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## The Non-Specificity of Location in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights

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THE NON-SPECIFICITY OF LOCATION  
IN EMILY BRONTË'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

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Bachelor of Arts in English

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IN EMILY BRONTË'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

BRIAN P. VOROSELO

ABSTRACT

Emily Brontë's sole novel, *Wuthering Heights*, is unusual among nineteenth-century works due to the non-specificity of its locations. While many of her contemporaries were very specific in the use of their settings, using real place names and locations that paralleled real-life locations of the time very closely, Brontë uses details of place that make it impossible to draw one-to-one correspondence between her settings and real-life locales, and includes details that serve to remind the reader that the places in which her story takes place, and thus the story itself, are unreal. She does this in order to exert total narrative control over her universe. This enables Brontë as an author to force her readers to confront the issue of power, since the reader must engage Brontë's narrative universe on the author's terms.

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

No one who has read Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* can deny the overwhelming power of *place* in the novel. Who does not come away from the novel feeling they have spent time on the moors, or shared in Catherine and Heathcliff's delight on seeing Thrushcross Grange for the first time, or experienced the cold, barren chill that Lockwood experiences on seeing the Heathcliff-dominated Heights? The evocative landscapes in the novel have convinced generations of readers that *Wuthering Heights* takes place in a community closely modeled on Brontë's own home of Haworth, and that *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange themselves are inspired by actual locations in and around Haworth, a supposition reinforced by her sister Charlotte's preface to the book written following Emily's death. Indeed, there are merchants in Haworth who make their living by exploiting its connection to this novel; a plaque at the ruins of Top Withens notes that "this farmhouse has been associated with *Wuthering Heights*, the Earnshaw house in Emily Brontë's novel" (Kayes 75). In *Emily Brontë*, published in 1883, and *The Brontë Country*, published in 1888, the authors theorized that the Sowdens

was the original Wuthering Heights, based on the fact that the "HE 1659" inscribed above the door was the inspiration for the name Hareton Earnshaw (Flintoff 37). Other candidates for the Heights include Top Withens in Howarth, Law Hill in Southowram, where Emily Brontë had her brief teaching career, Ponden Hall in Stanbury, and others. Thrushcross Grange has been identified as Shibden Hall, Crowstone Hall in Southowram, and High Sunderland Hall, also in Southowram (Flintoff 38).

However, despite the powerful descriptions of setting that Emily Brontë includes throughout the novel, there is a startling lack of specificity in these locations. While there are certainly real-life parallels to these locations, Brontë often refuses to supply specific place names that would identify real-life counterparts to her settings, a decision that is unusual among the fiction of her contemporaries, and even that of her sisters, Anne and Charlotte, who conformed more to contemporary practice by naming specific places and including details that allowed these locations to be found in actual space. More to the point, the text actually undermines the readers' ability to locate the novel's settings in real space by including details that distinguished them from real-life locales; for example, while Top Withens has some superficial characteristics in common with the Heights, there are also several details included in the novel that make it clear the house is not Top Withens, or Ponden Hall, or any of the other houses with which it has been identified.

This is not as trivial a matter as it might seem, for readers of the time expected to see places and things in fiction that were familiar to them. In his seminal study *The Presence of the Present: Topics of the Day in the Victorian Novel*, Richard D. Altick argues that Victorian readers expected to see real life reflected in fiction. He states, "The kind of literature that was most in demand was the kind that somehow reflected, as

newspapers did, the world—including the domestic realm...that readers knew best" (10). Readers expected, even in novels of the fantastic, to recognize something of their own selves and their own world (130). The question then becomes, why the difference in Emily Brontë's approach? Why do her novels include details of setting that, while recognizable, are ever so slightly different from settings that exist in actual space? Why create something so close to real life and then undermine that association?

It is equally legitimate to ask what relevance the question has. Even if Emily Brontë did differ from her sisters, and other contemporary novelists, in the sense that she did not represent real-life locales one hundred percent accurately, could not such differences merely be accounted for by taking into account individual style, or the fact that Emily Brontë was at least partially writing in the gothic mode, in which fantastic and utterly fictional locales were an accepted part of the genre? In essence, have not such differences already been reconciled?

The answer is yes, but only to a point. While it is true that Emily's style is of course different than her sisters' (as, of course, Anne's and Charlotte's styles have important differences between Emily's and each others'), the question is deeper than one of style, for generations of readers have found an almost mystical quality in Emily Brontë's description of her settings, a quality that makes the world in which this novel is set almost unreal, despite the fact that the moors, the Heights, the Grange, and the other settings of the novel are unquestionably inspired by places that did, in fact, exist in real space. What are the implications, then, for any message that Emily Brontë was attempting to convey?

It is also true that the decision to write in a gothic mode does at least partially



explain why Emily Brontë did not need to create a completely journalistically accurate representation of the particular part of Yorkshire about which she writes, since fantastic locales were a typical element of the gothic genre. However, the complicating factor here is that *Wuthering Heights* is not a typical gothic tale in this respect, either; the fact is that the reader does not have a completely accurate picture of where the tale takes place, but it clearly does take place in Yorkshire at a certain time and within certain boundaries. (The text makes it clear, for example, how far the unnamed city in which the bulk of the narrative takes place is from London.) Thus, Emily Brontë is creating, against contemporary expectations, a world that is, in some ways, a reflection of the Yorkshire of the period, and in other ways, ways too numerous and significant to ignore, recognizably different from that world. How, then, should the modern reader approach the idea of setting in the text?

The answer, I will argue, lies, in part, with Brontë's early fascination with fantasy and fairy tales. The text of *Wuthering Heights* shows unmistakable fairy-tale elements that have less to do with a typical "tale of the present" than with the stories of Gondal that she created in her youth. In that context, Brontë avoids naming specific places because she is creating a narrative universe that is both based on the real world yet distanced from it: a sort of "third way" between the sort of journalistic fiction of which Altick speaks and what John Sutherland calls the "ghastly castles, mysterious apparitions, sex and sadism, and Italianate mystery" of the pure gothic (256).

