**Chapter 6, Wuthering Heights: abroad**

Most early British critics criticized the roughness of Wuthering Heights but also praised its power and originality. But the American critics only criticized it and didn’t see anything positive in it, and also criticized the author.

**Activity 1**

The contrasting worlds of WH and TG represent a **conflict** between northern rural values and the urban cultures of the south of England. To Lockwood, the north is a foreign place, while to the inhabitants of the north, London and the south are foreign. Heathcliff is foreign, his foreign appearance, his unknown origins, and his fortune that he made in the time he spent away from WH.

**Heathcliff** is the most obvious representative of 'abroad' in the novel. He enters the domestic scene from another world: from the streets of Liverpool, the imperial trading port where Mr Earnshaw finds him, and from elsewhere before that. **Mr Earnshaw** said that (he is as dark as if it came from the devil, a gipsy child, speaking some nonsense foreign tongue. He might be a little Lascar or an American or Spanish castaway). **Lockwood** describes him as (a dark-skinned gipsy). **Nelly** adds to the list of possible origins by recommending that he might be a prince in cover, (who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen?). Heathcliff's foreignness is connected to the romantic genre, he is represented as a romantic her. Heathcliff represents the marginalised in the society. His ethnicity is unknown and his class seems to be that of a beggar. More specifically, Bronte's description of him is similar to that of starving Irish workers who came to Liverpool during the great famine in Ireland. Also this description of him connects him to realism, everyone is trying to guess his origins, and all these guesses are connected to contemporary issues of that time. The mystery over Heathcliff's origins, over his place when he disappears from the novel, and over the source of the wealth which he returns with, connect him to the world of commercial industry and colonial exploitation, although it’s all just suggestions and nothing is confirmed. There is no specific location for the colonial contexts of this novel. However, this lack of specificity opens up many possible connections, which have been explored in postcolonial and cultural criticism.

**The Uncanny**

Wuthering Heights combines realistic storytelling with some of the most fantastical modes of Romantic narration, to which the concept of the uncanny is central.

**Activity 2**

Here we'll look at the **features of Uncanny** in Wuthering Heights. The Uncanny is a concept that has no single definition. It's what disturbs our sense of the familiar, what is known, or what is of the family. So the familiar is close to our theme of home. The uncanny is the strange and unfamiliar, which relates to our theme of abroad. Lifeless objects that move are uncanny, as, for example, statues or portraits in Gothic novels. The sense of an active presence within lifeless nature might be described as uncanny. For example, the final paragraph of WH describes a wind that 'breathes' through the grasses.

The **grotesque** is another quality that might be associated with the uncanny (it means that in a familiar place, something unfamiliar happens). There are many grotesque moments in WH, e.g. the ghost (unfamiliar) that appears in the house (familiar). Also, Heathcliff's behaviour during his final encounter with Catherine, when he seems to Nelly a creature of another kind. Critics **Bennet and Royle** list some of the common features of the uncanny, emphasising how the uncanny defamiliarises (how it turns home into abroad). The uncanny is a sense of strangeness, mystery or foreignness. It's a sense of unfamiliarity that appears at the heart of the familiar, or else a sense of familiarity which appears at the heart of the unfamiliar. The uncanny is not just a matter of the weird or spooky but has to do more with a disturbance of the familiar.

**Heathcliff** is connected to the theme of home and abroad, he's also connected to the concept of uncanny. His otherness and his foreign origins are central to his uncanny nature. Also, the two houses in WH can be seen as uncanny. There's no single concept of home in the novel, no specific idea about how a home should be. We have two different homes, which is also disturbing. Also how Lockwood was able to describe the whole house when he first entered, which wasn't a familiar idea to the contemporary readership (the Victorian reader). In that time, the bedrooms and the private spaces in the house weren't supposed to be seen by guests, and this wasn't the case in WH homes, so this's uncanny.

**Wuthering Heights and Romantic poetry**

Bronte's language in the passage in P.387 builds up a sequence of balancing phrases and **rhythmic repetitions**, just as poetry often does. These draw attention to the ways in which the effect of the passage results from the **musicality of the language** as from the actual meaning of the words used. These effects are not just for poetry, but the prose is described as 'poetic' when these qualities are outstanding in it. Also, its diction (the words that the writer chose) is suggestive of poetry. This passage is described as a 'dramatic poem' because of the way it is delivered by Heathcliff. It's a **dramatic monologue** (a poem in which an imaginary speaker addresses an imaginary audience). The novel's relationship with poetry is a crucial aspect of its composition. Both Bronte's own work as a poet and her extensive reading of poetry had a great impact on the language and rhythms of Wuthering Heights.

