

## WHUTHERING HEIGHTS THE GOTHIC NOVEL: AN UNDERSTANDING

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### **Abstract:**

*One of the most celebrated writers of English Literature, Emily Brontë was born in Thornton, Yorkshire in 1818 but she spent the majority of her life in Haworth, a town in the moors of Yorkshire, described as “wild and lonely” while other critics such as Lock and Dixon state the argument that those who describe the moors in such a way might have lost “their senses to appreciate beauty”. As an individual and one of the Brontë sisters, Emily Brontë has acquired mythological status. She has been portrayed as an Absolute Individual, a Tormented Genius, and a Free Spirit Connecting with Nature. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, the other two sisters, have been portrayed as Romantic Rebels and Solitary Geniuses. The paper represents the novel, whuthering heights as the gothic novel, creating an understanding of the same.*

**Keywords:** *Gothic, myth, free spirit, tormented*

### **The historical context of *Wuthering heights***

The historical basis of Emily Brontë's "*Wuthering heights*" can be traced back to the 1770s, when Lord Mansfield's ruling outlawed slavery in the United Kingdom. But other historical elements have an impact on "*Wuthering heights*," such as the Brontë family legacy and the established church. All of these elements combine to form what is recognized as the backstory of Emily Brontë's "*Wuthering heights*" in modern times.

#### **Lord Mansfield Verdict on Slavery**

The verdict in the case of Lord Mansfield turned out to be a crucial historical moment that contributed to the worldwide abolition of slavery. But, even if readers of Emily Brontë's "*Wuthering heights*" don't get to see such a significant event unfold within the book's chapters, its impact on the mood and characters is clear.

Lord Mansfield's decision on slavery wasn't rendered until 1772, a year after Mr. Earnshaw brought Heathcliff back to Yorkshire from Liverpool, but the incident did mark the beginning of a widespread acceptance of all African Americans in the United Kingdom as free people with the right to live freely and be accorded equal rights while on UK soil. Even though the concept in "*Wuthering heights*" proves unique and foreign to society, select families, such as the Lintons and the Brontës, are shown to have an open mind toward a member of the black race. Yet, Heathcliff receives special attention from his adopted family, beginning with Mr. Earnshaw's introduction of him to his wife. Mr. Earnshaw's description of the homeless child proves too sharp and straight to be considered non-racist as we can see "...a gift from God, though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil" (Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* p.36)

There is no doubting Mr. Earnshaw's true love for young Heathcliff and his adoption of him as his kid, but that doesn't stop him from focusing on the child's skin and making analogies to the devil. There are other incidents like this throughout the book, and readers get to observe how other characters interact with or treat Heathcliff as a result. There's no denying that Lord Mansfield's submission serves as a significant softener to the harsh treatment of people of color, both in the reality of 18th-century England and in Emily Brontë's "*Wuthering heights*" as it exists today. Although these treatments can be partially blamed for the reason the protagonist changes from a sweet boy to a sour man throughout the book, they do not entirely excuse it.

#### **The Established Church**

An evangelical movement swept through England and other countries during the 18th century. Because it upset the pre-existing order, had a significant impact on numerous families, and changed the way many of them lived, this event was significant for English history and for the rest of the globe. In Emily Brontë's "*Wuthering heights*," these events indirectly impact the setting and lives of the characters. For example, Lockwood's dream about Jabez Branderham and the church in Gimmerton both depict evangelical revival as being present in the book's historical setting.

### **Gothic Literature**

Gothic literature is a literary subgenre of Romanticism that developed in England during the 18th century as a response to the formalized Enlightenment (a European intellectual movement). Gothicism primarily focused on the darker aspect of humanity and its predestined relationship to sin and evil, while Romanticism emphasized sublime beauty and individualism. The authors of this genre craft spooky tales with gloomy settings, supernatural intrusions, and ancient family curses while incorporating Gothic elements like horror, mystery, suspense, romance, decay, and degeneration to address important social issues like social injustice, corruption, class system, gender norms, and racism.

The term 'Gothic' actually traces its origin in the medieval architecture created by the Goths, a North Germanic tribe of the Middle Ages. Gothic architecture was dark, intricate, and dismal in its appearance. Aesthetically embellished and conceptually intricate, this medieval architecture became the inspiration for a new literary genre in Europe, namely, Gothicism or Gothic Literature. The expression "gothic" was initially an uncredited term applied to a style of middle age architecture (Gothic architecture) and art (Gothic art). Gothicism made its appearance in literature at the beginning of the Romantic Era (mid-18th Century). It was encouraged by a group of writers who were enchanted by the essence of medievalism.

