

Natural Elements in Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights

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Abstract

It is worth mentioning that David Daiches and in a brilliant introduction, to a new edition of *Wuthering Heights*, which was published in 1965, refers to the 'domestic routine' used by Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights* namely ' food' and ' fire'⁽¹⁾.

This research sheds light on the natural elements: fire, water, air, earth and animals used by Bronte in her classics. These elements are used metaphorically and conventionally to reflect the way Emily Bronte conceived of the romantic atmosphere in which her characters lived, which are in turn a reflection of her world experience and speculations. Emily seems to have been happy only at home and in the inner world of imagination.

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In the very beginning of the novel we are given minute details about the domestic life at Wuthering Heights as reflected by Mr Lockwood, the principal narrator, when he notes that "the kitchen is forced to retreat altogether into another quarter" and he observes "no signs of roasting, boiling, or baking about the huge fireplace"⁽²⁾, and this, of course, reflects the nature of inhospitality of the house owner, Mr. Heathcliff. The violence of the weather seems to be reflected in the characters' behaviour. Furthermore, he notices "the huge, warm cheerful 'apartment' glowing 'delightfully in the radiance of an immense fire' "(p.47). The effect is to contrast the warm interior with the cold weather outside. What makes Lockwood "in fact" to drive a four mile walk on a cold January day-is that the fire in his room is out '... stepping into the room, I saw a servant girl on her knees surrounded by brushes and cool-scuttles and raising an infernal dust as she extinguished the flames with heaps of cinder" (p.51). The cold hospitality;-of Heathcliff is at variance with the blazing warmth of his house⁽³⁾. At Thrushcross Grange the fire was deliberately put out, when Lockwood arrived at Wuthering Heights with its "immense fire". In the morning and after that terrifying night, Lockwood finds Zilla burning flakes of flame up the chimney with a "colossal bellows, and Mrs. Heathcliff, kneeling on the hearth,

reading a book by the aid of the blaze' (pp.71-72). And when at night, Lockwood descended to rekindle his candle, he had found "a gleam of fire raked compactly together'. Returning home, Mr Lockwood finds his solace- in restoring his animal heat' and he sits to enjoy the cheerful fire and smoking coffee which the servant "has prepared for him as refreshment" (p.73).

Fire' is referred to recurrently and immensely in *Wuthering Heights*,⁽⁴⁾ when Catherine accompanied by Heathcliff is attacked by dogs at Thrushcross Grange and her real identity is revealed by Mr Linton, he orders the woman servant to bring her "a basin of warm water' to wash her feet and "a plate of cokes... negus' to eat and finally they give her a pair of enormous slippers and wheel her ' to fire". When Isabella arrives at the Heights, she finds Joseph bending over the 'fire' making porridge. Though the house is dirty and neglected, she finds 'great fire". Isabella, running away from Heathcliff's tyranny, throws her wedding ring into the "fire" and among coals threatening he (Heathcliff) will buy another 'if he gets me back."

Moreover, Emily Bronte has used a complex symbolism to express the contrast between the "fireless' grate of Thrushcross Grange and the 'roaring fire' of Wuthearing Heights⁽⁵⁾. This can be

applicable, too, to the inhabitants of both houses. The inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights* are described as the children of 'storm' and 'fire', whereas, those of *Thurshcross Grange* are described as the children of "calm" and "ice" as Lord David Cecil has rightly remarked⁽⁶⁾.

Heathcliff is described in terms of rocks and trees and wild animals. His love for Catherine is described as a "firing" love comparing with the 'cold' love of Edgar⁽⁷⁾. Catherine, herself, refers to this point when she describes her love and feeling, in that famous scene, to Nelly Dean as a 'moon beam' for Edgar and as 'lightening-to Heathcliff, 'forest' and 'fire' respectively.

The moorland setting of the novel gives it a power beyond anything which the action itself can convey. The most powerful forces that reside in the depths of human nature have no relation with the artificial world of civilization and gentility, but they do have a relation to the elemental forces at work in the natural world⁽⁸⁾.

'Fire' is traditionally associated with life and light as well as with heat. In *Wuthering Heights* it is usually the centre of life, but it is also associated with emotion used metaphorically in the description of character.

