathcliff could not hide the fact that she would never marry him because of his uncivilised manners and unknown roots of family and the clear manifestation that he was not like them. As she said ''He does not know what being in love is!''(Brontë 92), which

suggests that she wanted security over passion. However, in the later lines she adds more to the postcolonial detestations by saying, ”Nelly, I see now you think me a selfish wretch, but did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power’’(Brontë 93), which suggests the oriental outlook to uplift the colonised people and make them refined in manners and approach. The divide was prevalent, and so were the prejudices behind the bigotry of uncritical fondness.

Heathcliff's portrayal is impertinent and monstrous which makes him a ‘Byronic hero’. The Byronic hero is a hero who entwines love and hate and convolutes them into passion and confusion, because they also reflect the personal battles and dogmas of the hero. He is an iconoclast and unprecedented definition of hero. He renounces the sophisticated ideals of the hero and embraces, if not the visage then at least the shadow of a villain with a quasi-satanic ensemble. The Byronic hero contrives moral ambiguity and is an enigma, both sufferer or tormentor. He gives impetus to the tragic element of a love story and to the conscience of the Victorian era, which was dichotomised between emotions and materialism.The hero ridicules empathy and undergoes psychosis just for a personal vendetta or repressed desire.

Heathcliff's persona can be reasoned on psychoanalytic grounds. He is the paramount Byronic hero, working extrinsically on moral grounds and extrapolating the thirst for revenge from his childhood onto the next generation, creating a transgenerational loop of trauma and grief. His ambiguity corresponds to love catastrophically. This is his answer to the atrocities that Hindley showered upon him, who treated him like a servant, a monster, a fiend. Constant judgement on him as being a misfit or an outcast made him refute the self-identification and instead valorise his incivilities. He intensified the ‘Id’ instead of the ‘ego’. His character development is wrathful,

insinuating the childhood trauma and rejections he faced. His constant habit of cursing and using violence was an imitation of the experiences or a response he got in the past.

The the sublime

His moral justification was to ruin the lives of all who distanced him from Catherine. He was kind towards Catherine only because she always behaved lovingly towards him. In his struggle to resonate with his surroundings, where he is constantly criticised and abused, Catherine was a window to optimism : someone who inflicted pain but the only one who drove him to imprudent passion to pursue her. The Byronic hero inspires the concept of the *Burkean sublime*. According to Burke, whatever befits the notions of danger and terror and has the potential to uproot or akin to terror is a source of the sublime. It has the capability to evoke the strongest emotions and leave imprints on the mind. According to Edmund Burke, ”Without all doubt, the torments which we may be made to suffer are much greater in their effect on the body and mind, than any pleasures which the most learned voluptuary could suggest, or than the liveliest imagination, and the most sound and exquisitely sensible body, could enjoy.”(Burke 104). According to him, pain is stronger in operation than pleasure, as pleasure is volatile but pain has an everlasting impression and that is evident in Heathcliff’s outward behaviour. His sole motive in coming back to Wuthering Heights after three years of disappearance was to avenge all he had suffered. He could never pursue Catherine, as she herself had double grounds and fabricated reasoning. She chose Linton but always loved Heathcliff. Her declaration to Nelly Dean that she is Heathcliff justifies her passion. She became more inclined towards him when he came back, civilised in manners and tone. Her ‘self-complacency’ in knowing that Heathcliff will always love her and in claiming strongly to Isabella that Heathcliff will never choose her shows her self-righteousness. This dogmatic

approach leads her to behave psychotically when she realises that Heathcliff is pursuing Isabella. Heathcliff never loved Isabella, but she was a means to torment Linton and to take revenge on him for stealing Catherine in a way. Isabella was an extension of the pain he wanted to cause to Edgar Linton. She was on the receiving end of a pain she never caused. He even desolated the happiness of his own son.

Everyone's misery reflected the consequences of Heathcliff's anguish. Catherine plagued and ostracised his happiness.

Psychoanalysis and Nuances of German Gothic

According to Freudian psychoanalysis, the conscious mind is just the tip of an iceberg. While the conscious component of the mind seems to be visible, it is not the preponderance of human behaviour. The unconscious drives action and human distress. The human personality, which is fueled by the unconscious, has three components. The id is based on the pleasure principle, the ego functions on the reality principle and the superego works on morality principle. While Heathcliff's personality and decision-making seem to be ruled predominantly by the id component, they also reflect the ego formation based on his experiences as a child in that house. When the human mind cannot handle childhood atrocities, it pushes them into unconsciousness through the process of ‘repression’. These anxieties sometimes percolate out in adulthood. Victorian Gothic successfully portrays these childhood resentments.

