THE RHETORICAL IMPORTANCE OF MONSTROSITY: GENRE CRITICISM AND *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of North Carolina at Charlotte
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts in
Communication Studies

Charlotte

2019

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ABSTRACT

TAYLOR FUSSELL. The rhetorical importance of monstrosity: Genre Criticism and *Wuthering Heights*. (Under the direction of DR. DANIEL GRANO)

In Emily Bronte's foundational narrative *Wuthering Heights* (1847), monstrosity is representative of repressed societal fears in response to growing industrialization, shifting socioeconomic status, and changing gender norms of the Victorian era. The rhetorical importance of monstrosity lies in its ability to frame an understanding of the cultures that produce it. As a construction of genre, monstrosity also recurs in representative accounts on ideological discourses based on a given historical, societal, or cultural context. Monstrosity is characterized among contemporary rhetoricians as a manifestation of reading practices, popular representations, and ideological problems. I argue that *Wuthering Heights* is part of the original well that constructed the trope of monstrosity and its manifestation of societal fears, especially surrounding gender and romance, that are still relevant and adapted to contemporary audiences. Contemporary reproductions of *Wuthering Heights* provide evidence that the text is still part of relevant generic reading practices and the evolution of the romance novel. My treatment of monstrosity will focus on its representational qualities and its public importance. As such, this research project is about monstrosity and its rhetorical importance, with genre criticism serving as a lens into its construction via a reading of *Wuthering Heights* and Gothic literature.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all of my family members, friends, and mentors that supported me during the course of a difficult semester. First, I must thank Dr. Dan Grano for his continuous dedication to my success. He devoted time to help guide my project in a productive direction and provided great insight and perspective into this project. His assistance in narrowing my argument and his guidance toward salient scholarship made this project achievable. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Jason Black and Dr. Jonathan Crane for their invaluable perspectives and unwavering support. I am thankful for the patient mentorship that I received from my advisor and committee members during a trying and difficult semester. Lastly, my sincerest appreciation goes to my family and friends whose encouragement and strength supported me during the triumphs and the defeats. This thesis is dedicated to the greatest mentors, best of friends, and the little monsters that made this project attainable.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Wuthering Heights (1847) by Emily Bronte is part of the originary well for the trope of monstrosity, especially its manifestation of reading practices, popular representations, and ideological problems surrounding romance and gender. The rhetorical value of monstrosity lies in its representational quality and its public importance. Monstrosity does a great deal of cultural labor. It uses entertainment rather than persuasive speech to generate new ideologies and cultural norms that move away from hegemonic culture. It highlights the fragmented and inadequate nature of epistemological worldviews, acknowledging the failures within structured, societal systems. The study of monstrosity often brings gender into the conversation because the monstrous is often depicted as marginalized, other, alien, or threatening. While there are many facets of marginality within society like sexuality, race, religion, ethnicity, or ability, I pinpoint gender, specifically, because it has a rhetorical history within the Gothic genre and monstrosity. The original well of Gothic monstrosity born out of eighteenth-century England included *Wuthering Heights*, an important representation of monstrosity and gender that has generated continued interest among audiences. The manifestations of monstrosity within the novel also adds to a recent interest in the connection between monstrosity and gender.

I am studying monstrosity because it is rhetorically important. It reflects societal injustices and anxieties by displaying them as monstrous. Dominant culture defines what the fears are within society and it represses those fears in everyday life and in other forms of entertainment. Through the use of Gothic literature and monstrosity, threats against hegemonic masculinity and sociocultural reformation are expressed. By revisiting

Wuthering Heights, contemporary considerations and problems related to monstrosity and gender are highlighted. *Wuthering Heights* shows a generic shift in the monstrosity that emerged in the eighteenth century and serves as a foundation for the way the genre is still understood today. It is also part of what comprises the internal dynamic of the Gothic and the relationship between monstrosity and gender. The contextual changes from physical to psychological monsters were influenced by gendered stereotypes and evolving societal discourses. These qualities that help define monstrosity and gender within the Gothic repeat throughout history, lending to the attainability of this construct.