'Water' in *Wuthering Heights* takes several forms: snow, rain, stream of tears. Like the other elements, water images are common and significant. At the very beginning up to night Lockwood "arrived at Heathcliff's garden just in time to experience the first feathery flakes of a snow shower"(p.51). Here, we see *Wuthering Heights* associated with storm and hostile elements, like the air "cold and impalpable ice" when Nelly and Cathy go for a walk "on an afternoon in October-or the beginning of November-a trush watery afternoon, when the turf and paths were wrestling with moist withered leaves and the cold blue sky was half hidden by clouds, dark grey streamer rapidly mounting from the west, and bounding a bundant rain-I requested my young lady to foreget her ramble.....I was certain of shower "(p.262). In this passage, the 'bounding rain' reflects Cathy's mood: "She wen; sadly on, there was no running or bounding now-: though the chill wind might well have tempted her to race" (p.263). Heathcliff describes his passion towards Catherine as "it is not my fault that I cannot eat or rest you might as well bid a man struggling in the water rest within arms - length of share ! I must reach it . first, and then I'll rest." (p.363). The metaphore of the 'struggling man' conveys forcefully the primitive elemental nature of his passion⁽⁹⁾. When Nelly discovered the dead Heathcliff she comments "I could not think him

dead-but his face and throat were washed with rain; the bed clothes dripped, and he was perfectly still"(p. 364). The 'rain' in this, passage stands for the 'bliss' and 'mercy' of heaven because Heathcliff seems to 'smile' when 'he was dead and stark"(p.365).

The moors are the setting for the novel-the place where Catherine and Heathcliff are at home, even in death. The moors represent for them freedom-escape from the tyranny of Hindley-and the place of which Catherine dream (her "heaven"⁽¹⁰⁾). In real life Emily 'loved the moors in all seasons and weathers know the remote and secrete corners, and made herself familiar with there birds animals, and flowers"⁽¹¹⁾. And the earth, the place of their final union, for which both Catherine and Heathcliff long. Many of the references to the earth in the novel are associated with death and graves. Catherine's love for Heathcliff "resembles the eternal rocks beneath a source of little visible delight, but necessary "(p.122). Catherine seems to belong to the moors and to Heathcliff, not. significantly to heaven as seen through conventional Christian eyes⁽¹²⁾. She explains to Nelly why she should marry Edgar, who is identified in the novel with traditional Christian values. Heathcliff, on the other hand, is associated in the novel with anti-Christian forces-Satan, the Devil, ghoul, vampire, Hell and with forces of Nature: the moors, the wind,

rain and snow. His name alone demonstrates his affinity with moor and rock. Catherine's grave is as close to the moor, to which she belongs "and it was dug on a green slope in corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so slow that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat almost buries it "(p.205). Emily Bronte tells us that Catherine is not buried in the chapel, nor with either" Linton's family or her own. She does not ----- with any of those, but-to wild, natural forces which are her and Heathcliff s true element⁽¹³⁾.

In the final paragraph of the novel Mr Lockwood notices "three headstones on the slope next the moor-the middle one, grey, and half buried in heath-Edger Linton's only harmonized by turf and moss, creeping up -its foot-Heathcliff still above "(p.367). Peace has, at last, descended on and enveloped this passionate, violent world the sky is "benign", the mothes "flutter" and the "wind" is "soft" , the "sleepers" " slumber" in the "quiet" earth.

Concerning the wind and the air they are presented as bearers of the storm in *Wuthering Heights*, in them is centred much of the voilence and the passion the reader may find in the novel⁽¹⁴⁾. When Mr Lockwood manages to escape from Wuthering Heights after his

terrible night there he still emerges into a hostile environment to which he does not naturally belong: the air is "cold as impalpable ice". Emily Bronte manages to convey the insubstantiality of Catherine's ghost through the image of air. Heathcliff remarks "I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above close to the edge of the grave, and bending down ... There was another sigh, close to my ear. I appeared to feel warm breath of it displacing the sleet laden wind" (p.103). Catherine is a "sign", a "warm breath", which replaces the "sleet-laden wind". Her physical body cannot withstand "the air", as the sexton warns Heathcliff when he opens the coffin.

