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The Gothic element in the Bronte novels

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THE GOTHIC ELEMENT IN THE BRONTE NOVELS

by

Barbara Muir Butler

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

THESIS

THE GOTHIC ELEMENT IN THE BRONTE NOVELS

by

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(A.B., Atlantic Union College, 1944)

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Although the Bronte sisters are not usually classed among the half dozen or so truly great English novelists, their positions in the scale of rating lie not far below. That two sisters (For Anne's work basks only in the reflected glory of Charlotte and Emily,) should produce novels of such a different spirit and yet of such a similar quality is indeed phenomenal. Although one wonders timidly at times if they have not been over-rated, their various influences on English literature, from both artistic and historical points of view, cannot be disputed. There is always an amount of shoptalk about any successful writer, and it is not to be wondered at that around major writers whole schools of legend, fact and fiction, develop. But the library which has mushroomed concerning the Brontes would do justice to a Shakespeare. Sired by Mrs. Gaskell's memorial biography of Charlotte which came out with a speed unusual in those days, and comparable even to Hollywood today, more and more volumes have continued to run in the Bronte derby. The romantic elements of their lives have been exploited by myriads of biographers, each seemingly refuting at white-hot speed the

ideas and opinions of some unfortunate predecessor; novelists and dramatists have had a heyday; and, of course, so typical of the twentieth century, the vulture psycho-analysts have not overlooked this very meaty prey. Even the critics, fortunately less prone to excitable prejudices, are contradictory and confusing in this matter of the Bronte sisters. Poor modest Charlotte and even the aloof and independent Emily would most assuredly be bewildered to know the controversial fervor which they have aroused.

Occasionally an incidental reference will mention that among other things a certain character or description is "faintly Gothic", but despite the quantities of material written about the Brontes, I could find no one who has treated the Gothic elements as an entity. That Gothicism featured not only in the works of Emily and Charlotte, but in their lives as well, is a significant factor and equally so with many others which have been fully exhausted. One pamphlet, anonymous and long-since unavailable, bore the title of The Difference between the Spirit of Wuthering Heights and the Gothic Novels; this writer obviously recognized the kinship, but only negatively.

. In the field of English literature, the term Gothic

is used primarily in reference to a school of novelists who flourished during the second and third quarters of the eighteenth century. Their distinguishing characteristics were the abandonment of analysis and ridicule to return to the magic, mystery, and chivalry of medieval times. Making no homage to credulity, by extravagant and superstitious portrayal of the strange and marvelous, they carried on a morbid search for new sensations. Using nature as a stimulus and appealing to all the senses, the sensations aroused were mainly physical ones, with emotional effect excited only through the impact of the physical.

But Gothicism has also come to be applied to another phase of literature, the very early romantic poetry of the late ~~seventeenth~~ ^{eighteenth} century. Quiet in tone and subtle in effect, this poetry has its resemblance to the Gothic novels in that it too was experimenting with new sensations--new because they had not been exercised for a long time. Delving deep into imaginative wells, these poets found what was to them a very unusual subject matter, psychological tendencies and reactions. They used the ruins and graveyards of the Gothic novelists, but only incidently, for their object was in subjects freely imagined and passionately felt, a total suffusion of emotion.

These various distinctions in the term Gothic, which phases were adopted by the Brontes and to what extent, are discussed in more detail in the third chapter.

It is true that Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre so far surpass any of the best of the Gothic school as to be classed entirely distinct from them. Reading these two books which treat with such rudimentary experiences of life makes the question of minor sources and techniques seem comparatively paltry. It would be pompous and erroneous to pretend here that Gothic elements ruled the Brontes' lives and art, but that Gothicism does appear in quantity and in quality is undeniable. Where the Brontes acquired it and how they used it, is the subject of the following discussion.

CHAPTER II

GOTHIC INFLUENCES IN THE BRONTE
LIVES AND ART

There are four primary and distinct circumstances which favored the growth of Gothicism in the works of Charlotte and Emily. These conditions apply also to Anne, although less definitely. First of all, the neighborhood of their home; second, the character of their dispositions; third, the quality of their experience: and last, their acquaintance with contemporary literature.

So much emphasis has been placed upon the force of Haworth upon the personalities of the Brontes that it is impossible to contribute anything new in that direction, and further repetition is superfluous. Suffice to say that village life in Haworth was uninteresting, apparently quite barren of inspiration for its famous writers. Geographically it was circled by the wild, bleak moors, more often gloomy than genial in atmosphere and mood, usually raw and cloudy rather than otherwise. That such surroundings did have a profound effect has already been well established. In character and disposition, the sisters were naturally sensitive and impressive as persons of genius conventionally are. They

were inordinately influenced by the natural environment around them which seemed always closely akin to their moods and feelings.

Their personalities were not of the innately joyous and optimistic type. Emily was the stoical mystic, escapist lover of the moors and home, free and unyielding in all her life, as she was even in the last minutes as she struggled with death. Anne was beautiful, quiet and secretive, always a shadow in contrast to the vivid strength of her sisters. She too met death in the serene submission so characteristic of her life. Charlotte was the most womanly of the three, fussy, practical, conscientious, and ambitious, she was consistently the leader of the family. The outstanding qualities of her writing reveal the outstanding qualities of her personality, accuracy, insight, understanding, passion, doubt, and success. Charlotte was just the one to have a martyr death.

It is true that young people of great talent very commonly write depressing books, but the consistency of not only their books and minor writings, but the whole tenor of their lives and even incidental conversations never breaks the mood of that distinctive seriousness which is often found in Gothic romance. To the Brontes, life was real and earnest. This

conformity is hardly coincidence; as Wilson(1) points out, all four of the Bronte children who reached maturity had some sort of more or less exaggerated neurosis. Anne suffered from deep melancholia of a religious variety which is most poignantly expressed in her own lines, "O God, if there is a god, Help my soul, if I have a soul!" Branwell's various delusions and abnormal conceit are notorious; he chose drink as a remedy. Emily is said to have suffered from a persecution mania. When aroused she would weep, turn pale and then stark white with temper which never failed to frighten her sisters. She always felt that she had been the unwanted child and her Gondal poems, as well as Wuthering Heights, always feature the "doomed child." Even Charlotte, by far the most social and maternal of them all, once had an aggravated form of religious mania in which she went almost insane with the conviction that she was to be eternally damned. In such periods of stress Charlotte would become ill and was unable to eat. Old Patrick Bronte, not being outdone, would get into savage moods which were strangely relieved by an exciting session of pistol shooting out of a

(1) Romer Wilson, The Life and Private History of Emily Jane Bronte, p. 287.

favorite second story window. All this makes the parsonage seem like a strange and awful menage. Perhaps these idiosyncracies are little more than those unpublished ones of most people: perhaps they are only the price exorted which so often accompanies the gift of great talent. But it is significant that the strangeness which ran in the Bronte family is of that nature to adapt itself to the gloominess and dark imaginings characteristic of the Gothic School. When Charlotte writes in Villette of her experience with a confessional in a Catholic church or when she describes melancholia as in The Professor (following his proposal to Francis), she is not just creating; and when Emily cries the mysticism of the moors, it comes not from a feigned experiment with emotion, but from a deeply-rooted, natural disposition.