I will be analyzing *Wuthering Heights* through a generic lens because that lens sheds light upon what ideas about gender and otherness inspired the genre, formulated the original well of monsters within the Gothic, and continue to be relevant to modern audiences. The Gothic communicates our societal fears in a tangible way. It makes us confront suppressed societal anxieties about inequalities and injustices within culture by embodying the taboo. It also acts as a form of rhetoric that displays the repressed aspects of society, the stuff people do not talk about and the stuff that makes change hard. It is a genre that does not conform; rather it confronts and reflects.

Monstrosity and gender are still talked about amongst rhetoricians and continue to resurface, transform, or repeat. The production of monstrosity within Gothic fiction and within its byproducts, subgenres, horror films, romance fictions, etc., are symptomatic of their times and confirm "the prevailing convictions of the culture that produces it" (Cameron, 2008, p. 29). Contemporary rhetoricians' treatment of monstrosity aligns manifestations of the monster in popular culture with a variety of conditions within the prevailing socioeconomic order. These include the threats of class status and gendered

norms that define monstrosity within *Wuthering Heights*. Romance fiction, for example, has historically seen a reinforcement of gender norms that monstrosity in *Wuthering Heights* sought to confront. Contemporary depictions of the monstrous in literature and film continue to use monstrosity as a communicative tool to display societal fears to a public audience.

The construct of monstrosity within a gendered ideological system offers a view of alternatives to the dominant gendered authority and structures. These constructs of monstrosity serve as touchstones across history in the places that the Gothic surfaces to communicate to a society bound by fear and oppression. I use *Wuthering Heights,* specifically, because it offers a unique and important representation of monstrosity and gender. Monstrosity in this novel represents societal fears toward the marginalized and represents that fear in a very human way. It hardly includes supernatural elements; rather, it manifests monstrosity in human characters as a representation of dominant culture's fear of reform.

Wuthering Heights begins in the winter of 1801 when a man named Lockwood rents a manor called Thrushcross Grange from a landlord named Heathcliff. The wealthy Heathcliff lives in the ancient manor called Wuthering Heights which is a few miles away from the Grange. The story of Heathcliff is told to Lockwood by Nelly Dean, the housekeeper at the Grange and the former servant at Wuthering Heights. Lockwood records his recollection of this story that serves as the main part of the novel. When Nelly worked at the Heights as a child, the manor was owned by Mr. Earnshaw and his family. One day, Mr. Earnshaw departs on a trip to Liverpool and returns to the Heights with an orphan boy who he has adopted as his own. This orphan is Heathcliff and he is at first

detested by his new siblings, Hindley and Catherine Earnshaw. Catherine and Heathcliff quickly become inseparable and Mr. Earnshaw grows to prefer Heathcliff to Hindley, especially after Mrs. Earnshaw dies. Not long after, Mr. Earnshaw also dies, Hindley inherits Wuthering Heights and seeks revenge on Heathcliff.

Catherine and Heathcliff continue to have a close relationship and one night they wander to Thrushcross Grange to poke fun at the children that live there, Edgar and Isabella Linton. Catherine is bitten by a dog and has to stay at Thrushcross Grange for five weeks to recover. During this time, she establishes a relationship with Edgar Linton and eventually marries him to fulfill her desire for social advancement, despite her love for Heathcliff. A few years after their marriage, Heathcliff returns from his time away and seeks revenge against all who have wronged him. He inherits the Heights after Hindley dies and puts himself in a position to inherit Thrushcross Grange by marrying Isabella Linton. Catherine then becomes ill and dies after giving birth to a daughter, also named Catherine. Shortly after, Isabella gives birth to her and Heathcliff's son, named Linton. When young Catherine and Linton grow older, they begin a secret romance; however, Linton pursues young Catherine only because Heathcliff forces him to in his plot to inherit the Grange. When Edgar Linton falls ill, Heathcliff lures Nelly and Catherine to the Heights where he holds them captive until Catherine and Linton marry. Soon after the marriage, Edgar and Linton die. Heathcliff now controls both manors and forces young Catherine to live and work at the Heights while he rents the Grange to Mr. Lockwood. Young Catherine and Hareton, Hindley's son, fall in love. After Heathcliff dies, they inherit Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange and the story ends with a scene of Lockwood visiting the graves of Catherine and Heathcliff.