The fact that the narrative structure of *Wuthering Heights* holds similarities to the world of fantasy and fairy tale has not gone unnoticed by other critics. Susan Meyer and Terry Eagleton have both argued that the locations and settings of *Wuthering Heights* are

not specific because they are meant to be read as an allegorical representation of some real-life place about which Emily Brontë is choosing to make a political point. Susan Meyer argues that Heathcliff, who is variously described as "an American or Spanish castaway," a possible Emperor of China, or an Indian prince, should be seen a "reverse colonizer," someone who represents a threat because he is an outsider who threatens to take over Britain. The references to his black skin and dark eyes, in this view, are a racial signal that he does not belong, and his treatment as a slave is thus reminiscent of the actual slave trade. Meyer points out that the one specific city named in the novel, Liverpool, was the seat of the British slave trade, and that, of course, is where Heathcliff is found (98). After he spends his years abroad, Heathcliff takes retribution for his former enslavement, making the slave the master (102). Terry Eagleton makes a similar argument when he posits that Heathcliff's origins and conditions mark him as Irish, and the novel can at least partially be read as an examination of the effects of British policy in Ireland (4). This is a view shared by Oscar Arnedillo, who notes that Heathcliff's years of absence coincide with years of political upheaval in Ireland. Heathcliff's return and subsequent near-enslavement of the Heights and the Grange can thus be seen as a variation of "reverse colonization": in this case, the Irish establishing dominion over England (244). In defense of his argument, Arnedillo argues that Heathcliff's "babbling" at the beginning of the novel is meant to represent Erse, a Gaelic language with which Emily was familiar, and also points out that the use of fir trees at the side of the Heights was an Irish tradition, representing Heathcliff's attempt to impress his (supposed) ethnic identity on his conquered home (242). Matthew Beaumont synthesizes these arguments, stating that Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights represent the competing,

destructive forces of modernity and tradition, and Heathcliff, rather than representing the threat, represents the victim of these competing forces (138)

The arguments of Meyer and Eagleton, in particular, have had great influence. What has yet to be argued, however, is how a fairy-tale structure enabled Emily Brontë to create a narrative universe in which it was possible to make such arguments, and to do so in a more powerful way than simply "holding the mirror up to nature." Brontë was heavily criticized for her "grotesque" vision, and characters with whom it was hard to identify, but ultimately, that may have been her intention: to create a narrative universe which forced the reader to confront difficult truths about the real world.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CONTEXT OF PLACE

For Emily Brontë, the creation of a fantastical realm was a project that began early in life. It is, of course, well-known that the younger Brontë sisters, Emily, Charlotte, and Anne, along with their brother Branwell, created an elaborate series of fantasy realms in writing over a period of nearly twenty years. Charlotte and Branwell created "Glasstown" and later "Angria," while Anne and Emily created the mythical island of "Gondal." What is slightly less well-known is the surprisingly varied inspiration for these tales; while the children were inspired by authors like Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron (Emily was especially enamored of Byron, even at a young age appreciating his rejection of traditional morality), they were also inspired by the engravings of artist John Martin, whose works were religious in nature but were appreciated by Emily for "the completeness of his vision" and "his capacity to evoke the reality of other fantastic worlds" (Fraser 48). It is worth noting that while Glass Town, the creation of Charlotte and Branwell, was inspired by the real-life colony of the same name on the mouth of the Niger River, Emily and Anne's kingdom had no such real-

world counterpart. Furthermore, Charlotte soon became fascinated with the political sphere and started writing of parliamentary elections and legislative maneuvers in Angria that paralleled real-life events in London, and, in later life, Charlotte attempted to transplant Angria into real-life locales (Fraser 131-132). Gondal, on the other hand, was a mythical island ruled by a gorgeous queen over whom men fought and killed, and where the pageantry of war and conquest was rejected by the natives. Emily is believed to have written about Gondal on and off through the end of her life, even comparing the visiting Queen Victoria to the queen of Gondal in a short letter she wrote when both Emily and Victoria were twenty-four (Fraser 199). In any case, Emily showed early on a love of having godlike dominion over her own worlds, a character trait Charlotte may have had in mind when she opined that Emily had "a spirit...more powerful than sportive" (Fraser 293). Anne, too, noticed this; in her poem "The Three Guides," Anne seems to be describing Emily when she writes, "Spirit of Pride! thy wings are strong; / thine eyes like lightning shine / Ecstatic joys to thee belong / And powers almost divine" (293).

It is worth pointing out that having godlike dominion over a fictional universe is comparatively easy when the realm is totally fantastical, as in Gondal. It is more challenging when the novel purportedly takes place in the England of the time, or at least the near past, as indicated by the date "1801" in Lockwood's journal entry, which is, in fact, the first bit of prose in the book. Yet the lack of specificity is nonetheless significant: why does Brontë go to the trouble of including the detail that the town of the narrative is about sixty miles from Liverpool, and not go ahead and give the name of the town as well?

There is certainly some explanation to be found in the fact that Brontë was writing

a novel in the gothic mode. Emily was, after all, known to be an enthusiastic reader of the gothic, and authors of contemporary gothic fiction such as Edward Lloyd often set their stories in fantastical locales. However, this was not universally true: G.W.M. Reynolds, known as a teller of melodramatic gothic tales, set almost all of his novels in a very recognizable London. Indeed, readers who had no contact with the city read his novels to get a sense of what London was "really" like, according to one critic:

How hungrily were George W.M. Reynolds's entrancing *Mysteries of London* (1846-50)...devoured in provincial places, and how securely lodged in provincial prejudices were their metropolitan melodramas and stereotypes? One cannot tell. But...London occupied a unique and identifiable place in the national psyche which someone has got to probe very thoroughly before we can understand properly its relations with the provinces, either then or now. (Altick 52)

Furthermore, William Harrison Ainsworth, the leading gothic novelist of the time, mainly focused on historical melodramas and the titles of his works reveal a preoccupation with specific settings: *The Lord Mayor of London*, *Charles Stuart at Madrid*, *Bath in the Eighteenth Century*, and others (Sutherland 14). Indeed, while John Sutherland argues that gothic fiction, as a whole, was "a minor byway of Victorian fiction," he also argues that the most popular and numerous examples of the genre at this time were works of historical fiction, particularly the works of Sir Walter Scott, whose locations were usually specific and of whom Emily Brontë was a great admirer (256). In this sense, *Wuthering Heights* was anomalous. *Wuthering Heights* could also be considered a regional novel, but here, too, it is anomalous: According to Sutherland, in a Victorian era in which

London was growing at a rate of twenty percent every ten years, "the bulk of Victorian fiction is set in the capital" (527). Ireland and Scotland no longer had the popularity they once had as settings, and among the exceptions to the "London rule" listed by Sutherland, the Brontë sisters are the only regional novelists of the time who wrote works set in Yorkshire (527).