One of the happy results of the Bronte success story is the refutation of the well-worn belief that in order to write about life, one must have "experience of life". Certainly if there was anything the Brontes did not have, it was "experience of life" in the ordinary conception of the term. Living to themselves exclusively, they achieved their experience through two channels: the family life, and their chief contact with the outside world, their reading material.

Fortunately both of these avenues allowed full freedom for natural propensities to develop.

Perhaps the earliest memories retained by Charlotte and Emily were of the six, motherless children roaming unrestricted and unrestrained over the moors, developing that independence of spirit which was to be such an integral part of their natures ever afterward. With a father who was not by nature convivial to those whom he lived with and who was, moreover, occupied with parish duties, they were left much to their own devices, and the entertainment they created for themselves was just as romantic as their imaginative minds could produce. Their games were original, sometimes patterned after the lives of favorite heroes like Wellington, or adventurous affairs called "Islanders". Tabby, the cook, would sometimes sing folk ballads and tell fairy tales, exciting ones--nothing mediocre would satisfy Charlotte or Emily--or stories of the hard and reckless doings among the people of the moors. Sometimes Mr. Bronte would emerge from his usual solitude to tell fantastic, legendary stories of Yorkshire or Ireland, so rich in Gothic details such as opening of graves, tampering with coffins, outbursts of passion so similar to the early Scandinavian and Icelandic

myths like the Lay of Helgi, and so similar to Emily's own Gondal legend and later Wuthering Heights. Maria would read the younger ones Bible stories sometimes, and how tremulously they heard about David and Goliath, Cain and Abel, and other dark tales of murder and revenge. With no one to hinder the indulgence of their natural, infant fascination for the mysterious and imaginative, it would be more strange than otherwise if it did not become an intimate of their adult art.

In tracing the sources and causes of the Brontes' art, one finds the trails lead consistently backward, back to early environment and inherited tendencies. The family history in Ireland--some students think the name was originally Prunty--contributed much to make Charlotte, and especially Emily, what they became. Their keen and sensitive natures, full of passion and romanticism, were always more Gaellic than English. Patrick's early poems and ballads, based on Irish folk lore were unmistakably of a Gothic cut, wild and supernatural. The very plot of Wuthering Heights is similar to, and may well be adapted from, an experience of Emily's own great-great-grandfather. Related by Patrick to the young children, it was reproduced in theme in the Gondal poems and later in Wuthering Heights.

The Gondal poems also are linked in a mysterious way not yet satisfactorily analyzed to the production of Wuthering Heights. Because many of the poems in this enormous "dream drama" have been destroyed, it is impossible to determine to any degree of accuracy, the complete significance of the legend in the history of Emily's personal emotions. It is clear however that all the themes of Gondal, passion, betrayal, vengeance, subjection, are likewise themes of Wuthering Heights; and Catherine and Heathcliff have their prototypes in "cursed Zamorna", the Byronic hero, and the "woman of whom he was robbed!"

Parsonage literature available in those early, formative years was a number of Methodist periodicals with dramatic accounts of violent, revivalist meetings which, as Charlotte said, were "full of miraculous apparitions, ominous dreams, and frenzied fanaticisms". Aside from the religious books of their father, it is not known what books made up the parsonage library. There was one however entitled Letters of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe from the Dead to the Living. If this was indicative of the type, it is no wonder that these children did not feel the need of comic books.

CHAPTER III

GOTHICISM-WHERE THE BRONTES FOUND IT

The greatest single influence responsible for introducing contemporary literature to them was Blackwood's Magazine, the only secular publication taken regularly at the parsonage. It was always looked for and happily received Charlotte reports. Many of the then modern, English poets as well as German poets (Goethe's "Sorrows of Werther", for example) were represented in Blackwood's, possibly explaining in part the strange affinity for German literature displayed by both Charlotte and Emily. Typical of the stories featured was one called "The Bridegroom of Barna"(1846.) The scene is laid in Ireland: the plot akin to that of Wuthering Heights.

In nearby Keighley was a small lending library. No one has yet established exactly what was available there, but probably it was quite representative for a country library-- a few of the classics and many of the best sellers of twenty to fifty years before. Emily and Charlotte were both too intelligent and discriminating to indulge long in the ordinary and mediocre, but Charlotte especially was always curious about the literature popular with other people, and it is safe

to assume that she read more than one of the Gothic novels which had flooded libraries everywhere. Their ardent descriptions of nature (the nature she knew so well) and their melodramatic mysteries (so reminiscent of childhood) interested her and Emily, though probably did not move them to any extent. But whether consciously or not, Emily and Charlotte did imbibe some ideas from these Gothic novels in their little country library. Propensity and propinquity are a busy pair. Jane Eyre, written at white-hot speed, reveals many reminiscences which had haunted Charlotte's imagination and which went unconsciously into her pen; the pictures of gloomy, old mansions, grim interiors, maniacs and Byronics, had impressed her far more than she knew. The book has not only Charlotte's distinctive type of Romanticism, but that of the earlier date which is more startling and strange, less calm and sober. The plot is said to have come from Le Fanu's tale of a bigamist whose blind wife terrifies her innocent supplanter. However, if Charlotte did borrow the plot, she worked out her own idea and solved it according to her own dramatic principles.

There are strong evidences that Charlotte and Emily were also well acquainted with Radcliffe and her school. In

fact, Shirley has a direct reference to Mrs. Radcliffe. Then, too, The Sicilian Romance is a story about Ferdinand, fifth Marquis of Mazzini, who has married for the second time while keeping his first wife prisoner in an uninhabited wing of the abbey. Her presence leads to disquieting rumors of the supernatural when Ferdinand, the son, tries to solve the enigma of the flashing lights in the deserted rooms. All of which seems like a much more natural reaction than Jane Eyre's apathy when faced with a similar mystery. The Romance of the Forest, like Wuthering Heights, begins with LaMotte, a stranger who later becomes involved in the story, taking refuge on a stormy night in a lonely sinister-looking house.

Another writer who may have furnished Emily with ideas was Sir Walter Scott. His Waverley novels had had a prominent place on her father's library shelves, and whenever the "Islander" game was played, Emily would unhesitatingly name as her favorite companions, Walter Scott, Mr. Lockhart and John^y Lockhart. There are many undeniable resemblances between Wuthering Heights and Scott's most introspective and atmospheric novel, The Black Dwarf(2). Both are moorland novels of revenge: the latter is part of the first series of Tales of My Landlord. One of the least obvious likenesses^{es} is in

(2) Florence Dry, Sources of Wuthering Heights, p. 21.

the names. In The Black Dwarf, the hero's name is Earnsccliffe, the villain is Elienslaw. Adding Heath to cliff, and the Earns to law (change l to h) makes Heathcliff and Earnshaw. Guy Mannering contains black accounts of gypsies which are also hinted at in the origin of Heathcliff and the Mr. Bertram is very much like Mr. Earnshaw.