**Wuthering Heights and Romanticism**

WH's connections with Romantic literature are strong in its portrayals of **romantic union** and of the **natural world**. Specific references to Romantic poetry underpin Catherine and Heathcliff's passionate love. The relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine remains one of **sibling love** (pure love) rather than adulterous romantic passion.

A further link with Romanticism is apparent in the novel's constant recall of the **natural world**, and the notion of an earthly afterlife for some of the protagonists. Throughout WH, every mood and season in nature is described. She didn’t just describe the dark and stormy aspects of the nature, but described the bright side too such as trees and birds.

Romantic ideas of the importance the **human nature**, about Heathcliff’s desire for revenge, and how his childhood experience contributed to the formation of his character. In telling the story of Heathcliff's progress from a poor orphan to a revengeful gentleman-capitalist, Wuthering Heights shares aspects of the Romantic Bildungsroman, or 'novel of education'.

**Wuthering Heights and the world within**

Everyone perceives the novel differently due to our different backgrounds, perspectives, and how we read the novel. If we read the story as a realistic story, our understanding of it will be different from reading it as a romantic story, and vice versa. If we focus on the male protagonist, Heathcliff, rather than the female, Catharine, our understanding will differ, too. Also, the contemporary world of the reader affects our understanding. We read the story differently from how the Victorian readers. Our worlds, contemporary problems, and issues are different. The Victorian reader didn't focus on the political and economic context as we, the 21st-century reader, do. But the Victorian reader was able to find connections between the world within the novel and the real world with its issues and problems like colonisation, the Irish immigration, marginalised people, racism, and sexism. Also, there was a focus on the psychoanalysis of Heathcliff, what is the psychological motive behind his tendency to violence and revenge?

From a psychological perspective, while self-control was important to achieving a balance between the forces within each individual, suppressing these forces produces a revolution, and this’s what happened with Heathcliff. Also, his psychology might be understood as a microcosm of aggressive capitalism abroad. Heathcliff is not mad, Nelly assures us that his actions are perfectly sane, apart from his monomania (obsession) over his attachment to Catherine. So Heathcliff is mad, but only in one aspect.

**Theology and domestic ideals**

Bronte connects the **afterlives** of her protagonists to the Earth rather than Heaven, suggesting a pantheistic (existential) rather than conventionally Christian worldview, which is kind of uncanny. The relationship of Heaven and Hell is brought into question from the point of Catherine's speech (refer to p393). Catherine tells Nelly about her dream of heaven. She says that she was crying and miserable, she doesn’t want to stay there. She says that her heaven is not God's heaven but it is on earth where Heathcliff is. Heathcliff shares her idea of heaven but he says that his heaven is under the earth where Catherine is buried.

Bronte's novel contains **Miltonic elements**, among them are the links between Heathcliff and Milton's fallen angel Satan. From the start, Heathcliff is seen as the Devil. Nelly, Isabella and Catherine herself compare him with the Devil. To Isabella, his eyes are windows of hell from which a monster looks out.

**Gilbert and Gubar's** reading of Bronte's relationship with Milton contributed to a shift of focus from Heathcliff to the novel's female characters, Cathy. Previous readings tended to concentrate on Heathcliff as the force of rebellion, while Gilbert and Gubar’s reading of Wuthering Heights makes it a powerful text of feminist revolution. Catherine becomes the protagonist of a female Bildungsroman (a novel dealing with one person's developmental years or spiritual education), with Heathcliff as her alter-ego, her alternate personality.

Wuthering Heights both **reflects and challenges** some of the dominant feminine ideals. Catherine Earnshaw is a rebel against feminine nature. She is an independent character who frequently rebels against authority, she doesn’t behave in the way she’s expected to, she goes out of her way to make sure she gets what she wants, and her decisions regularly have a huge impact on the plot. But also, like any other woman in the late 18th century, she’s under huge social pressures that make her eventually give up. Although she wants to run around on the moors all day with Heathcliff, she knows that due to class and gender-based limitations, she’ll never be free to marry him. Cathy is a character ahead of her time. She’s a wild, reckless, passionate young woman in a time where that kind of behavior was restrained. She starts off as a tomboy who doesn't care about her appearances and laughs at the kind of expectations placed on other women. She has limited power, but she does what she can with what she’s got. When she marries Edgar Linton and becomes a lady, she’s clearly unhappy, regrets her decision and eventually starves herself to death. This's clearly **a criticism** of the expectations placed on 18th-century women. She marries Edgar in pursuit of class and social standing. But being forced into the role of a perfect wife and mother literally kills her, which is a very rebellious idea for the Victorian society. Feminist critics turned our attention to the idea that this novel is a dramatization of female rage. For Catherine, the end point of rebellion is death. In Gilbert and Gubar's view, this is because her submission in marriage to Edgar Linton has starved her nature of its true wild and uncivilised home.