Yet *Wuthering Heights*, while clearly set in Yorkshire, does not name its city, and the landmarks that are mentioned—The Heights, the Grange, Penistone Crag, Gimmerton—are fictional. Emily Brontë seems to go out of her way to avoid using any real place names or locating the reader in identifiable space, except in the most generic terms. The general location of the village within England is identified only as being in the North of England; Mr. Earnshaw states that he walked "sixty miles each way" to Liverpool and back. In fact, Liverpool is one of the very few real cities mentioned in the novel, and one of the few places mentioned by name at all besides the Heights and the Grange. One of this handful of other mentioned places is the village of Gimmerton, whose geography is described by Nellie Dean as

the wild green park, the valley of Gimmerton, with a long line of mist winding nearly to its top (for very soon after you pass the chapel, as you may have noticed, the sough that runs from the marshes joins a beck which follows the bend of the glen). *Wuthering Heights* rose above this silvery vapour; but our old house was invisible; it rather dips down on the other side (E. Brontë 97).

Gimmerton appears on no map of England. Penistone Crag, another location mentioned by name, does not exist in reality either, although the location has been associated by

Edward Flintoff with Ponden Kirk and the name with Penistone Hill, which is to the southwest of Haworth. Nellie Dean notes that "The Craggs lie about a mile and a half beyond Mr. Heathcliff's place, and that is four from the Grange" (E. Brontë 174). Ponden Kirk is less than a mile from Top Withens, which has been identified as a possible "real" Wuthering Heights. Further, young Cathy speaks of a "fairy cave," which matches a local legend, and the description by Nellie fits the actuality: "They [the crags] are bare masses of stone, with hardly enough earth in their clefts to nourish a stunted tree" (E. Brontë 172). Yet, if Emily Brontë did intend for Ponden Kirk to be matched with the location in the novel, why did she change the name, particularly to one that is so close to a real-life location? It is a small detail, to be sure, but given the specificity of the description, it must be considered a significant one.

Consider, for example, the two most important houses in the novel: Wuthering Heights itself, and Thrushcross Grange. As previously noted, several real-life houses have been suggested as the putative inspiration for the Heights and the Grange, but Emily Brontë's text serves to undermine nearly all of them. Wuthering Heights, for example, is described thus by Mr. Lockwood:

One may guess the power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house...happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong; the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones. Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door, among which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys,



I detected the date "1500" and the name "Hareton Earnshaw" (E. Brontë 26)

Several details in this description undermine the Heights' identification with either High Sunderland Hall or Sowdens. High Sunderland Hall had no such trees, no carvings, no griffins or cherubs, and no date. Sowdens did have a date, but it was 1659, not 1500, and while there was an "HE" inscribed on the building, the use of fir trees in the graveyard is a detail that would have gone against contemporary Yorkshire practice; it was, in fact, an Irish one (Arnedillo 241). Furthermore, Lockwood notes that he "jumped over" the gate (E. Brontë 29), yet plans for High Sunderland Hall clearly show a very high gateway that would make this impossible (Flintoff 45). Indeed, High Sunderland Hall, which had a high gate, opulent stained-glass windows, and a fully-finished second floor, seems to be too magnificent a building to correspond to the description Brontë gives of a household whose magnificence is long past:

The apartment and furniture would have been nothing extraordinary as belonging to a homely, northern farmer with a stubborn countenance, and stalwart limbs, set out to advantage in knee-breaches, and gaiters. Such an individual, seated in his armchair, his mug of ale frothing on the round table before him, is to be seen in any circuit of five or six miles among these hills, if you go at the right time, after dinner. (E. Brontë 27).

This description is clearly meant to convey anything other than opulence, as is this description:

There was a carpet - a good one, but the pattern was obliterated by dust; a fireplace hung with cut-paper, dropping to pieces; a handsome oak-

bedstead with ample crimson curtains of rather expensive material and modern make; but they had evidently experienced rough usage: the valences hung in festoons, wrenched from their rings, and the iron rod supporting them was bent in an arc on one side, causing the drapery to trail upon the floor. The chairs were also damaged, many of them severely; and deep indentations deformed the panels of the walls.

(137)

Edward Flintoff hypothesizes that the house described here is not based on a specific location, but a type: the Halifax house, which, as he states, shows a "characteristic lack of any pretension to gentility: no coat of arms, no porter's lodge, no ornate gateway" (45). In this sense, it is not only unimportant but counterproductive to attempt to match it to any real-life location; Brontë is displaying not an extraordinary house, but one that is, paradoxically, highly ordinary, an unfashionable and unattractive house that has clearly been allowed to decline.

Even the fictional village of Gimmerton vexes the reader trying to pinpoint matching real-life locations. Michael Irwin has pointed out that "the reader can never clearly establish quite where Gimmerton is situated in relation to Thrushcross Grange or Wuthering Heights" (138). Lockwood notes that "the distance from the gate to the Grange is two miles" (E.Brontë 48); Christopher Heywood notes that such a holding "is on a scale rarely found except among the demesne parks of dukes and other expensive landowners" (28). Edward Flintoff points out that neither Shibden Hall or Ponden Hall is anywhere near this size; indeed, nothing of this scale was to be found in any of the areas previously identified as the "real" Grange, stating, "The sheer scale of the household is

immeasurably greater than anything likely to be met with in either the Haworth or Southowram areas” (41). Lockwood also clearly states that it was a “four miles walk” from the Grange to the Heights; there are no comparable households in Howarth that meet this requirement.

In short, while these locations have much in common with real-life locales, there are just enough significant differences described in the text to make it clear that they are not the same. While *Wuthering Heights* has much in common with, for example, High Sunderland Hall, or Top Withens, it is not High Sunderland Hall or Top Withens. In other words, one could not visit *Wuthering Heights* the same way one could see the locations described in Dickens or Ainsworth or Sir Walter Scott. Significantly, readers of the time period could not read *Wuthering Heights* to find out what Yorkshire was "really" like the same way they could read Ainsworth to learn about London. J. Erskine Stuart, the author of the aforementioned *The Brontë Country*, admitted this when he noted that the desolate, craggy town described in *Wuthering Heights* bore little relation to the Haworth of the time, which was a center of the textile industry (Heywood 18). This realization came as early as 1888, yet, there still seems to be an insistence that, despite the incongruities, the geography of *Wuthering Heights* can be roughly equated with real-life locales with which Brontë was familiar without any dilemma; that *Wuthering Heights* is, in part, a celebration of the home that Emily Brontë knew, a view at least partially inspired by her sister Charlotte's remark that

as far as the scenery and locale are concerned, [Emily's view] could hardly have been more sympathetic: Ellis Bell did not describe as one whose eye and taste alone found pleasure in the prospect; her native hills were far

more to her than a spectacle; they were what she lived in, and by, as much as the wild birds, their tenants, or as the heather, their produce. (22)