From Shakespeare, who, though certainly not of the Gothic school, could yet use its elements to perfection, Emily said she learned that tremendous literary power is gained by making one human trait the predominant note of the theme. Surely if any book was ever centered around a human trait, it is Wuthering Heights, and like Shakespeare's own Macbeth, the last hours of Heathcliff's life are spent in the recognition that ambition is satiating and futile. Emily's Cathy, who usually defies all kinship to literary sisters, is very much like Catherine, the passionate heroine of "The Taming of the Shrew", in both appearance and character.

The one dominant source of Wuthering Heights, aside from the Gondal series, leads back to the German literature of which she was so fond and to a strongly Gothic writer from the German Gothic school, E. T. W. Hoffmann. Apparently the framework of Wuthering Heights has been borrowed outright from

The Entail.(3) Both stories begin with a visit to a lonely castle on a deserted moor, a snowstorm, admission to the castle gained through a strange servant, the reading of a gruesome volume before going to bed, a nightmare followed by scratching in the wall and troubled sighing. Both books contain^a usurper and an orphan heir, passionate love and bitter feelings. Daniel, the cross-grained old house-steward, is renamed Joseph and clothed with English religious hypocrisy. The sane old man of law who acts as raconteur changes sexes to become Nellie Dean. The heroine, Seraphina, is a beautiful young wife who suffers from "morbid excitability" which finally destroys all the happiness of her life; one remembers Cathy's "morbid excitability" at the re-entrance of Heathcliff into her life when she was happily, though passively, married to Edgar Linton. Charlotte also found something worth remembering from The Entail, for her fire device in Jane Eyre seems to have been salvaged from a similar one in Hoffmann. The Brontes not only admired German literature but were acclaimed in turn by German litterateurs. Their books in translation were great successes in Germany, and Jane Eyre was even dramatized for the German stage.

(3) Wilson, op. cit. p. 246.

From these and other sources, chiefly novels of a Gothic type, the Brontes gleaned suggestions concerning plot, character, and mechanics which later went into their own works. But it is to another phase of Gothicism that their chief debt belongs--namely, the type of Gothicism found in poetry. In 1834, Charlotte Bronte wrote to Ellen Nussey,

If you like poetry, let it be first-rate: Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope(if you will, though I don't admire him), Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth, and Southey. Now don't be startled at the names of Shakespeare and Byron. Both these were great men, and their works are like themselves.

She also expressed a fondness for Hume, Coleridge, and Cowper. A majority of these poets belonged to that group which broke away from the seventeenth and early eighteenth century formalism to become fore-runners of the early romanticism which represented specifically these three aspects: 1) a poetical awakening to nature, 2) individualism of character, and 3) Gothicism, which includes the two former elements and adds the stagecraft trappings for which the Gothic school became so justly renown. Among early Gothic poetry and among Charlotte's favorites are found Milton's "Il Penseroso", Pope's "Eloise to Abelard", Thomson's "The Seasons", "Hymn on Solitude", and Goldsmith's "Deserted Village", until by the

time Wordsworth, Byron, Coleridge, and their contemporaries came along, the romantic titles are literally "too numerous to mention".

It was a gradual process before the change which had come over poetry spread to the novel. Corresponding to the early graveyard school in poetry which recognized the strong appeal in the powerful and subtle effects of Gothicism, but which floundered around chiefly in the stage mechanics, was the novel of the Lewis, Radcliffe school. These novels attempted to dabble in the poetic treatment of nature, but, lacking in inspiration and genius, the nature described in these books soon became merely a formalized routine. As far as the individual soul was concerned, the Gothic novel and all other novels were still faithful to the eighteenth century patterns in presenting comedies of characters whose most serious problems, as far as the reader ever finds out, concern the subtle associations and paltry intrigues of social life. Rarely did a novel dig under to expose a naked heart. Today we are used to finding practically anything included in the novel, and the novelist's range is totally free and unrestricted. But previous to the time of the Brontes, novelists had followed Fielding's theory that fiction should

confine itself to intellectual and matter-of-fact discussions of every-day living. Only the poets had dared to intrude in the realm of the spiritual, to weave the gossamer of a soul. Nevertheless writers gradually began combining the poetical tendencies with prose- DeQuincey, Carlyle, Dickens, Scott, etc. Many of the writers wrote formal poetry as well: so did the Brontes.

Walpole, the first of the terrorists, with his clear and rational outlook on life, was by no means a poet. He always defeated his own end by making his mystery so flamboyant and so motiveless and bloody as to become ridiculous and humorous. Lewis always wallowed in gory details, expatiating on the physical agonies of his victims. Polidari, on the other hand, wrote more tranquilly, matter-of-fact and restrained, depending for terror solely on the bare facts of his impossible and blood-curdling story. The most fruitful contribution of Mrs. Radcliffe was her elevating of the common idea of terror by toning down the crude tools of terror itself making it more acceptable to the artistic standards as well as to the moral scruples of all. It is no wonder then that the Gothic novel before her time exists today only as a historical curiosity, for as those writers handled it, Gothicism is a pretty cheap

device. However, it gradually became subdued, until by Scott's day its most melodramatic features had subsided, and it was accepted as a natural and permanent thing. This is Gothicism as the Brontes found it.

CHAPTER IV

GOTHICISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT
OF CHARACTER

As the novel of terror passes from the novels of Mrs. Radcliffe to Lewis, Maturin,there is a crashing crescendo of emotion. The villain's sardonic smile is replaced by wild outbursts of diabolical laughter, his scowl grows darker and darker, and as his designs become more bloody and more dangerous, his victims no longer sigh plaintively, but give utterance to piercing shrieks and despairing yells;....passions rage in all their primitive savagery;...We are caught up from first to last in the very tempest, torrent and whirlwind of passion.(4)

Out of this "farrago of frightfulness" one clearly defined character gradually evolved--the Byronic hero, a curious hybrid between heroism and villainy. Created by Mrs. Radcliffe, this romantic character was capable of the greatest crimes yet dignified and impressive withal. He was an imposing figure, sometimes over-theatrical but wrought of flesh and blood. Mary Shelley paints him in A Tale of the Passions, or The Death of Despina thus:

Every feature of his countenance spoke of the struggle of passions and the terrible egotism of one who would sacrifice himself to the establishment of his will: his black eyebrows were scattered, his grey eyes deep-set and scowling, his look at one stern and haggard. A smile seemed

(4) Edith Birkhead, The Tale of Terror, p. 157.

never to have disturbed the settled scorn which his lips expressed. his high forehead was marked by a thousand contradictory lines.