Most the animal images in the novel suggest the aggressive, violent nature of the characters they describe ⁽¹⁵⁾. Wild animals are much used in description of Heathcliff, who is "a wolfish man, as 'evil beast", and "foams like a mad dog". Gentle animals are often referred to with contempt; Edgar is 'sucking leveret' and Heathcliff says of Edgar, "Cathy, this lamb of yours threatens like a bull!" (p.153). And Catherine joins Heathcliff's attack on Edgar with "Heathcliff would as soon lift a finger at you as the king would march his" army against a colony of mice" (p.154). Linton is a 'puling chicken', Hareton "a calf, But not all frail things are despised. Catherine is 'soft and mild as a

dove', and at the end . of the book moths flutter over Heathcliff's grave, and a soft wind blows through the grass.

Emily Bronte moves easily and naturally among symbols. The symbols at the heart of the book are of wild and tame, fierce and gentle, dark and fair. Moreover, references to windows, gates and doors are recurrent images in *Wuthering Heights*. All window images in the novel suggest barriers, which separate characters from each other and from their hopes or desires. The images of gates and doors serve very much the same purpose as windows in the novel. Shut, they represent barriers between people, open, they suggest barriers removed. Hardly is there any book on *Wuthering Heights* that tackles these images. Indeed, the 'window' image pervades the book, both as a metaphor and as actual physical sheet of glass. Finally, we can say that Emily Bronte's images are largely drawn from the natural world, and most of them from the harsh expanses of the moor. And her strength is her use of imagery, and in this her prose often approaches the condensation of poetry⁽¹⁶⁾.

Emily Bronte uses in *Wuthering Heights* what Neil McEwas has rightly called "prose-poetry, which is elaborate and rich in rhythm and metaphor. This type of style is used by nineteenth century novelists

such as: Dickens, the Bronte sisters and Thomas De Quincey⁽¹⁷⁾. It will be more helpful, therefore, to attempt to understand Emily Bronte's use of natural elements with reference to her poetic imagination, which is considered, perhaps, the cornerstone of romanticism. We have to conclude pointing out that Emily Bronte is a creator rather than an interpreter in this aspect. In the words of C.M. Bowra, the single characteristic that distinguishes the English Romantics from the 18th century writers is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination, and the special view they held of it ⁽¹⁸⁾.

Notes

1. David Daiches, *An Introduction to Wuthering Heights* (Harmondsworth. Penguin Books, 1965)P.19
2. Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books. 1982) PP46-47. Further references to this edition will parenthetically be cited in the text.
3. Daiches, p.25
4. Sheila Sullivan, *Studying the Bronte's* (Hong Kong: Longman, York press, 1986)p.103

5. Jane O'Neill, *Wuthering Heights: A work sheet guide* (Lincolnshire: York press Limited. 1992) p. 9.
6. *Early Victorian Novelists*. (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books 1948) p.52.
7. Daiches, p. 13.
8. Kate Flint, *The Return of the Repressed: Passion and Violence in Wuthering Heights* in M.Allott(ed.) *The Brontes: the Critical Heritage* (London: Kegan Paul, 1974) p.28
9. O'Neill, p. 16.
10. O'Neill. p. 9
11. Sullivan. p. 93.
12. Sullivan, p. 110.
13. I.Gregor(ed.), *The Brontes: Collection of Critical Essays*, (New York : Prentice-"Hall 1970) p.48.
14. Kate Flint, p. 30.
15. O'Neill. p. 20.
16. Neil McEwas, *Style in English prose* (Hong Kong: Longman.1986) p. 41.
17. McEvvasp. 41.
18. *The Romantic Imagination* (London: Vision Press, 1950), p.46.

ملخص

عناصر الطبيعة في رواية أميلي برونتي مرتفعات وذرنبج

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من الجدير بالذكر ان ديفد دجز وفي مقدمته الرائعة لطبعة جديدة من مرتفعات وذرنبج والتي نشرت عام 1965 أشار إلى الحياة العائلية الروتينية التي استخدمتها أميلي برونتي في هذه الرواية وبشكل خاص "الطعام" و "النار"، يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على عناصر الطبيعة: "النار"، "الماء"، "الهواء"، "الأرض" والحيوانات التي استخدمتها أميلي في رائعها مرتفعات وذرنبج . حيث استخدمتها أميلي بصورة مجازية وتقليدية تعكس الصورة التي كانت تفهم بها الجو الرومانسي الذي عاشت فيه شخصياتها والتي هي نفس الوقت انعكاس لتجربتها الحياتية وتأملاتها. ويبدو أن أميلي لم تكن تشعر بالسعادة إلا في منزلها وفي عالم خيالها.

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