The disappearance of Heathcliff for three years and his return‘civilised’and wealthy also hints at the Faustian compromise and representation of motivated reasoning for Catherine. A Faustian compromise means selling one’s soul to the devil for the fulfilment of desires and power, owing nothing to moral frameworks. While it is not clearly mentioned, Victorian Gothic was influenced

by German Gothic.‘The Return’ of Heathcliff suggests German Gothic resonance. In the Schauerroman Gothic, the return of a character is a presentiment of revenge and destruction in Schauerroman Gothic(German Gothic). The ‘Hoffmann influence’ is visible in Heathcliff. E.T.A Hoffmann is a prominent figure in German Gothic, who created male characters so ruthless that they blur the line between imagination and reality. Heathcliff came out of nowhere and was animalistic at times. As Isabella Linton said, “Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?” (Brontë 154)

Heathcliff’s name may evoke speculative meanings of ‘heath’ likely suggesting ‘heathen’ and ‘cliff’, meaning a steep face of rock or mountain. This creates a pagan and terrorising meaning, showcasing the imperialism anxiety. Victorian Gothic highlights imperialism anxiety as generational wealth was perishing, the emergence of bourgeois families, the constant battle to be significant and also a fear of the consequences of asserting dominance and enslavement. Heathcliff is not an ersatz but a true portrayal of that fear. He came back and took revenge on Hindley, enslaved him and made Hareton like himself but worse. He never let him learn proper language or education. This also created a cyclical and vicious form of personal vendetta.

Setting and the Pathetic Fallacy

The weather was not only inclement or, as the name ‘Wuthering’ suggests, stormy but also an outward reflection and symbolic of characters’ manifestations. *Wuthering Heights* is a symbol of the inner turmoil that plummets the persona of Heathcliff. Thrushcross Grange as the name can suggest a positive connotation and can possibly incline towards the bearer of song of happiness and intersecting the suppressed desires and violent actions of Heathcliff. The eerie ‘peace’ foreshadowing of Catherine’s dreadful passion and moral depravity. His perdition lay in finding

life and love only in Catherine and in seeking to uproot the house and security she chose. The Pathetic Fallacy perfectly coordinates with the inner conditions of characters. Victorian Gothic was inspired by the Foundational Gothic constructs of Romanesque or Gothic Architecture with graveyard motifs.

The secluded house is a predisposition of some bad omen. Even the colour of the walls hints at a gloominess that pervades and changes the course of the visitor's experience. The mansion is also a critique of the religious and psychological dogmas of the reader. “That *Wuthering Heights* is about heaven and hell has long been seen by critics, partly because of the pervading religious language, all the narrative voices, from the beginning of Lockwood's first visit to the Heights, insist upon casting both action and description in the Heights, in religious terms, and partly because one of the first Catherine's major speeches to Nelly Dean raises the questions ‘‘What is heaven? Where is hell?” perhaps more urgently than any other speech in an English Novel” (Gilbert and Gubar 57).

Another significant characteristic of Victorian Gothic is a servant who knows the journey and the secrets that are latent behind the pretence, hiding in the dark. Nelly Dean is an example of the same. She gives a detailed account, almost as if she were the spectator of everything that happened. She gives details in a chronological order and not only satisfies Mr. Lockwood’s curiosity but acts as a narrator, turning the events into an interwoven tale. Joseph is a representation of conservative and religious doctrines, reflecting how biblical substance goes unnoticed because of his dialectical vocabulary.

Femme Fatale and The Lacanian Self

Wuthering Heights as a love story is fanatical, defying reason and even defenestrating the acceptable notions of love. The sanctity of Heathcliff and Catherine's bond shows a fiendish side that cannot be completely aligned with lust. Heathcliff's desire to love Catherine persists despite his impressions of her, and her passion fuels his demons. Catherine was the archetypal 'femme fatale '. In Victorian Gothic, the femme fatale is a morally grey female lead or heroine who is explicitly flirtatious or promiscuous and is grounded in bleak, darkly emotional circumstances. She emerged as a consequence of the lack of freedom given to women and eschewed the maidenly, vibrant demeanor of Victorian women. This concept also emerged as a revolt against the disposition of virtue and chastity in women and against the hypocrisy of Victorian sexual and moral ethics. Their love was not just passionate but morally ambiguous, defying the conventions of sanctity of marriage. They drove each other to the brink of madness. Their zenith of love was in reality the nadir of sensibility. They were just outrageous. They both subsequently met the same fate, a maniacal ending, completely bereft of their senses. "The relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff reveals a strong desire for the dissolution of the boundaries of the self. 'Nelly, I am Heathcliff', the young Catherine declares, while Heathcliff asserts that she is his soul, his life."(Punter and Byron 215).

She is self-absorbed, narcissistic. The relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff reveals a strong desire for the dissolution of the boundaries of the self. 'Nelly, I am Heathcliff', the young Catherine declares, while Heathcliff asserts that she is his soul, his life.