Goodwin made him even more awesome:

.....He was more than six feet in stature; and he was built as if it had been a colossus, destined to sustain the weight of the starry heavens. His voice was like a thunder...his head and chin were clothed with a thick and shaggy hair, in color a dead black. He had suffered considerable mutilation in the services through which he had passed...Bethlem Gabor, though universally respected for the honour and magnanimity of a soldier, was not less remarkable for habits of reserve and taciturnity. He was hideous to the sight: and he never addressed himself to speak that I did not feel my very heart shudder within me. Seldom did he allow himself to open his thoughts: but, when he did, Great God! what supernatural eloquence seemed to inspire and enshroud him...Bethlem Gabor's was a soul that soared to a sightless distance above the sphere of pity.(5)

But it was Monk Lewis who broke all records of horror in his portrait of Abellino.

...Every muscle in his gigantic form seemed convulsed by some horrible sensation; the deepest gloom darkened every feature; the wind from the unclosed window agitated his raven locks, and every hair appeared to writhe itself. His eyeballs glared, his teeth chattered, his lips trembled; and yet a smile of satisfied vengeance played horribly around them. His complexion seemed suddenly to be changed to the dark tincture of an African; the expression of his countenance was dreadful, was diabolical. Magdalena, as she gazed upon his face, thought that she gazed upon a demon.(6)

Novel and exciting as this creature was, he naturally stimulated the imaginations of Charlotte and Emily.

(5) William Godwin, St. Leon, pp. 396-397.

(6) Mathew Gregory Lewis, Blanche and Osbright, or Mistrust, (1808).

Charlotte was content to make his awesomeness only suggestive as she described him with the thrilling fear of a wonder-stricken school girl, and so Rochester with his dogs and horses, his propensity for swearing, always makes the reader, as well as Jane, feel vaguely uncomfortable in his presence even when graced with the "precious grimness" of the smile "used on rare occasions".

Jane's first impressions of him and his "ebon-eyebrows" are physically accurate if inadequate.

....I could see him plainly. His figure was enveloped in a riding cloak, fur collared, and steel clasped; its details were not apparent, but I traced the general points of middle height, and considerable breadth of chest. He had a dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow; his eyes and gathered eyebrows looked ireful and thwarted just now; he was past youth, but had not yet reached middle age: perhaps he might be thirty-five. I felt no fear of him, and but little shyness. Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked.....
.....
but the frown, the roughness of the traveller set me at my ease:(7)

. . .I knew my traveller with his broad and jetty eyebrows: his square forehead, made squarer by the horizontal sweep of his black hair. I recognized his decisive nose, more remarkable for character than beauty; his full nostrils, denoting, I thought, cholera; his grim mouth, chin, and jaw-yes, all three were very grim, and no mistake. His shape,

(7) Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, p. 83.

now divested of cloak, I perceived harmonized in squareness with his physiognomy: I suppose it was a good figure in the athletic sense of the term- broad chested and thin flanked, though neither tall nor graceful.(8)

And later, costumed in shawls and turban for the charade, "His dark eyes and swarthy skin and Paynim features suited the costume exactly: he looked the very model of an eastern emir: . ."(9) She could not know then about his "bursts of maniacal rage". Later descriptions are less like Radcliffe and broach closer to Lewis.

His voice and hand quivered: his large nostrils dilated: his eye blazed:

.
"Jane, I am not a gentle-tempered man-you forget that: I am not long-enduring: I am not cool and dispassionate. Out of pity to me and yourself, put your finger on my pulse, feel how it throbs, and-beware."

He bared his wrist, and offered it to me: the blood was forsaking his cheek and lips, they were growing livid;(10)

Obviously Rochester has a few touches of the melodramatic villain, those conventional Byronic extravagances. His brutalities, his stage villain frowns, those "Grand Turk whims" make him eccentric and outrageous, but of course it should not be forgotten that he is seen through the

(8) Ibid., p. 88.

(9) Ibid., p. 136.

(10) Ibid., p. 238.

eyes of the little governess who is romantic, passionate, and very innocent. Despite all this, Rochester is a fine creation. He commands the readers' sympathies. As Baker(11) points out he has the moral courage for both moral and immoral actions. He dares bigamy under the most impossible of situations, and when exposed, he never for an instant loses his presence of mind. He has wit, eloquence, and a sort of sardonic humor. Besides, he is a magnificent lover. But more than all this, he has a deeper spirit of a poetical nature. When he says,

I like this day: I like that sky of steel;
I like the sternness and stillness of the world
under this frost. I like Thornfield; its anti-
quity: its retirement; its old crows and
thorn-trees: its grey facade, and lines of dark
windows reflecting the metal welkin: and yet
how long have I abhorred the very thought of it;
shunned it like a great plague-house!(12)

he ceases being an empty type, a wood fashion model, and takes on a flesh and blood all his own.

Heathcliff is but a distant kin to Rochester. "The little black-haired swarthy thing as dark as if it came from the Devil" is even closer to something out of Lewis. With his diabolical sneer, he would have scoffed at hearing Rochester's speech about Thornfield. Heathcliff "was always

(11) Earnest Baker, The History of the English Novel, Vol. 8, p. 42

(12) Charlotte Bronte, op. cit., p. 105.

reserved and had an aversion to showy displays of feeling". (Unless it was a frenzy of passion about Cathy.) But like Rochester and so many of his progenitors, he, too, had "black eyes withdrawn so suspiciously under their brows," and even when he had returned to Wuthering Heights a new and different man still "a half civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire. His manner was even dignified: quite divested of roughness, though too stern for grace." Lockwood says of him, "He is a dark-skinned gipsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman: that is, as much a gentleman as many a country squire: rather slovenly, perhaps, yet not looking amiss with his negligence, because he has an erect and handsome figure; and rather morose." Heathcliff's power comes not from any physical quality or actions, it is a far more terrible essence that he emits. As Charlotte said of him:

The worst of it is some of his spirit seems
breathed through the whole narrative in which he
figures, it haunts every moor and glen, and
beckons in every fir-tree of the Heights.

The impact that he brings is an ever-lasting one. Heathcliff is well-known to Emily before the first word is written. The passions in Wuthering Heights have been gathering for

years like thunder. He is not like his predecessors, a mere player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage. The uncommon relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, in which they virtually cry damnation upon each other, proves they are not of this world: if Rochester is impossible, what can be said of Heathcliff? After reading Wuthering Heights, Dante Rossetti said, "Its scenes were laid in hell; though oddly enough the places and the people had English names."

Walpole's Manfred, and Mrs. Radcliffe's Schedoni and Montoni, and numerous other Byronic characters are the victims of an unfortunate past: so are Heathcliff and Rochester. Heathcliff is a waif of what horrible heredity we can only surmise. His earliest childhood is unknown, but from the state of his nature when he first arrived at Wuthering Heights, it was probably unpleasant. From then on his position was not an easy one. The object of jealousy between father and son, he was spoiled by the elder to make up for abuse from the younger. Mistreated and degraded, even by Cathy, the final injustice was when she announced her intention to marry Linton. Rochester, although well-born, is the willful son of an avaricious father who tricks him into an impossible marriage. Often this unfortunate past was associated in Gothic tradition

with tyrannical and scheming parents or guardians, as often the mother died in childbirth--like Hareton Earnshaw, of Catherine Linton, Jane Eyre, and surely Heathcliff's and Rochester's caretakers were at best misunderstanding.