It is as if Emily Brontë's description of the moors and their almost savage, and certainly unforgettable, quality is so vivid that there surely must be, in the critic's mind, a real locale which served as the model. It is here, however, that the reader must stop and confront some inescapable truths. First, it is by no means necessarily true that a vivid description of a place means that it must really exist; works by Tolkien, Swift, Margaret Cavendish, and countless other science-fiction and fantasy works serve to disprove this notion. Charlotte herself probably suspected, at least privately, that her sister was interested in more than simply "holding the mirror up to nature, " to use Hamlet's term: in the selfsame 1850 preface, she notes that Heathcliff was "the ever-suffering soul of a magnate of the infernal world" (24) Branwell and Charlotte had nicknamed their world of fantasy from childhood "the infernal world" (Fraser 267), and Charlotte's use of the phrase acknowledges the darkness and moral ambiguity of her sister's fictional world. The novel presents a kind of "third way" for contemporary fiction, with places that are only marginally "real"; that is, they are not places on a map that one can actually visit. Altick remarks on the fact that details of time are lacking, arguing that "[w]ere no dates mentioned, the events could just as well have taken place in 1760, or for that matter in 1846, the year before *Wuthering Heights* was published" (129), but it is also important to note that his point can easily be applied to place as well: that *Wuthering Heights* does not meet the contemporary expectation that novels present the reader with something specific. Instead, they present the reader with the "third way" mentioned previously: a fairy story or romance that takes place in a realm that is part of, but at the same time

isolated from, the journalistic "real world" presented by other contemporary novelists. "As many critics have observed," Altick argues, "it is literally 'timeless', dealing with a closed group of characters living on their self-destructive passions, with no sense of a world, a society, beyond *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*" (129). This is hyperbole; *Wuthering Heights* clearly takes place in a certain time in a certain part of England. However, that very fact sets it apart: Yorkshire, according to one observer, was "pretty cut off from the influence of those forces that shaped the main trend of the time. Its life remained essentially the same as it had been in the days of Queen Elizabeth" (Altick 129). Simply setting the novel in Yorkshire meant that Emily Brontë was following a different path from most of her contemporaries; she was for the most part treading untrodden novelistic ground, both literally and figuratively. By this definition, according to Altick, *Wuthering Heights* is not only anomalous, but is "the very antithesis of the 'typical' tale of the present" (129).

### CHAPTER III

#### THE FUNCTION OF PLACE IN THE NOVEL

This is not to say that the locale of the novel is as fantastical as Gondal. The novel clearly takes place in Yorkshire; Mr. Lockwood notes that the term "Wuthering" is a "provincial adjective" (E. Brontë 26), describes Heathcliff as a "homely, northern farmer" (26), and Linton asks Catherine if she has noticed Hareton's "frightful Yorkshire pronunciation" (196). Yet, Emily Brontë does not name the town in which the narrative takes place "Haworth" or any other name actually used in Yorkshire at the time. In fact, the town is unnamed, and the town of "Gimmerton," as previously stated, did not exist at the time. What seems most significant vis-à-vis location in Brontë's universe is that it is indeed a universe to itself; locations are only specified in terms of their distance from the Heights or the Grange, and the outside world is literally that: a world outside the novel's concern. Places away from these places are another world that is alien. Consider the origins of Heathcliff, an alien to this universe, who may be a "little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway" and, in any case, "a wicked boy, at all events, and quite unfit for a decent house!" (E. Brontë 62). It should be pointed out that it would seem to

be quite easy to tell most people's origins through their language, but, upon his introduction to the family, Heathcliff "only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish, that nobody could understand" (E. Brontë 51). Heathcliff is thus labeled from the beginning as the ultimate outsider; his origins are a complete mystery, and it is only known that he is from the world outside the domain of the narrative. Nellie Dean even tells him, "Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England?" (E. Brontë 67-68). While it is clearly a suggestion meant to be fanciful, it is nonetheless telling that Heathcliff does, in fact, take over the Heights. In the context of this novel, it is no less far-fetched to believe that Heathcliff is a Chinese prince or the son of an Indian queen, because he is simply identified as someone who comes from elsewhere. Where, specifically, is not important.

Indeed, there is a clear demarcation in this novel between the world of the Heights and the Grange, and everywhere else. The only city mentioned in the novel is Liverpool, and the mention of the distance from Liverpool to Gimmerton—sixty miles—is one of the few mentions of exact distance mentioned in the novel. It is, of course, significant that Liverpool is sixty miles from Haworth, and is actually one of the few details in the novel that links the setting of the novel to any concrete place, or, indeed, any one that can be found on a real-world map. Indeed, this novel creates a world that is as self-contained as any place could be; the outside world is simply another place with which the characters do not concern themselves. When Lockwood shows up, he is not welcome. He is literally "out of place." The dog snarls at him, and he states outright, in the novel's

very first paragraph, "In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society" (E. Brontë 25). From a narrative viewpoint, he cannot tell the story. It is left to someone inside the already established domain of the narrative, Nellie Dean, to do that. Much has been made of the novel's "puzzle-box" narrative structure, but for the present purpose, it is important to note that a resident of this "situation so completely removed from the stir of society" must explain the goings-on to an outsider: to Lockwood, and by extension, the reader. Since the story is told through the perspective of Mr. Lockwood, an outsider, who relates the story told to him by Nellie Dean, who in turn tells about events that she has not witnessed, the way in which the story is told constantly reminds the reader that he or she is also an outsider; that the events of this novel are *meant* to be alien. Critic Nancy Armstrong states that "[m]any literary critics have attributed the Chinese-box structure of this novel to the neurosis of a female author who withdrew from adult sexuality into the sanctuary of her family, fantasy life, and finally, death" (431). Yet, given Emily Brontë's other efforts to literally "displace" her reader, it seems just as likely that the narrative structure, at least partially, is yet another device to remind her reader that the locales of this novel are not real; that the events that took place therein did not take place in actual space. As Christopher Heywood noted in an article on this very subject, "Light concealment was part of Emily Brontë's intention" (820); in other words, just as Shakespeare's characters often remind the audience that it is watching a play, the reader of *Wuthering Heights* is being constantly reminded that these places are not real, and, by extension, these events did not happen.