This thesis will begin by defining genre criticism, the lens that allows the Gothic and monstrosity to be understood as important beyond texts themselves. I then define the interconnections between the Gothic, monstrosity, and gender threaded throughout the development of the genre. Gender discourse is found within Gothic texts and within the extensions of the Gothic, such as romance fiction. These are important connections between the representation of gender and monstrosity within *Wuthering Heights* and its contemporary manifestations and treatments. The subsequent analysis chapter will begin with a close reading of *Wuthering Heights*. This will bring to light the specific nuances of fear within Victorian society that monstrosity represents. I will detail the monsters within the narrative and how they display gender stereotypes that extend beyond the text and time period. This analysis spells out the general understanding of genre, monstrosity and romance within *Wuthering Heights* that makes the text foundational. Lastly, I will reference contemporary versions of *Wuthering Heights*, as well as contemporary and illustrative manifestations of the Gothic monster and romance. The figure of monstrosity and its signification to gender politics drawn from *Wuthering Heights* have shifted over time and across texts. This will show how the genre and its attending tropes of monstrosity and romance stand today.

CHAPTER 2: GENRE CRITICISM, THE GOTHIC, AND MONSTROSITY

This chapter will preview previous research related to genre criticism, the gothic, and monstrosity. I begin with an overview of genre criticism that ends with an emphasis on the understanding that genres inhere in people, not texts (Gunn & Frentz, 2008). Next, I characterize the Gothic as a specific genre that brings to light repressed societal anxieties. Following that I will bring monstrosity to the forefront as a trope or figure within the Gothic genre that manifests in representations of humanity, imbalances of power, and the convergence of symbolic expression and ideological discourse. Lastly, I approach a treatment of gender as it relates to monstrosity and serves as an index for specific political and historical moments, consistent with the general assumptions of genre criticism.

2.1 Genre Criticism

Concepts of genre as a means of classification have been used since the times of Aristotle who distinguished three rhetorical genres: the forensic, the deliberative, and the epideictic (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986). In rhetoric, genre theory provides a system of classification and comparison of artifacts derived from form, genre, and situation. At times form and genre are treated as synonymous, as when Kenneth Burke speaks of Aristotle's classification of the three genres as "forms-in-the-large" (Burke, 1969, p. 69). Generic thought was kept vital during the Renaissance by rhetorical theory rather than literary theory (Connors, 1986). Moving beyond the formal features of communication, Carolyn Miller, among others, focused upon de-facto genres recurring within socio-cultural circumstances (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986). Some, like Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1978) treat genres as complex clusters of forms (Simons &

Aghazarian, 1986). This viewpoint is consistent with Edwin Black's view of rhetorical genres that scholars have generally endorsed (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986). Black (1965) argues that genres are related in some sense to situation, and as constituted by recurrent features or elements that can be described as forms.

Campbell and Jamieson (1978) expanded upon this notion of genre by offering a series of propositions about the relationships among form, genre, and situation (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986). They define genre as a constellation of recognizable forms that recur (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978). The forms within rhetorical genres are strategies—"substantive and stylistic forms chosen to respond to situational requirements" (Campbell & Jamieson, 1978, p. 15). Campbell and Jamieson argue that as constellations, rhetorical genres are not "mere groupings of acts displaying significant similarities" (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986, p. 7). A genre's substance and elements of style are, instead, demanded by situation. "They are joined to each other as well by an internal dynamic that remains virtually unchanged even as the elements themselves are altered somewhat over time" (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986, p. 7). This is what makes genre understood as a set of reading practices. Over time, people gain an understanding of what it means for something to be Gothic, as an example. They recognize the internal dynamic, even if elements within the book or film change and vary. As such, genres inhere in people, not texts (Gunn & Frentz, 2008).