Gothic fiction was characterized by an excess of imagination. The plot often included a dark and mysterious setting which was opposite to the writings of the Romantic writers of that era which became the reason for it being academically not appreciated or at worst, totally ignored. While the traditional gothic works were based on myths and legends of folklore and often presented a world inhabited by grotesque figures such as demons, monsters, or evil spirits. The term 'Gothic' was first utilized in writing by Horace Walpole, an English writer, art historian, and a Whig legislator. He involved the term 'Gothic' in the caption of his book *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1765). Walpole's book brought about a literary movement that has sired beasts, unleashed lightning, and place the female characters in tormenting situations.

Horace Walpole borrowed the term 'Gothic' from archaic Gothic design and applied it concerning terror. His novel '*The Castle of Otranto*' is the first Gothic novel, and is responsible for starting a whole new genre of literature that eventually gave rise to horror writings — Gothic Literature. Without this precursor of the Gothic novel, the horror genre may have never come into existence. With its convincing mix of sinister portents, violent and sadistic interests, and spooky appearances, it brought forth a whole new style of writing and affected the writings of authors such as Ann Radcliffe, Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Edgar Allan Poe, and others.

### **Elements of a Gothic Novel**

Gothic novels are a type of fiction that is "marked by mystery and otherworldly dread, frequently set in a dark castle or other medieval location." A sense of mystery and fear dominates this pseudo-medieval fiction book. Some people call a Gothic novel a Gothic horror. It is a literary style that incorporates aspects of both romance and horror.

The origins of the Gothic Novel can be traced back to the publication of *Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, but it was only until the Victorian Era that it received a platform to be widely acknowledged and be included in academia. A subset of the Romantic movement, the Gothic novel aimed to evoke powerful feelings in the reader—in this case, terror and trepidation. Such a book gets its name from medieval architecture because it frequently has an ancient theme or spirit, and it frequently takes place in Gothic buildings. Gothic literature's impact thrives on a pleasantly terrifying kind of horror.

Some of the characteristics of a Gothic Novel -:

### **AN ISOLATED, HAUNTED DWELLING**

One of the essential components of Gothic literature is the bleak, empty, and disturbingly haunted location. A Gothic story always begins in an old castle, a deserted mansion, a haunted and abandoned house, a bewitched monastery, or a ruinous structure that displays the Gothic architectural aesthetic. The place's emptiness and terror tend to arouse fear and terror in both the character and the reader.

In some works, the main character gets stuck in these situations—often by a cruel antagonist or a supernatural force—and barely manages to escape. The structures' architectural details, including their pointed towers, trapdoors, shadowy passageways, rusted hinges, and hidden tunnels, are all designed to imprison their defenseless prey. The essential components for creating a gothic environment are present.

In some scenes, the action takes place in or close to graveyards, gloomy woodlands, or open spaces. In Gothic literature, the wilderness and trees serve as symbols of evil, sin, and immortality. These creepy places also invoke a sense of danger and anxiety.

### **DARK AND MYSTERIOUS SETTINGS**

In Gothic literature, the mood of gloom, mystery, and suspense constantly prevails. The night is the primary theme in Gothic literature. The inability to see clearly at night and the resulting mood of uncertainty make it difficult for characters to know what lies ahead. Gothic books frequently feature a lot of enigmatic events in their plots. Characters, even inanimate objects, have the propensity to vanish. The door automatically opens and closes, but no one is visible. The candle goes out by itself. All of these components help to create the story's enigmatic tone.

### **MELODRAMATIC PLOTS**

Melodramatic themes abound throughout Gothic books and stories. In the narrative, the characters shout, sob, terrify, rage, and swoon. Their emotions are heightened by their fear of the mysterious and the unexplainable. They frequently experience inner torments and are perpetually in a state of terror. The protagonists experience profound emotional outbursts in response to incidents like murder, kidnapping, and terrible insanity. Gothic books also use very emotional language.

### **INCULCATION OF SUPERNATURAL FORCES**

Gothic literature's association with supernatural entities like ghosts, vampires, giants, monsters, demons, and zombies is another essential component. In Gothic literature, the main character may be pursued by ghosts or monsters, and the dead may come to life and frighten readers. A painting of a dead person speaking or an Armor suit walking like a man are examples of inanimate items that seem to come to life.