It is also telling that while Hindley is sent to London to be educated, by Chapter 8,



he "had lost the benefit of his early education; continual hard work, begun soon and concluded late, had extinguished any curiosity he once possessed in pursuit of knowledge, and any love for books or learning" (E. Brontë 76). It is as if being literally back "in his place"—that is, the insular world in which he grew up—has counteracted the effect of leaving it. This sense of insularity also permeates the novel's dialogue: when Nellie is wondering aloud about Catherine's possible place in the afterlife, she asks Lockwood, "Do you believe such people are happy in the other world, sir? I'd give a great deal to know" (E. Brontë 153). Such a question, at this point in the narrative, has an intriguing double meaning: Lockwood may not know what goes on in the afterlife, but he does know what goes on in the "other world": the outside world that only he has access to. When people are sent away from this world, their journey is vague and undefined, significant only because it was somewhere else. When Heathcliff comes back to the Heights, the usually ebullient Nellie Dean cannot say where he was. It is left to Lockwood to surmise where he might have been: "Did he finish his education on the continent, and come back a gentleman? or did he get a sizar's place at college, or escape to America, and earn honours by drawing blood from his foster-country? or make a fortune more promptly on the English highways?" (E. Brontë 95). Nellie is either evasive or dismissive when she states, "I don't know how he gained his money, neither am I aware of the means he took to raise his mind from the savage ignorance into which it was sunk: but, with your leave, I'll proceed in my own fashion" (E. Brontë 95). Her response is thus revealing on a number of levels. First, the location of Heathcliff during that time is not known, is considered to be unimportant, or is not to be spoken of. In any case, the question of where he was is insignificant to Nellie's narrative because he was simply

somewhere else: in that large expanse of "elsewhere" from which Heathcliff arrived in the first place. Such dialogue not only has the effect of distancing the reader from the characters, but reminds the reader that he or she is much closer to Lockwood than any of the other characters in this novel, who reside in a separate world.

CHAPTER IV  
THE REACTION TO BRONTË'S USE OF PLACE

Saying that *Wuthering Heights* took place in a separate world might well be useful, since many contemporary critics found *Wuthering Heights* to be shocking and immoral, and expressed dismay at the actions of its characters, its highly unusual plot, and, above all, its lack of situations and places to which the reader could relate. Typical was one critique from the *Literary World*: "In the whole story not a single trait of character is elicited which can command our admiration, not one of the fine feelings of our nature seems to have formed a part in the composition of its principal actors" (Allott 234). Another reviewer stated that the characters were "so new, so grotesque...that they strike us as proceeding from a mind of limited experience" (Fraser 291), while another noted that the novel was only to be enjoyed by the deranged, since "we can promise them that they have never read anything like it before" (Fraser 291). It seems Altick is correct: contemporary readers did not know what to do when presented with a world that had so little to do with their day-to-day experiences. However, Emily had little time to worry about this, if, indeed, she ever would have: she died a year after the novel's publication,

the same year as her brother Branwell and just six months prior to Anne.

It was left to Charlotte to deal with the reception accorded to Emily's work, and it is here that her somewhat more conventional approach had its greatest impact. It is interesting to note that when Charlotte arranged to have Emily's poems published, she had all references to Gondal deleted. Charlotte also standardized the spelling and punctuation of *Wuthering Heights* upon its publication in order to make the work more palatable to the contemporary reading public (Fraser 390). Charlotte's novels, *Jane Eyre*, *Villette*, *Shirley*, and *The Professor*, are much more in keeping with contemporary practice in that they mention specific locations and real settings. For example, there are references in *Jane Eyre*, as Altick points out, that are "inconsistent," but nevertheless give at least a vague sense of time and place: a reference to Leeds, which she calls Milcote, as "a large manufacturing town," a reference to the contemporary novel *Marmion*, references to military operations in Sheffield, and others (130). Further, Charlotte Brontë sought to reassure her readers that *Shirley* was specifically *not* a romance when she said, "something real, cool, and solid lies before you, something unromantic as Monday morning" (Altick 45). Following the deaths of Emily and Anne, she wrote a Preface to a new edition of *Wuthering Heights*, in which she attempted to explain Emily's transgressions by stating that she was a native of an uncultured hinterland and that "she did not know what she had done" (335).

Altogether, the jarring mix of genre, along with the shock of something unexpected and new, created a kind of cognitive dissonance in readers and critics, who were scandalized by the novel's content but nonetheless recognized the talent of its author. In her 1850 defense of her sisters, Charlotte Brontë states that, "[t]he immature

but very real powers revealed in *Wuthering Heights* were scarcely recognised" (10), but this is not entirely accurate. There were in fact several critics who noted the novel's narrative power, as did one unsigned review that stated, "We are spellbound. We cannot choose but read" (Allott 232). What critics overwhelmingly objected to was a perceived lack of message in the novel. One critic noted that, "There seems to us great power in this book but a purposeless power, which we feel a great desire to see turned to better account"; however, that same critic praised her skill as a writer, opining, "We are quite confident that the writer of *Wuthering Heights* wants but the practised skill to make a great artist; perhaps, a great dramatic artist" (Allott 228). In other words, critics were capable of discerning the raw power of the work; they simply didn't know what to do with a novel that was so different from what was being published at the time. One reviewer specifically noted that, "If this book be, as we apprehend it is, the first work of the author, we hope that he will produce a second, giving himself more time in its composition than in the present case, developing his incidents more carefully, *eschewing exaggeration and obscurity*" (Allott 221) [Italics mine].

Hence, there began, almost as soon as the novel was published, an effort to somehow explain the novel's purported flaws. Not surprisingly, this included an effort to show that the novel did take place in "real" space after all; that the world of the novel was the author's childhood home, and that the geographic limitations are somehow representative of the author's limitations as a novelist, and did not represent an intentional flouting of the status quo. In this view, Emily is a sort of savage, who, while "truthfully" representing the world she knew, should be forgiven for her excesses in portraying that world since it was all "the home-bred country girl" knew. Charlotte later expanded on

this in a biographical note, saying that Emily's mind was "unripe...inefficiently cultured and partially expanded," and stated that "Neither Emily nor Anne was learned...they always wrote from the impulse of nature, the dictates of intuition, and from such stores as their limited experience had enabled them to amass" (Fraser 267-268). Sympathetic biographers tried to argue that the world Brontë created was an unnamed parallel to the world in which she grew up, which she found both grotesque and fascinating.