"In Lacanian terms, Catherine's and Heathcliff's relationship looks back to the mirror stage when the self is defined not through language but through the reflecting gaze of another, who is, in Catherine's words, 'more myself than I am'. Exiled from this world of imaginary unity, they

struggle repeatedly to recover it. When Catherine is forced to choose between Heathcliff and Linton, she loses the other self that gives her the sense of wholeness.Her only hope lies in death and a spiritual reunion: 'they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me', she tells him" (Punter and Byron 215). It questions the determination to revoke death, the obsession with the afterlife and fixation on 'The Mirror Stage' and the imaginary. The language justifies it and the actions which make up 'The Real' and shows that she returned, and her actions speak more than the language could capture.

When Catherine died, Heathcliff said, "And I pray one prayer-I repeat it till my tongue stiffens-Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you-haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always- take any form-drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my soul! I cannot live without my soul!" (Brontë 188). According to Melvin R Watson, "Since physical union is made impossible by her death—not that it was ever important,—the union must be spiritual, but the world and the people of the world must be subjugated before such happiness can be achieved. The course is set, the wind is strong, the bark is sturdy, the journey long. For seventeen years Heathcliff wreaks his vengeance on Hindley, Edgar, and Isabella and on their children Hareton, young Cathy, and Linton."(Watson 34)

Catherine's Ghost and the Uncanny

Catherine's Ghost is profoundly important. It is the uncannyness of Catherine's ghost that drives Heathcliff towards his catharsis or, 'moral teething'. According to Freud, "the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar."

(Freud 202). It is the way and the response that an individual experiences when something becomes unhomely. The entire existence of Heathcliff was doomed but driven by the motive to love Catherine passionately. “In Heathcliff one looks in vain for Christian morals or virtues; his is a primitive, pagan soul; yet love conquers even a Heathcliff in the end—after his soul has been purged of the hate in and with which he has lived for decades. The evil that he does springs not from a love of evil itself, but from the thwarting of the natural processes of love.” (Watson 37). The entire cyclical pattern is cataclysmic, driven by motive to avenge his unfulfilled desire. He married Isabella Linton only to torment Edgar, Catherine's Husband. He then made Catherine Linton, daughter of Edgar Linton and Catherine Earnshaw, to marry his dying son, Linton Heathcliff.

However the appearance of Catherine's ghost changed Heathcliff. He began to see glimpses of Catherine. As he said to Nelly “I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men and women-my own features -mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!”(Brontë 359).

The appearance of Catherine's Ghost drove him to his end, he confided himself to his chamber before he died. As Nelly Dean said ‘‘I could not think him dead: but his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed-clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still. The lattice, flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill; no blood trickled from the broken skin, and when I put my fingers to it, I could doubt no more: he was dead and stark!”(Brontë 372).

The further description of Heathcliff's death evokes terror as Nelly Dean continued to describe: “ I hasped the window; I combed his black long hair from his forehead; I tried to close his eyes: to extinguish, if possible, that frightful, life-like gaze of exultation before any one else beheld it. They would not shut, they seemed to sneer at my attempts; and his parted lips and sharp white teeth

sneered too!"(Brontë 372). He died but looked like he had given up his conscience and now he is free from worldly obligations and in the afterlife, they are together. Victorian society was obsessed with seances and the afterlife.

Conclusion

To conclude, the evidence presented in the paper has been a humble endeavour to align meticulously the nuances of Victorian Gothic in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. As demonstrated throughout, it becomes evident that *Wuthering Heights* is not just a romantic novel foregrounding passion, but it reconciles the fervour between passion and norms. It transcends the conventional amorous narrative into a critical psychological and social one.

Emily Brontë in her writings presented an eerie atmosphere where lovers were meant to meet and challenge the conventions when blatant sexuality was not so prominent and tracing the insinuations and behavioural calamity, without deliberately attaching a moral lens but creating a coherence between characters and nature. It highlights the potency of Gothic which does not fully reside in diaphanous entities but in the labyrinth of human complexities, repressions and paradoxes that are hard to logically cumulate. Wuthering Heights is one such novel that espoused Victorian Gothic. It critiques the social grounds and moral obligations, foregrounding Freudian, Burkean, Lacanian, Spectrality and other psychological concepts.

The Freudian psychoanalysis helps us understand the 'unconscious' of Heathcliff which is rooted in childhood trauma, repression etc. 'Burkean sublime' contextualises the experience, presenting pain and passion with defiance of morals to become the most profound of human experiences. 'Wolfreys's framework of spectrality' disrupts the linear progression of time and 'the uncanny' by Sigmund Freud and 'Lacanian psychoanalysis' further internalises gothic from paranormal to

psychological and propagates Victorian Gothic as a lens of social realism, psychological complexities and ambiguities of human mind.

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