Fiction authors are constantly constructing realities and establishing values and attitudes of a given period of time (Booth, 1961). Although commonly looked at as forms of entertainment, Chesebro and Hamsher (1975) argue that "entertainment and persuasion are not exclusive dimensions; entertainment may be persuasive; persuasion may be

entertaining" (p. 590). Through rhetorical analysis, the persuasive qualities of fiction, traditionally thought of as solely entertainment, are revealed. The power and advantage of entertainment is that it offers a safe space to critique and shed light on society and the human condition. Pieces of entertainment are not approached as persuasive; therefore, they gain the power to persuade an audience who is more vulnerable than an audience of a rhetorical form that is traditionally persuasive. Rhetorical analysis further suggests that these "types of communication traditionally reviewed as non-persuasive may, in fact, function predominantly and essentially as rhetoric" (Hubbard, 1985, p. 114). As such, there is validation for considering the rhetorical potential of novels such as *Wuthering Heights*.

2.2 The Gothic Genre

Traditionally, "Gothic" refers to a literary movement emerging out of eighteenth-century Britain and marked by Horace Walpole's publication of *The Castle of Otranto* in 1764 (Aguirre, 1990; Emandi, 2013; Heiland, 2007; Hogle, 2002; Piatti-Farnell & Mercer, 2014). Through analysis of the genre's conventions, the Gothic is shown to be more than a fanciful literary notion (Browne, 1988). It is an articulation of a society's constraints that deliberately violates conventions of art and fiction and challenges the constructs of a society (Browne, 1988). It does so by representing repressed societal fears in the manifestation of the monstrous. As such, it is a genre and literary movement that reacted to and moved away from the previous accounts of realism. Realism as a genre is the literary attempt to present familiar things as they are.

The Gothic genre was formed and defined in its response to domestic realism in the eighteenth-century, addressing the dialectical tensions of a society grappling with

change. Eighteenth-century Britain records a slow rise in realism that, in turn, contributes to literary projections of denial, anxiety and fear surrounding otherness (Aguirre, 2017; Emandi, 2013). Thus far, Gothic literature is understood not only as an expression of society, but as a force that shapes society as well. It is a construct that represents human difference within and across time (Del Lucchese & Williams, 2016; Sharpe, 2007).

The development of the Gothic and monstrosity coincides with the rise of medical knowledge following the political and economic rebirth of the Enlightenment (Burwick, 2003; Del Lucchese & Williams, 2016). Nineteenth-century findings on aberrational psychology and new ideas regarding the individual psyche led to the appearance of medical doctors, science experiments and themes of domestic and urban violence in Gothic fiction (Burwick, 2003). The appearance of these nontraditional themes moved the novel out of medieval and renaissance romanticism (Hogle, 2002; Zurutuza, 2015), and into a genre that provided escape grounded in human experience (Heiland, 2007). The Gothic novel became a venue for authors and audiences to examine ideas of religion, political authority, civil society and nature in a new frame of mind and in a safe space (Burwick, 2003; Del Lucchese & Williams, 2016). For example, early modern shifts of monsters being placed in domestic settings marks the changing notion of monstrosity within a culture (Patterson, 2014). Gothic literature often repurposes the themes found in domestic realism that reflect societal beliefs, including patriarchy and the complacent attitudes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While all things respond to context, it is the way that the Gothic portrays human nature, otherness, and societal fears through the use of monstrosity that make it generic and unique.