It is interesting that in Gothic romance this Byronic hero was sometimes only one of a pair, "Blacky and Blondy". There was the unfortunate brunette type of hero. It was usually his fate to fall a victim to his own passion (both Heathcliff and Rochester), but he showed his inherent heroism in the end by doing extreme penance for his misdeeds. (Rochester at least, and Heathcliff certainly suffered even if it wasn't "penance".) In spite of his utter resignation to passion, he would bear himself in so impressive a manner that he would arouse sympathy. In contrast to this dark passionate creature, there was also a blond platonic "pretty boy". He never did anything very bad, in fact in contrast to Blacky, Blondy was quite a saint. He was often the victim of the more or less unknowing Blacky and his fate was usually an insignificant one beyond his control, for he often just faded away out of the picture. Physically Mrs. Radcliffe describes them thus:

Godfrey's hair was of a glossy brown, his eyes were of a dark hazel, and the glow of health was on his manly cheek; while his brother's countenance was tinged with a sallow hue, his hair was jetty black, as were his eyes, which were wont to express, with extreme quickness, those fiery passions that too frequently agitated his soul.(13)

In general type, St. John Rivers and Edgar Linton belong to this class. In minor characters, who act as "props", both Charlotte and Emily include the typical, garrulous old servants and faithful seneschals, who, like Joseph, although too strange to lessen the mood of terror, still manage to inject a type of comedy.

Charlotte's use of the maniacal wife is a strange excess for her. Emily's unfailing artistic sense would probably have kept this creature in the dim recesses of Thornfield Hall. Charlotte overdoes it in typical Lewis fashion, and one is reminded that after the failure of The Professor, she determined to make a deliberate effort to write what she knew the public would have a taste for. Perhaps she used this bit of melodrama as an "icing to her cake".

"It seemed, sir, a woman, tall and large, with thick and dark hair hanging long down her back. I know not what dress she had on: it was white and straight; but whether gown, sheet, or shroud, I cannot tell.

.....

(13) Anne Radcliffe, Maximilian and Selina: or The Mysterious Abbott, p. 10

"At that moment I ~~saw~~ the reflection of the visage and features quite distinctly in the dark oblong glass. . . Fearful and ghastly to me-oh, air, I never saw a face like it! It was a discoloured face-it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!

.....
"This, sir, was purple: the lips were swelled and dark; the brow furrowed; the black eyebrows widely raised over the blood-shot eyes. Shall I tell you of what it reminded me?

.....
"Of the foul German spectre-the Vampyre. . . Just at my bedside the figure stopped: the fiery eyes glared upon me-she thrust up her candle close to my face, and extinguished it under my eyes. I was aware her lurid visage flamed over mine, and I lost consciousness:(14)

. . . In the deep shade, at the further end of the room, a figure ran backwards and forwards. What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours: it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing; and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face.

.....
A fierce cry seemed to give the lie to her favourable report: the clothed hyena rose up, and stood tall on its hand feet.

.....
The maniac bellowed: she parted her shaggy locks from her visage, and gazed wildly at her visitors. I recognized well that purple face,--those bloated features.

.....
"Ware!" cried Grace. The three gentlemen retreated simultaneously. Mr. Rochester flung me behind him: the lunatic sprang and grappled his

(14)Charlotte Bronte, op. cit., p. 213.

throat viciously, and laid her teeth to his cheek: they struggled. She was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides: she showed virile force in the contest-more than once she almost throttled him, athletic as he was. He could have settled her with a well-planted blow: but he would not strike: he would only wrestle. At last he mastered her arms; Grace Poole gave him a cord, and he pinioned them behind her: with more rope, which was at hand, he bound her to a chair. The operation was performed amidst the fiercest yells, and the most convulsive plunges.(15)

In the portrayal of heroines, the Brontes left the Gothic traditional choice entirely. Gone was the beautiful but colorless girl, sensitive, innocent, and phlegmatic, with character as firm as jelly, who had been persecuted by Radcliffe. In her place was the wild and passionate Cathy, or the plain out stalwart and individual Jane, each in herself as Gothic as an abbey in elemental personality. She was intelligent and reasonable, but also imaginative and instinctive. She was in all situations capable of taking care of herself: consequently her fainting scenes were but to a minimum. In the Gothic novels whenever a crisis was upon her, the heroine would be seized with complete inertia and would lift nary a finger even to save her life and honor. Charlotte does something like this a couple of times: for instance in Villette,

(15) Ibid., p. 220

Lucy is seemingly transfixed when she might have acted so as to see and talk with Paul. Her whole future and his is at stake, but she does nothing. And again in Jane Eyre, when the maniac woman is entertaining herself in the middle of the night by shredding Jane's wedding veil, Jane just sits in bed watching apparently as calmly as if in a concert hall listening to a Bach fugue. Such lack of normal reaction is not realistic, and nothing short of Jane's ardent avowal of love to Rochester when he is about to marry someone else redeems her. But unlike the Gothic heroines whose primary occupation was peeking out of tower windows at handsome men riding by, the Bronte heroines are never concerned with the safety of their persons, but always concerned with the emotional crises of their souls. And that was a perpetual job.

There is much of Charlotte in Jane Eyre--the same restless, imaginative, responsive, passionate nature imprisoned under a plain and non-attractive exterior, and put to hard service amongst meagre surroundings. She knew what her heroine felt: Mrs. Radcliffe had never lived in the musty cellar recesses of an abandoned abbey. True to the ideals of the new Gothic poetry, the Brontes created the individual soul, not the

social being or the part of society. They substituted "a background of affinity for the drawing room". The human soul in its naked emotionalism is itself a Gothic being: that which treats of it then must be Gothic--not necessarily in mechanics, but certainly in spirit.

CHAPTER V

GOTHICISM IN THE TREATMENT OF NATURE

It was natural that the background, too, would be one of nature and a nature of bizarre extravagance. With the Brontes, character, not characters or setting, was the important thing. Their style was to take one or two people and to reveal them completely. The minor characters are shadowy types, traditions of the Gothic school: the background was used as complimentary to the moods of the chief characters, and yet also somehow as an integral part. The idea of nature as background was not a new one. The Gothic novels had developed it as a fine and exacting art. All "objects de nature" were unionized. Trees could have any of the three purposes 1) to have gnarled trunks and roots 2) to cast long, dark shadows 3) to moan and wail dismally (if the wind was employed too). But to make nature an integral part of the characters and the story was more difficult. It took all of the poetic genius of Charlotte and Emily to accomplish. The dual seclusion to which fate and misfortune condemned them forced them to an appreciation of and kinship with the moors about them. From the Gothic novels they had learned that it was the fashion to include

a professed, (if the writer was not capable of making it sincere) admiring description of nature. To the Gothic writers, nature was an external physical surrounding which they treated with all the mystery of a new experiment. To the Brontes it was no experiment, and the fact of its physical existence was natural and familiar, but its power and significance was the mysterious element, an element the Gothic writers, with the exception of Mrs. Radcliffe, had never recognized. But although Mrs. Radcliffe recognized the beauty and mystery of nature, her attempts at expressing it rarely crystallized into great art. In her books, and she did the thing better than the others of her school, the descriptions of nature were in a formalized style, almost the cult of an ideal, and very conscious. She did not know nature as the Brontes did. She admired nature: they lived it. She even loved nature; but they were a part of it. No one might say then that the Brontes used it as a conventionality; they were too candid and original to attempt to do so; they were too close to nature itself to have to do so.