Others attempted to explain that the novel's darkness and immorality was also a function of place; in other words, Emily Brontë wrote the way she did because her environs growing up were so bleak. In her famous biography of Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell notes that the moors of Haworth were "oppressive from the feeling they gave of being pent-up by some monotonous and illimitable barrier" (55). A family friend described the parsonage where the girls grew up as "wild and uncultivated," "cold," "dead-coloured," and a "bleak oblong" (Fraser 19), yet, among the girls, Emily in particular had a delight in following the goings-on of the "ungovernable families" and "queer people" of Haworth, the reckless people who "build grand houses, and live in the kitchens, own thousands of pounds and yet bring up their sons with only enough learning to qualify them for onlookers during their fathers' lifetime," (Fraser 21) and it has been pointed out that, at this time,

the area [of Haworth] was completely cut off, and isolation had fostered a spirit of remarkable independence. A strong sense of folklore still flourished in these northern hills, and tales of fairies and the wee folk...went alongside Methodist teaching, with its emphasis on the marvellous. (Fraser 29)

Hence, in this scenario, Haworth and its surrounding environs, where Emily felt like an outsider yet also found inspiration, are the framework for a fictional environment that is fictional only in name and in a few insignificant details, since Emily Brontë could only "write what she knew." This is an argument made to defend the novel from attacks on its morality and "coarseness" by, among others, Emily's sister Charlotte. In her preface to the 1850 edition of her sister's novel, Charlotte Brontë admits that she has

gained a definite notion of how it [the novel] appears to other people—to strangers who know nothing of the author; who are unacquainted with the locality where the scenes of the story are laid; to whom the inhabitants, the customs, the natural characteristics of the outlying hills and hamlets in the West-Riding of Yorkshire are things alien and unfamiliar...the wild moors of the north of England can for them have no interest; the language, the manners, the very dwellings and household customs of the scattered inhabitants of those districts must be to such readers in a great measure unintelligible, and—where intelligible—repulsive. (21)

Charlotte then goes on to defend her sister's perceived lack of morality and lack of gentility in noting,

Had Ellis Bell been a lady or gentleman accustomed to what is called "the world," her view of a remote and unclaimed region...would have differed greatly from that actually taken by the home-bred country girl. Doubtless it would have been wider—more comprehensive: whether it would have been more original or more truthful is not so certain. (22)

Ultimately, the fact that Charlotte and others were left to defend her sister's sense

of propriety and morality in her novel is an event tinged with irony, since Charlotte had always had a more conventional morality and thus, as one biographer points out, "her very different temperament made it difficult for Charlotte to appreciate the greatness of Emily's novel" (Fraser 267). It may be that Charlotte's defense of her sister's work was made with a willingness to simply set aside what she knew to be true of her sister in order to achieve a greater good, but for the purposes of this paper, it is important simply to point out that her argument is fatally flawed. It is clear that Haworth and the locale of this novel are not interchangeable; more to the point, this association is so consistently undermined throughout the novel that the reader cannot help but find a purpose for Emily's decision to create another "infernal world." It is also worth pointing out that the assumption that the novel needed to be defended was questionable; it assumes that the lack of specificity in place and time are flaws that should be glossed over in favor of the novel's virtues. The evidence suggests otherwise.

In terms of place, the evidence that Emily Brontë was truly trying to create a world all her own is strong, since the text frustrates any attempt to say definitively that "such-and-such is the real Thrushcross Grange," or "such-and-such is the real Wuthering Heights." Indeed, the aforementioned plaque at Top Withens admits that, "The building even when complete, bore no resemblance to the house she described," but hastens to add that "the situation may have been in her mind when she wrote of the moorland setting of the Heights" (Kaye 75). In Emily Brontë's case, the power of her descriptions comes not from the fact that a reader can see them for himself or herself, but that they are so fantastic. When a delirious Catherine recalls the places she and Heathcliff visited in their youth, Nellie notes, "There was no moon, and everything beneath lay in misty darkness;



not a light gleamed from any house, far or near; and those at Wuthering Heights were never visible" (E. Brontë 123). This description bears less resemblance to the descriptions found in a contemporary domestic novel, or even a gothic tale, than to another genre entirely: the fairy tale or fantasy.

CHAPTER V  
BRONTË'S USE OF THE *MÄRCHEN*

Fantasy certainly has certain advantages for the author over other genres of the time. The world of domestic fiction—and even the gothic novel, to a certain extent—oriented the reader in "real" space, a space that was already demarcated. However, the world of the fantastic gothic novel, or, perhaps, the fairy tale or romance, could at least enable Brontë to create her third space, by crafting a form of fiction whose events take place in the real world, but whose actual locales are as vague as possible. In doing this, she had precedent. By setting her novel in the past (1801), and only defining her locations in relation to something else ("sixty miles from Liverpool"), Emily Brontë was doing what Sir Walter Scott had done in 1814 in *Waverley*. In explaining why he had chosen the subtitle "'Tis Sixty years Since," Scott had stated that

By fixing then the date of my story Sixty Years before this present...I would have my readers understand that they will meet in the following pages neither a romance of chivalry, nor a tale of modern manners; that my hero will neither have iron on his shoulders, as of yore, nor on the

heels of his boots, as is the present fashion of Bond Street" (Altick 36).

Sir Walter Scott was speaking of the advantages of setting his novel in the past, and a clearly defined past, to be certain. Yet his narrative aim as expressed in this excerpt is what strikes the reader: he aims neither for the totally fantastic nor the specifics of the present, but a method of storytelling that fits precisely the sort of story he wishes to tell. In the same way, Emily Brontë's choice to set the story in the past, and to define her narrative settings only in relation to somewhere else—places both "real" enough for the reader to identify them and yet vague enough that anything she wanted could take place there—may have served her in the same way.

It is certainly true that Emily Brontë was well-acquainted with both folklore and fairy tales. Her father was a powerful storyteller, at least in the author's early childhood, and Tabitha "Tabby" Aykroyd, their housekeeper, instilled in Emily her love of folk tales and of the moors. Rebecca Fraser reports that "[t]he children particularly delighted in her rough Yorkshire dialect, sometimes mimicking it in their writings" (44). The "writings" Fraser refers to are the juvenilia, the fairy-tale sagas spoken of previously. Sheila Smith argues that, by fairy tales, Emily Brontë was inspired by more than narrative structure; that her narrative tastes were shaped by the tales of fantasy kingdoms and ballads about faraway places that she so enjoyed:

It is possible to trace in these extreme portrayals of an earlier, more overtly savage society, patterns of behaviour which Emily Brontë...incorporated into her mid-nineteenth century novel. Moreover, the quality of sexual passion is similar in ballad and novel, expressed with comparable conviction, objectivity, and economy (507-508).