Gothic studies are not relevant only to eighteenth and nineteenth century artifacts or criticism. Twentieth century pulp fiction (Browne, 1988), feminism, Marxism and post-structuralism (Heiland, 2007) provide different landscapes of Gothic portrayal and various lenses to critique it. The analysis of Gothic cinema is now a prominent field of academic research that continues to provide advancements in Gothic scholarship (Piatti-Farnell & Mercer, 2014). This scholarship analyzes the Gothic beyond its literary bindings and traditional formulations and notes the modal transformations over spans of time (Piatti-Farnell & Mercer, 2014). As a genre that began in the last third of the eighteenth-century, tracing its progression to the contemporary works that circulate in the twenty-first century shows how various societies utilize the genre's conventions to articulate societal anxieties.

2.3 Monstrosity

As most of the contemporary literature on monsters and their use confirms, the word monster, monstrosity, and monstrousness have their etymological root in the Latin word *monstrare,* meaning both to show and also to warn or advise. In literature, monstrousness, monstrosity, and monsters are used interchangeably; however, these terms mean different things depending on their usage. The importance of identifying the actual distinction between the three terms lies in the fact that it separates the social and cultural implications of monstrousness and their generic manifestations. The idea of monstrousness encapsulates the amoral, dreadful, impossible, inhuman, unthinkable, and even unspeakable qualities that lie at the periphery of human dignity. The monstrous is the inverse or outside of that which is accepted of humans in any social or cultural conditions. Contemporary rhetoricians use the term monstrosity to imply both the cause

and effect of monstrousness. Up to the end of the eighteenth century, Smith (2007) argues, monstrosity was understood as a physical irregularity amongst people that operated as a corporeal sign of monstrousness. Monstrosity was never an intrinsic quality, but a narrative that is imposed on certain appearances or behaviors at particular times in specific social contexts. Bronte alters this definition of monstrosity by manifesting it in Heathcliff's malevolence, desire for revenge, and sadistic abuse. The monstrous is powerful because it resists containment by social and natural laws and defies language to become a transformative force based on the context and existing natural circumstances.

A convention of the Gothic genre is the construction of "the other" (Aguirre, 2008, 2017; Del Lucchese & Williams, 2016; Haefele-Thomas, 2012; Takacs, 2009). The genre conventionally brings readers in contact with characters that are different than themselves in a way that places the "other" on the fringes of society and in opposition to the norm. The monstrous in Gothic literature is defined as such in relation to what is acceptable, reflecting a deviation from a society's set of criteria (Del Lucchese & Williams, 2016; Frosini, 2016). Criteria, however, are fluid constructions, which is why I have defined a particular monster archetype as a quality of the Gothic genre. As a literary convention, monsters not only serve as intriguing characters for captivated audiences but looking closely at the way they are characterized as monstrous provides insight into the society they are born out of.

The monster signifies the struggle with identity constraints and reinforces the outsider status ascribed to characters like Frankenstein's monster (Jones & Harris, 2016). Additionally, scholars delineate different types of monsters, such as the physical monster that embodies un-human characteristics (Lopez, 2016); or the moral monster situated at a

political conjunction (Nuzzo, 2013). An example of the physical monster can be seen in *Frankenstein* as the "creature" represents a grotesque figure of unnatural physical stature with grotesque proportionality. Alternatively, the moral monster characterized by irrational interests and monstrous behavior, rather than nature (Nuzzo, 2013) is exemplified in the novel *Jane Eyre.* As the novel explores classism, sexuality and religion, its monstrous characters are defined by their threat to Jane's autonomy. However, regardless of the type of monster, they are often liminal characters that represent human difference and positioned at the in-between (Aguirre, 2017; Jones & Harris, 2016; Lopez, 2016; Nuzzo, 2013; Sharpe, 2007).