In some Gothic novels, the supernatural components are presented as the outcome of some natural phenomena, whereas in other works, they are depicted as genuinely paranormal. The paranormal powers were used by Gothic authors to explore the fear of the unknowable and uncontrollable.

*"Gothic novels often incorporate "Spooky setting (mansions, abbeys, castles); nightmare visions of the home; secret passages; locked rooms; a feeling of mystery and suspense; an emphasis on madness and disordered state of mind; omens, portents, visions, and the supernatural; and tortured family relationships often involving persecution of the female--all of which work to threaten the reader's sense of what is 'normal'" (Kandola, Encyclopaedia of Literary Romanticism)*

### **A VILLIAN-HERO PROTAGONIST (BYRONIC HERO)**

The protagonist, who is typically a male figure, being portrayed as an anti-hero is another essential component of Gothic literature. He is the major subject of the narrative, but we also get a glimpse of his horrible side. He is an outcast who lives alone. Sometimes, the main character is seen struggling with remorse and going through internal torments. He is destined for destruction and is already beginning to deteriorate.

Frustrated with the traditional romantic heroes, Lord Byron aimed to make heroes who are psychologically complex and often imperfect (unlike the ideal heroes of romantic works), thus marking the origin of the Byronic Hero which he named after himself. The traits of the Byronic hero include haughtiness, violence, recklessness, seduction, trauma, and self-serving motives. This kind of figure, invented by the poet Lord Byron in the 19th century, defies social conventions and appears as an antihero, or a protagonist lacking traditional heroic traits.

## ROLE OF WOMEN

Another key component of Gothic literature is without a doubt the depiction of a female heroine. It is noted that female characters in Gothic novels and plays often fall into one of two categories: innocent victims, subservient to the strong and powerful male characters, which is the stereotypical depiction in male gothic, or the shameless and dangerous predator which is a response to the above-mentioned conventions called as the Female Gothic. In male gothic works, either a harsh aristocracy or a supernatural being is after them, or they are captured in a remote castle. They scream, sob, and swoon from the dread and threat of the strong, and often from the unknown and unexplainable. Sometimes the cause of their suffering is a physical disease, remorse, or powerlessness at the hands of the dominant guy. While, in female gothic works, women are portrayed as mentally strong independent women who actively resist the gender stereotypes put forth by the patriarchy.

## USE OF OMENS, VISIONS, AND PROPHECIES

These components are frequently used by authors to give readers a sense of mystique and suspense. They show a relationship between the castle, and Kandla its residents, and an antiquated prophecy. Usually, the prophecy is hazy, unclear, or only partly accurate. Additionally, a character might have a disturbing dream or think that something is a portent of upcoming events. For instance, if the manor owner's statue falls over, it could portend his impending demise. In modern fiction, a character might see something and confuse it for a hallucination (for example, a shadowy figure stabbing another shadowy figure). This is what is known as an "imitation vision."

## USE OF GOTHIC-APPROPRIATE VOCABULARY

The gothic ambiance is created by consistently using the right words. Maintaining the gothic's mood of darkness and stimulation requires the proper language. These include

MYSTERY	diabolical, enchantment, ghost, goblins, haunted, infernal, magic, magician, miracle, necromancer, omens, ominous, portent, preternatural, prodigy, prophecy, secret, sorcerer, specter, spirits, strangeness, talisman, vision
FEAR, TERROR, OR SORROW	afflicted, affliction, agony, anguish, apprehensions, apprehensive, commiseration, concern, despair, dismal, dismay, dread, dreaded, dreading, fearing, frantic, fright, frightened, grief, hopeless, horrid, horror, lamentable, melancholy, miserable, mournfully, panic, sadness, scared, shrieks, sorrow, sympathy, tears, terrible, terrified, terror, unhappy, wretched
SURPRISE	alarm, amazement, astonished, astonishment, shocking, staring, surprise, surprised, thunderstruck, wonder
HASTE	anxious, breathless, flight, frantic, hastened, hastily, impatience, impatient, impatiently, impetuosity, precipitately, running, sudden, suddenly
ANGER	anger, angrily, cholera, enraged, furious, fury, incense, incensed, provoked, rage, raving, resentment, temper, wrath, wrathful, wrathfully
LARGENESS	enormous, gigantic, giant, large, tremendous, vast
DARKNESS	dark, darkness, dismal, shaded, black, night

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