**A 'fall into culture'?**

Wuthering Heights dramatizes a struggle between **nature and civilisation**, which reflects Romantic ideas about the superiority of nature over culture. George Lewes' criticism is one of the first critical responses to the novel. His evaluation identified Catherine's divided attraction to Edgar and Heathcliff as the centre of the drama played out in the two competing locations of the novel. While Edgar is an appropriate husband, she loves Heathcliff with a passionate abandonment which sets culture, education, the world, at resistance. Gilbert and Gubar's sympathies were on the side of nature, and they assumed that Bronte's were too. For them, Wuthering Heights, for all its cruelty, provided an authentic sphere for Catherine and Heathcliff's true uncivilised natures. Also, the injury that forces Catherine to enter the world of Grange symbolized the oppression of women within middle-class domesticity. Eventually, Catherine marries Edgar, meaning that civilization won over nature. However, some critics could argue that, although she married Edgar, she was still in love with Heathcliff and eventually died.

**Domestic readings of Wuthering Heights**

This novel can be read in different ways or from **different perspectives**. Some critics chose to focus on Heathcliff as the main protagonist, others focused on Catherine or the feminine part of the novel, others focused on the Romantic/Realistic elements in it. Lewes's view of the civilisation/nature conflict has connections with feminist readings that see the more radical aspect of the novel that doesn't support the idea of a union with Heathcliff as a rebellious ideal, but in the sense that Catherine has reasons to desire both Heathcliff and Edgar. Such a reading highlights the ways that the contrasting male characters in the novel are alike in their misuse of power. It is possible to see Catherine's desire for a well-ordered home as reasonable and to say that she only died due to being forced to choose between Heathcliff and Edgar rather than her false choice of Edgar. Bronte added a second part of the novel, bringing the Wuthering Heights' family closer to the gentler order of the Grange. Such a reading means that we can perceive the idea of the domestic as being of major importance within the novel, rather than something to be dismissed in favour of a transcendent Romantic ideal. This settlement of the domestic alongside the Romantic elements in the novel seems more similar to Bronte's aesthetic practice of mixing romance and realism. The categories of romance and realism, home and abroad, coexist as much as they compete in the novel.

In terms of its **genre**, the novel can be seen as following a continuous progression away from the mainly Gothic mode of the first-generation story towards the form of realist domestic fiction that dominated the Victorian novel. The first-generation story is characterised by domestic violence, a forced marriage and imprisonment, while the second-generation story ends with a change of the hero and heroine into the nuclear family and a shift towards the gentler home-world of Grange. So, the novel indicates both changing patterns of fiction and the emergence of new forms of the family. Feminist readings of the second-generation plot view it as either a retelling or a revision of the first-generation story, depending on whether they read the novel as voicing protest against the victory of patriarchal power or as describing its reform. The constant overlapping of the Gothic and the domestic is one of the unique features of this novel. There is certainly no schematic separation of genres. The Gothic is used from the start to show the shadow side of the Victorian domestic ideal, which can leave women the unequal partners under domestic oppression, and it continues in the power of the ghosts of Cathy and Heathcliff to disturb us until the end.

**Domestic reading in Wuthering Heights**

This part focuses on the importance of **reading and books in the novel**. Books and reading were shown in various parts of the novel. Catherine's diaries are in the form of notes written on the side of the pages of a copy of the Bible. This could be a sign of her revolution against religion. However, writing in the margins of books might be a sign of Catherine's marginal family and gender status. Books are not only symbols of intellectual independence and resistance to oppression. They have a **material presence and value**, e.g. Lockwood piles books against the window to try and keep Catherine's ghost out, and Edgar goes to his books when in conflict with his wife to get rid of tensions or to escape from the problems. The second Catherine uses books as currency in her trade with someone who helps her to visit Wuthering Heights and ultimately also with Hareton. She was also deprived of her books by Heathcliff. Also, Hareton's desperate desire to read suggests the empowering value of culture. Under Catherine's mockery of his illiteracy, he burns with shame and burns his store of books. But when Lockwood returns to Wuthering Heights in the following September, he finds Catherine teaching Hareton to read. Heathcliff's discovery of Catherine and Hareton reading together seems a crucial point in his loss of appetite for revenge. Reading books can empower the reader. Nelly has a small library, she reads to be part of Earnshaw family. She believes that if she has the ability to read she will be like them. She has the ability to narrate the story because she is educated. Her literacy gives her a voice that is not usually available to a servant.

Composed by: Mennah Alshafey.