With the same elusive sureness with which she handles character, Emily also handles nature. Her religious roots were

not as orthodox nor as tenuous as those of Charlotte, and she half reveals a conscious paganism which may be "the revenge of pantheistic intentions against the tyranny of society, family and religion." (16) Her consolation is in the sad and rough, but pure and beautiful aspects of nature. There are none of the long prosy descriptions natural to Charlotte, but there are regular and constantly fleeting words, phrases, and occasionally even a short paragraph, all of which achieve her purpose secure with infallible accuracy.

The close ties between Emily and nature are almost limitless: Wuthering Heights was written at night during the winter and spring of 1845 and 1846. The first part of the book is truly winter in spirit, but the last part shows up like spring. Her love of the moors, which was as a religion to her, is best expressed by Cathy in describing her dream to Nelly,

. . . Heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights: where I woke sobbing for joy. (17)

As Cathy would have done, Emily pined away whenever she was long absent from Haworth. The description is also reminiscent of a scene in Aucassin and Nicolette, a true Gothic romance.

(16) Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature, Vol. 2, p. 360.

(17) Emily Bronte, Wuthering Heights, p. 50

Later Cathy says:

These are the earliest flowers at the Heights. They remind me of soft thaw winds, and warm sunshine, and nearly melted snow. Edgar, is there not a south wind, and is not the snow almost gone?(18)

And again:

Gimmerton chapel bells were still ringing; and the full, mellow flow of the beck in the valley came soothingly on the ear. It was a sweet substitute for the yet absent murmur of the summer foliage, which drowned that music about the Grange when the trees were in leaf. At Wuthering Heights it always sounded on quiet days following a great thaw of a season of steady rain.(19)

On the night of Lockwood's first introduction to the nightmare of Wuthering Heights a snow storm raged. It was a thunderstorm on the night when Heathcliff went away, and when Cathy became ill for the last fateful time, and on her burial night when Heathcliff tried to open her grave. Just as there is only one person, and that, Nellie, who is an onlooker, who is normal and free from the agonies which haunt all others, so the weather and the nature seem constantly involved in a writhing struggle. Calm, cheerful days at Wuthering Heights are few but well chosen for harmony. It was "a mellow evening in September" ending the brief and happy married life of Edgar and Cathy, when Heathcliff returned; it

(18) Ibid., p. 99.

(19) Ibid., p. 99.

was spring when Cathy began to recover from her last illness; it was a soft, tender morning when Cathy lay dead and peaceful. It was during the fine days of summer that young Catherine roamed the moors and imagined herself blessed in the company of her cousin, Linton, and finally there was the last scene of all described by Lockwood.

As Emily had done, Charlotte also attunes her descriptions of nature to the mood or circumstance of a character. It might have been Emily instead of Lucy Snowe who sat on the casement ledge glorying in the storm

. . . too resistless was the delight of staying with the wild hour, black and full of thunder, pealing out such an ode as language never delivered to man--too terribly glorious, the spectacle of clouds, split and pierced by white and blinding bolts.(20)

Like Emily, Charlotte's eye is for the gathering storm and her ear for the distant moaning of the new-born gale. Shirley, especially, and many parts of Jane Eyre take one out into the "fresh blowing airs". The outdoor taste lies in the direction of storm, wind and rain.

The evening was pitch-black: star and moon were quenched in gray rain-clouds--gray they would have been by day, by night they looked sable.....He (Malone) did not, therefore, care to contrast the sky as it now appeared--a muffled, streaming vault, all black, save where towards the east, the

(20) Charlotte Bronte, Villette, p. 126

furnaces of Stilbro's ironworks threw a tremulous lurid shimmer on the horizon- with the same sky on an unclouded frosty night.(21)

The gray colorlessness of the day on which Jane Eyre opens, blends and emphasizes perfectly the mood and circumstance of the child.

There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner . . . the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further out-door exercise was now out of the question.

.
I studied the aspect of that winter afternoon. Afar, it offered a pale blank of mist and cloud; near, scene of wet lawn and storm-beat shrub, with ceaseless rain sweeping away wildly before a long and lamentable blast.(22)

And another storm, but keyed entirely differently is the one which follows the pledging of Jane's troth with Rochester. After an evening of moonlight and moths, laurel and nightingale, suddenly,

But what had befallen the night? The moon was not yet set, and we were all in shadow: I could scarcely see my master's face, near as I was. And what ailed the chestnut tree? It writhed and groaned; while wind roared in the laurel walk, and came sweeping over us.

.
. . . a livid, vivid spark leapt out of a cloud at which I was looking, and there was a crack, a crash, and a close rattling peal; and I thought only of hiding my dazzled eyes against Mr. Rochester's shoulder.

(21)Charlotte Bronte, Shirley, p. 16

(22)Charlotte Bronte, Jane Eyre, pp. 1-2.

The rain rushed down. He hurried me up the walk, through the grounds, and into the house; but we were quite wet before we could pass the threshold. . . loud as the wind blew, near and deep as the thunder crashed, fierce and frequent as the lightning gleamed, cataract-like as the rain fell during a storm of two hours' duration, I experienced no fear, and little awe . . .(23)

and again; another storm which ushered in the Vampyre woman who tore Jane's wedding veil: -- "clouds drifted from pole to pole, fast-following, mass on mass." And the wreck of the chestnut tree, "Black and riven: the trunk, split down the centre, gasped ghostly."

Aside from these wild descriptions of a very Gothic nature, she also handles with a quiet serenity something like the following:

"I know how the heath would look on such a day," said Caroline: "purple-black: a deeper shade of the sky-tint, and that would be livid."

"Yes-quite livid, with brassy edges to the clouds, and here and there a white gleam, more gnastly than the lurid tinge, which, as you looked at it, you momentarily expected would kindle into blinding lightning."

.
"Did you watch the clouds come down over the mountains?"

"I did; I stood at the window an hour watching them. The hills seemed rolled in a sullen mist, and when the rain fell in whitening sheets, suddenly they were blotted from the prospect: they were washed from the world."(24)

(23) Ibid., p. 192.

(24) Charlotte Bronte, Shirley, pp. 213-214.