This is a view echoed by Pier Paolo Piciucco, who states that,

Despite fleeting—and instantly vanishing—reminiscences of a number of real buildings and places, it is all, both in detail and as a whole, as totally imaginary as the landscape of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. Nor this should really surprise us when we consider that the same author had already compiled the obviously complex Gondal and Gaaldine sagas. (49)

Thus, the narrative takes on a tone of fantasy as well: the idea of Heathcliff as a conquering force who threatens a fairy-tale kingdom is echoed by Nellie Dean's exhortation that "I wanted something to happen which might have the effect of freeing both Wuthering Heights and the Grange of Mr. Heathcliff, quietly, leaving us as we had been prior to his advent" (E. Brontë 329). The word choice here suggests the oppression of a tyrant against the people of a kingdom, and the idea that the invaders from the other-world have led to a kind of Dark Age. In this sense, the reader is reminded of Nellie Dean's suggestion early on that Heathcliff may be "a prince in disguise" (E. Brontë 303). Conversely, he could also be a monster threatening the kingdom who must be vanquished. At one point, he is described as having "sharp cannibal teeth"(E. Brontë 25). He even takes on vampiric aspects late in the novel, saying the moment Catherine stopped respecting Edgar, he would have no further regard for him, and "I would have torn his heart out and drank his blood!" (E. Brontë 141). Cathy is thus cast in the role of the princess who has grown up in isolation, when Nellie Dean notes that "Till she reached the age of thirteen she had not once been beyond the range of the park by herself" (E. Brontë 172). In other words, the locations lack specificity because they are meant to be unreal, a world that exists only in fantasy.

When the characteristics of the typical fairy tale are considered, the reader can see that Emily Brontë's work does have many of the features of the genre that Stith Thompson referred to as the *märchen* or "fairy story." According to the *Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folklore and Fairy Tales*, the definition of a "fairy story" is as follows:

[t]his definition was published in 1946, but its basic elements are those that still surface in many discussions of the fairy tale: (1) The structure is episodic and constructed primarily on motifs, (2) *The genre is unabashedly fictional, the setting indefinite, and the mode of reality in which the characters move is supernatural or fantastic*, and (3) protagonists overcome obstacles to advance to rewards and a new level of existence (achieving wealth, power, marriage, and/or social status)" (Haase 323). [Italics mine]

The reader can clearly see the structure in play here: the stops and starts that delineate Nellie Dean's telling of the tale do serve to give the novel a somewhat episodic structure, while the use of dream sequences and Heathcliff's increasingly monstrous behavior give *Wuthering Heights* a tinge of the supernatural. Further, several of the characters overcome oppression to achieve new social status (Heathcliff, Catherine, Hareton, Cathy), although which one is truly the "protagonist" is a matter for some debate and beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is the second quality that is most significant here; a true fairy tale takes place in a fictional or undefined realm, and it seems altogether fitting that a writer who wrote of an utterly fantastic and clearly unconventional realm in childhood would choose to continue that project in an adult novel. Such an approach would have the built-in advantage of shielding the novel from

the criticisms spoken of earlier; after all, a criticism like the one from the *Literary World*, that "In the whole story not a single trait of character is elicited which can command our admiration" (Allott 234), could be deflected by pointing out that the novel is not merely fiction, but fantasy. The universe in which it happened simply did not—and never did—exist. Emily Brontë was its master. Just as the queen of Gondal had mastery over her enchanted men, so too did the author of *Wuthering Heights* hold dominion over her realm.

As Thompson's definition points out, fairy tales take place in an undefined realm, thus justifying the deviation from contemporary practice. However, Catherine and Heathcliff, by any conventional definition, are hardly moral heroes. This fits in with Piciuccio's description of folk-tale morality:

Characteristics of the protagonist which in the European magic tale would appear as weaknesses are either completely omitted or emphatically justified. This includes even those actions that an adult would find immoral. Everything the hero does is good and right, because the hero does it. This is not the articulation of a naïve morality, but of no morality at all (222)

As Jacqueline Simpson points out, the characters who are most in touch with the supernatural are those that "command Emily Brontë's fullest sympathy", even though such characters are denounced by society in the world outside of the novel. Heathcliff's behavior would be utterly abhorrent and Catherine totally self-absorbed in a contemporary domestic novel, but as a fairy-tale ogre and princess, their behavior is completely expected within the genre. Emily Brontë did not have to embrace the

excesses of the gothic to create the kind of “infernal world” she was used to creating.

Hence, the "message" of her novel that eluded contemporary critics becomes manifest in her choosing to subvert contemporary practice; indeed, that is, in one sense, the message. Charlotte said that Emily was withdrawn and "sombre" in real life. Emily could have the "powers almost divine" that Anne spoke of in "The Three Guides" by creating a fantasy realm that showed men and women as she would have them—totally under her control as a storyteller, with her narrative voice expressing judgment—but only by doing it her way. It must be her world, her realm; reality could not be allowed to intrude. This could enable Emily Brontë to be the "master" of her universe, as Heathcliff is the lord of his.

## CHAPTER VI

### CRITICAL IMPLICATIONS

All of these considerations are important, but the ultimate question still must be how considerations of genre and setting impact the present-day reader's conception of *Wuthering Heights*. As previously stated, the conceptualization of the novel as a fantasy or fairy-story is not a new one; Meyer, Eagleton, Arnedillo, and Beaumont have already demonstrated how Brontë may have used the fairy-tale genre to address specific political points. What has not been explored is how the genre of the fairy tale, coupled with the non-specificity of setting, might have helped Emily Brontë make those points in a more powerful way.

Certainly, the theorists previously mentioned have explored how it was possible that the novel's subject matter reflected contemporary political concerns in the outside world. For Emily Brontë herself, however, the implications of using a fairy-tale structure might itself be a subtle act of rebellion. It is well-known that all three Brontë sisters published under a pseudonym. Charlotte and Anne ultimately revealed their identities, but Emily was dead before the public discovered that "Ellis Bell" was a woman (Peterson



7). For a female author in the Victorian Era, creating a fantasy world where the citizens of the realm were under the rule of a Gondal-like queen could therefore be seen as a source of empowerment. A queen with godlike dominion over an infernal world was possible on a page of fantasy, where the “sportive” spirit Anne described could order about her characters with no regard for contemporary practice or morality. The realms of gothic fiction and domestic fiction had already been carefully demarcated, but the third way Brontë created for herself would allow her to tell the stories *she* wanted to tell the way she wanted to tell them.