"I shall like to go, Shirley," again said Miss Helstone. "I long to hear the sound of the waves-ocean-waves, and to see them as I have imagined them in dreams, like tossing banks of green light, strewed with vanishing and re-appearing wreaths of foam, whiter than lilies. I shall delight to pass the shores of those lone rock-islets where the sea-birds live and breed unmolested. We shall be on the track of the old Scandinavians-of the Norseman: we shall almost see the shores of Norway. This is a very vague delight that I feel, communicated by your proposal, but it is a delight."

"Will you think of Pitful-Head now, when you lie awake at night; of gulls shrieking around it, and the waves tumbling in upon it, rather than of the graves under the Rectory back-kitchen?"

"I will try: and instead of musing about remnants of shrouds, and fragments of coffins, and human bones and mould, I will fancy seals lying in the sunshine on solitary shores, where neither fisherman nor hunter ever come: of rock crevices full of pearly eggs bedded in sea-weed: of unscared birds covering white sands in happy flocks."(25)

The night-piece from the wanderings of Jane Eyre is perhaps her best. It begins, "I touched the heath: it was dry, and yet warm with the heat of the summer-day. Etc." More than to any other isolated factor Charlotte is most sensitive to the sinister and seductive beauty of the moon. Again and again she writes of it as if it were a personal being. "On the hill-top above me sat the rising moon: pale yet as a cloud, but brightening momentarily: she looked over Hay, which, half lost in trees, sent up a blue smoke from its few chimneys: . . ."

(25) Ibid., p. 248.

CHAPTER VI

GOTHICISM IN THE TREATMENT
OF THE SUPERNATURAL

The Gothic treatment of the supernatural was one of those strange, inexplicable phenomena which develop in society and even in art from time to time. "Real grown-ups" trying to outdo each other in telling ghost stories seems ludicrous in this very realistic world of today. And the fact that universally they did so with such utter lack of any imaginative artistic touch is even more peculiar. The ever-present abandoned wing of the eternal castle was the haunt of these domestic spirits who rarely went A. W. O. L. from the strict bounds assigned them. They were also definitely introverted, limiting their haunting acquaintance to a chosen few, and even in the presence of these, emitting only "swollen sighs" and half-apologetic pleas for vengeance. The treatment of ghosts is mild compared with the treatment of villains. The killing of Manfred's son is by an unusually violent spirit: his action must have been considered unseemly by all the other Gothic ghosts for such conduct was rarely if ever repeated. Like Manfred of Otranto, Heathcliff is far more terrifying than Cathy's ghost ever is; in fact Cathy's ghost is quite a lady compared to Cathy herself. Rather

than dreading it, one longs sometimes for its appearance to ease Heathcliff of his agony and to ease his victims of his torment.

The semi-supernatural phenomenon of mysterious voices, omens and premonitions found in Charlotte can be identified as the time-worn furniture of the Gothic romance. The essential objects are the same, but the spirit hovering over them is different: whereas Mrs. Radcliffe tried to explain them away, and Lewis used them solely for effect with no care about the possibilities of reality, Charlotte saw nothing miraculous in the existence of such perceptions. Jane Eyre (and Charlotte Bronte) lived on a plane of emotional excitability: such perceptions, supposed to be characteristic of high strung organization were realities in a life such as that. We get to know Jane Eyre and her sister heroines so well--her inmost feelings and ways of thinking- that whatever she senses, real or imagined, does not seem strange. We not only accept her "creatures of an overstimulated brain", to quote Rochester, but we do so with the confidence and prejudice of an intimate friend. This is in definite contrast to how we feel about Mrs. Radcliffe's beautiful but dumb heroines. We don't get to know them; we are therefore suspicious of whatever they think they sense. Besides, we don't think they have any more original or significant imagination

than the tremors of a child in the dark. If they do imagine anything, we accuse them as Jane Austen did of borrowing ideas from the novels they have read. Their moods come and go without sufficient provocation: they are not reliable. We dare not trust their hallucinations, for Mrs. Radcliffe, in her reasonable if at times illogical method, would be sure to account for what is only apparently supernatural.

When Charlotte was six years old, she had a dream, much like that into which Helen Burns falls, followed by a summons home to her sister's deathbed, a recollection which gives significance to Jane Eyre's dream of a wailing baby which preceded the news that her cousin John has committed suicide and her Aunt Reed is dying. Without doubt Jane (and Charlotte) believe that sympathies "whose workings baffle mortal comprehension" exist between distant and even estranged relatives and friends.

Besides these subjective intuitions, Charlotte includes such objective events as the incident of the sudden storm and crash of thunder which ends the idyllic scene between Jane and Rochester in the orchard. Like the nodding of the plume on the giant helmet in Otranto, events of this type may be described as sham supernatural or as an extreme example of "pathetic

fallacy", but fortunately Charlotte makes it less obvious than her predecessors did. In Villette Lucy Snowe who has nerves of "real iron and bend leather" gazes steadily for five minutes at a spectral nun. The race of heroines is becoming more hardy, for her Gothic ancestors could not have done this for five seconds without fainting away.

Less like Mrs. Radcliffe and more like Monk Lewis, who with reckless abandon throws all restraint to the winds and never stops to explanation, is Emily. From the time of Cathy's death, her ghost haunts Wuthering Heights. She appears to Lockwood apparently in a dream. Was it a dream or a reality? Those who shrink from the thought that it may have been an honest and alive ghost, will find no comfort in the belief that it is a dream, for the coincidence that Lockwood should happen to have a dream so full of importance is just as supernatural. As the ghost affects Heathcliff, modern psychologists would pronounce him insane with illusions. This is a practical, but not an altogether satisfactory explanation. Emily never implies that he is unsound, and surely in every other respect he is cold, logical and disinterested. Nellie Dean, who inspires all confidence as an observer, always finds him purposeful and reasonable. As

mentioned before, the effect of Cathy's ghost incites no terror except to Lockwood, and even then it is more pathetic than otherwise. It is Heathcliff, not the ghosts, that scares us. We would welcome Cathy's ghost to calm him. In fact the only beautiful thing in Heathcliff is his adoration of Cathy's spirit in death, as he seemed almost to hate her in the flesh. We fear Cathy in life for herself and for her power over Heathcliff, but her ghost inspires only pity. Emily never explains this, neither does she explain the origin of Heathcliff, although several dark hints are set forth concerning it.

The peace of blue sky and green grass could never be the end of Wuthering Heights. On the very last page while asserting her belief that the dead are at peace, Nellie gives voice to her fear of being out in the dark and of being alone in the "grim house". She also recounts an experience of meeting the little boy and the lambs on the moor. Quite conventionally she mentions the reasons for the boy's superstition, but she never explains why the sheep would not pass on. Traditionally animals can best distinguish between the dead and the alive. Can Emily be implying that the untampered instincts of dumb animals are more reliable than the cast off and reasoned away instincts of man? So it is that despite

Lockwood's last pacific paragraph there is still the vibration of the supernatural about Wuthering Heights. Lockwood says,

I lingered round them, under the benien sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.(26)

But then, Lockwood always remains an alien, a stranger to Wuthering Heights, just as he was that first night. He would not be expected to know.

(26) Emily Bronte, Ibid. p. 212.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Harrison has called *Wuthering Heights* "a kind of prose 'Kubla Khan'--a nightmare of the super-heated imagination." Whether or not one agrees entirely with the comparison, the resemblance remains that Wuthering Heights like "Kubla Khan", stands apart as an unusual, almost bizarre production. But as it is unnatural, so likewise it is deeply and desperately sincere. No matter what happens there is no affectation; it is never consciously artificial. And notwithstanding all its tempestuous eccentricities, the structure is based on a solid foundation. In dates, geneologies, circumstances of law and all other items of incidence, Emily was completely sure of herself. In addition to being sincere, Wuthering Heights is unfailingly consistent. Never does the gloom lighten. The rugged moors are scenery for even more rugged passion. Not only are isolated scenes and characters Gothic, but spiritually, the entire novel is Gothic. There is unrelieved horror and terror, not just in the mechanical details as in the early Gothic novel, but in the basic plot. From the very beginning it is the story of the doomed. Not a single

remitting instance gives one ray of happiness, one chance of hope. The love scenes are idyllic, but desperate; even the children of the second generation are seen struggling as futilely as flies in the same sticky mire which trapped their parents.

In comparison, Jane Eyre is like a haven of peace; but as Wuthering Heights was basically Gothic, so Jane Eyre is basically sensational. The whole plot--Rochester's secreting a maniac wife in his ancestral home even after her attempts at murder and arson, his bringing society friends to this same house as guests and planning to marry the daughter of a neighboring lord, his bullying and swearing, and his blasé essay at bigamy--all are sensational. But like Emily, Charlotte is sincere. She keeps rigorously within the literal-mindedness of the possible. Any passion is tempered with the strict moral code befitting the clergy-man's daughter that she was. Sometimes she balances precariously out of her native element to create effects and even characters which are too mechanically moulded to Gothic design and which reduce her effects as an artist. Her style is at its best when it remains simple and unimposing, inspired solely by her innate genius of form and taste and limited to her own kind of

sober realism.

There are in Charlotte and Emily situations which are terrible and terrifying, surpassing in effect any of the novels of the Gothic school and differing from them in that the terror is not exclusively a physical one, but an emotional, soul-stirring one. Any terror aroused through physical or mechanical tools is not used for any innate value it has within itself, but as a means to a higher and more complex result. The Brontes did not need supernatural elements to increase the tension of their works; terrors to them were terrors of actual life. In chapter nine of Jane Eyre there is a haunting sense of mystery; not the suspense of the detective story, but the transcending enigma of LIFE itself. Jane asks, "But where are you going to, Helen? Can you see? Do you know?" And in Shirley Carolyn says, "What was I created for, I wonder?" As these questions make of mystery a question of life itself, the Gothicism of the Brontes goes to life itself, to a deep, emotional root. The older novels made Gothicism the theme, and tragedy was used to that end, but the Brontes portrayed tragedy and used Gothicism as the means. It is this human meaning of the spiritual realm, that sets off the Bronte Gothicism from Frankenstein or The Castle of

Otranto. Although they learned types and mechanics from the Gothic novels, it was the use of the earlier Gothicism of the poets that gives the Bronte's novels such distinctive character. We can be very glad that they insisted on following the inner light and writing from their hearts.

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
THE GOTHIC ELEMENT IN THE BRONTE NOVELS

The peculiar Gothicism of the Brontes in the field of English fiction can be accounted for only by the integration of two distinct factors; 1) their innate talent, and 2) The state of fiction as they found it.

Their innate talents, or rather their natural dispositions, were determined by several influences. The neighborhood of their home had a profound effect upon them. Its barrenness, both socially and geographically, made the girls self-sufficient for entertainment and familiar with nature. After long years of intimacy, unrelieved by the usual distracting social pursuits of youth, with the wild, bleak moors of Haworth, they were well-qualified to write of nature in all its moods. In addition, the character of their dispositions, or their heredity, to use a much over-worked term, was of such a bent to lead them into introverted, serious, and almost morbid ways. The early family life in which they grew up was of a kind to allow them to indulge in any eccentricities of style, rather than to lead them out of themselves into the normal world of society and friends. And finally, even their reading material, the one concrete contact with outside life, was

filled with influences all of which helped in creating the Bronte individuals they they are. These four primary factors all had a share in bringing about a strong Gothic strain in their personalities.

But even this natural propensity would probably not have showed itself as vigorously as it does, had not the condition of Gothicism been what it was when they were ready to write. From the Gothic novelists, such as Lewis, Maturin, Radcliffe, and others, less obviously Gothic but who also indulged in the tradition, they found ideas about the stagecraft mechanics of fictional Gothicism. Certain minor characters had a pattern, nature was an effective backdrop for setting a mood, the supernatural could be as super-unnatural and plot as sensational as one wanted to make them.

From the poets however they learned far more important and worth while things. The early romantic poets had had a type of Gothicism which found a similar strain in their own poetic souls. Here they found a nature which was not merely an appropriate decoration, but an outlet, a counterpart to harmonize and blend into the very innermost nature of man. They found too a man whose deepest and most profound feelings

and thoughts were laid bare. They found that the mystery and terror of this material world were as nothing compared with the mystery and terror of man's spiritual existence.

The contribution of the Brontes can be summed up in very few words--they effected within the medium of their novels a remarkable combination of the two branches of Gothicism--that of the prose and that of the poetry. The Gothicism in the Bronte novels reveals itself best in the fields of character portrayal, treatment of nature, and treatment of the supernatural.

In the portrayal of leading men, the Brontes remained pretty faithful to the tradition of the Byronic hero, that swarthy, masculine hybrid of heroism and villainy. They also used characters built on the idea of the blond, attractive, but unromantic man who rivals the hero. In minor type characters they also followed Gothic novel precedent.

However, in the choice of heroines, the Brontes set a new style, a style which hitherto had been used only by the poets. Here was presented a soul, independent, romantic, imaginative, and individualistic, flanked by an intelligent mind whose every desire and dismay is revealed.

In the treatment of nature the Brontes did everything the

Gothic novelists had done--only better. They accomplish their purpose so well in fact that the result is far closer to that wrought by poets.

Likewise, in the realm of the supernatural they freely and frankly used the time-worn furniture of the Gothic romances, but the difference lies in the facts that unlike Mrs. Radcliffe, they were too artistic to attempt to explain away what they had purposefully created, and unlike Lewis and Godwin, they knew the greatest effect lies in subtle delicacy, not in abounding flagrancy.

Without a doubt, the greatest art of the Brontes comes from the poetic Gothicism; they would have been greater writers with less influence of the prose Gothic school. In many ways Emily is the more daring, the more sensational; in other ways she is the more acute and refined. The whole idea is that the Gothic novelists deified terror and used tragedy as the means; the Brontes surpassed them by painting tragedy and struggle, and used Gothicism to that end.

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