Emily Brontë appeared to have little interest in what the reading public thought of her as a person; she was extremely upset when Charlotte had revealed their real identities to their publishers. Charlotte noted that, “Ellis Bell will not endure to be alluded to under any other appellation than the *nom de plume*” (Fraser 309). She was much concerned, however, with what readers thought of her work; the negative reviews of *Wuthering Heights* were devastating to her, according to Charlotte, and when her desk was opened following her death, five reviews were found, bound together, comparing her novel unfavorably to *Jane Eyre* (Fraser 292). The question becomes what kind of reviews Emily Brontë could have expected, given that what she was offering was so different from what was typical. To put it simply, the question that vexed the critics of 1847 still faces the reader today: what was Emily Brontë’s purpose in writing *Wuthering Heights*, be it gothic tale, fairy-story, or *märchen*?

This may, in fact, be a question to which Emily Brontë has left the reader an answer, if he or she cares to seek it out. In her ode “To Imagination,” published in 1846, Emily praised Imagination as a personified abstract in saying,

So hopeless is the world without;/The world within I doubly prize;/Thy  
world,/where guile, and hate, and doubt,/And cold suspicion never  
rise;/Where thou, and I, and Liberty,/Have undisputed sovereignty (Pykett  
60).

Thus, Emily Brontë, the girl who could not stand a career as a teacher and was forced to return home, who lived a largely isolated existence in a dreary town, who saw her sisters gain acceptance and acclaim that was never hers in life, could seek solace in creating a world that was utterly imaginary. Her freedom, or Liberty, as she phrased it, could be found in creating a realm that was utterly imaginary, over which she ruled. However, the only way that world could ever gain acceptance to the public was through the form it took. How else could she comment on what she saw around her, as Meyer, Eagleton, and the others have described, yet at the same time create her own space in which concerns like slavery or imperialism were not concerns and in which she had “undisputed sovereignty?”

It is a truism that for many women, the “personal is political,” but for Emily Brontë, this was especially true. One of Emily’s teachers once told her biographer,

Emily had a head for logic...She should have been a man. Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old; and her strong imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty; never have given way but with life.” (Fraser 167)

Surely, if her professor saw this, Emily saw it as well. Knowing, however, that her life would, in fact, be one of opposition and difficulty, given her sex and unconventional

nature, it is understandable that she created another world—a world of imagination—in which she had no such problems. The role of the younger Cathy, for example, becomes elevated to new prominence in this reading. If Heathcliff is the tyrannical monster enslaving the kingdom, it is Cathy who "slays the beast," so to speak. It is her love for Hareton that can be argued to have broken Heathcliff's spirit, and it is she who educates him and prepares him for his new role. Tellingly, Hareton mourns Heathcliff's death, but Cathy does not; the male indulges in the kind of sentimentality usually reserved for the female. For Emily Brontë, this world is indeed a domain in which women have sovereignty; like the queen of Gondal, Cathy is unsentimental and powerful. For Emily Brontë, who had to publish under a male pseudonym, after all, the world she created—both fantastical yet modeled on the "real"—ultimately demonstrated that a woman *could* hold dominion. Yet *Wuthering Heights* is no escapist fantasy; if anything, the use of indeterminate locales allows her to pass judgment on the reader's world in a far more powerful way than she otherwise would.

Consider Meyer's point: that Heathcliff is meant to be a "reverse colonizer," and his actions are an indictment of the dehumanizing effects of the slave trade. If Brontë had chosen (as other authors did) to specifically address the problem of slavery in a specific place, at a specific time, she would have had to confine herself to attacking that problem *as it actually existed*, in the places where it actually happened. Similarly, addressing the oppression of the Irish specifically (as, for example, Charlotte did in *Shirley*) would have required Emily Brontë to confine her narrative to the situation as it existed at the time. By setting her story in an only marginally "real" world, Emily Brontë could create the world she was judging as she would have it. Heathcliff's alien tongue,

for example, becomes impenetrable babble, as opposed to a specifically Gaelic tongue. The circumstances by which he obtained his wealth can be utterly shrouded in mystery. Hindley can completely lose the benefits of his education. All of these, strictly speaking, are not realistic details, but in Emily's world, they can happen, for she is making the rules.

This is a crucial distinction. It is one thing to address the social evils of, for example, workhouses, as Dickens did in *Oliver Twist*: by portraying them almost journalistically. It is quite another to demonstrate the ills of ethnic discrimination or oppression symbolically, through grotesque distortion. "Reverse colonization," for example, does not merely make Heathcliff bitter, it makes him truly evil; his vampiric features and the decay into which the Heights and Grange fall show that his treatment has twisted his mind and soul. It is not a large leap for an aware reader to realize that England's own treatment of the Irish, or of ethnic minorities, may result in the same kind of social decay. Exaggeration and distortion, which are possible in an exaggerated and distorted realm, are used to make a much more dramatic point: that the reader must ask himself or herself what caused these things to happen. In this sense, the reader's discomfort and search for a message becomes a central point of the message, because it requires the reader to actively *think* about what is causing his or her discomfort. The fairy story, or *märchen*, may indeed have an unconventional morality, but such stories often make moral points. When early readers reacted so strongly to a perceived lack of message in the novel, they may have actually been evading a deeper truth: that the grotesque distortions of a character like Heathcliff conveyed in fact *too strong* a message: that this tale showed too much of the ugliness with which English society had been

treating the oppressed and disadvantaged. In this sense, the review cited previously, in which the reviewer stated, "We are spellbound" and "we cannot choose but read" may in fact reveal Emily Brontë's ultimate purpose: to create a world that is clearly *not* the world of the reader, but one that is meant to disturb and provoke. This is because the problems of that world are not fanciful at all. Just as Mark Twain would later set *Huckleberry Finn* in a world that was clearly modeled on the antebellum South while at the same time was an exaggerated and distorted reflection of it, so too did "Ellis Bell" choose to set her novel in a place that was both Yorkshire of the past and an exaggerated and distorted reflection of it. *Huckleberry Finn* is, of course, about much more than slavery, and *Wuthering Heights*, too, is about more than the sum of its political points. However, just as Twain/Clemens could address the dehumanizing effects of racism very powerfully by portraying the adventures of characters in a distorted reflection of the past, so too could Brontë/Bell address the insidious effects of colonization, or slavery, or England's treatment of the Irish, through a distorted reflection of the past. If such an approach made her readers uncomfortable, then perhaps that was the point.

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