Speaking to the marginality of those outside of established, societal order, monstrous characters in Gothic literature are depicted to reside on the fringes of society. Monsters, or monstrous characters, such as Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, can be physically separated from society. Heathcliff and the mansion called Wuthering Heights are physically distant from Thrushcross Grange: the site of domestic realism. Heathcliff not only represents an individual falling victim to psychological terrors that categorize him as Other, different and marginalized, but his residence at Wuthering Heights, a mansion far from town or any neighbor, physically places him on the fringes of society. The psychology-oriented terror (Aguirre, 2008) that Heathcliff represents is different from a prototypical monster with qualities of a different species (Lopez, 2016). As a genre that utilizes literary conventions to convey societal anxieties, the types of Gothic monsters represent different cultural attitudes about identity. This makes monstrosity rhetorically important. The manifestation of monstrosity within literature and extended

into contemporary popular culture serves to represent repressed societal fears and enact a public importance as audiences confront injustices within culture and society.

The interplay between the monstrous, monstrosity and the monster evolved during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Gothic imagination of Emily Bronte trails a manifestation of monstrosity of visual uncanniness, one that was set forth in Victor Frankenstein's creature. However, Bronte's imagination of this monster is politically engaged, rendering the characterization of the monstrous in the enigmatic and enduring figure of Heathcliff. There is no doubt that the character of Heathcliff is iconic in Gothic novels; moreover, the mystery of his character contributes to the discourse of monstrosity in the novel.

2.4 Gender and Monstrosity

The dominant narrative of the women's rights movement in the United States and Britain shares many commonalities and links. American and English activists, suffragists, and advocates shared a history of relationships and organizational connections. There were also similarities in these movements both in style and approach. For starters, the movements in both countries were based on gender inequalities. The primary objective of the women's rights movement in the United States and England was to make the political, social, and economic status of women equal to that of men (McMillen, 2008). They also aimed at establishing legislative safeguards against discrimination on the basis of sex (McMillen, 2008). In America, the women's rights movement formally started in 1848 when the first women's rights convention took place in Seneca Falls, New York (McMillen, 2008). Following the start of this movement in the United States, the

organized movement in England began in 1866 when women gathered 1,500 signatures to petition Parliament for the right to vote.

Literature published prior to the inception of both the American and British movements contained precursors to the women's rights movement. Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* contributed ideologies of feminist philosophy to English and American readers. It was favorably reviewed in American magazines and expressed fundamental rights that all humans, male and female, should be granted. This included the right to vote, the right to receive education, and the agency of women with regards to marriage. Another contributing narrative to the women's rights movement was Emily Bronte's publication of *Wuthering Heights.* This novel is part of the originary well for Gothic monstrosity, and it influenced feminist philosophy in both the United States and England.

Bronte demonstrates the emotional and physical abuse, and the economic struggles that women endured to her readers. Through the Gothic genre, Bronte uses a stylized approach and a complex narrative to represent female inequalities. When the Gothic heroine first emerged in literature, readers saw women depicted as one-dimensional, lacking depth, and serving one purpose: to maintain purity. This can be seen in what is considered the first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) by Horace Walpole. The representation of women within the Gothic began to change as historical shifts took place within society, as the women's rights movement gained momentum, and as the demand of accurate representation took shape in literature. Female characters within Gothic novels began to display a wide spectrum of emotions, sometimes extreme, that modelled nineteenth century thought and the emerging women's rights era. Gothic

female characters began to be portrayed as heated, hot-blooded, frenzied, or dramatic, emotions leading to their devastating revenge on those who have wronged them. They might also be simultaneously portrayed as submissive and tending to glorify the men that they admired, even if those men were not worthy of praise.

These new, multi-dimensional portrayals of women within the Gothic novel are exemplified in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine Earnshaw showed the dichotomy of the roles between the sexes as she represented the lack of freedom for women in a patriarchal society and her desire for independence. Edgar, Catherine's eventual husband, and Thrushcross Grange represent the constricting attitudes of the Victorian patriarchal society that upheld notions of gender inequality. Catherine was forced to play an accommodating role if she wanted to live successfully. While at Thrushcross Grange, she wanted to maintain her sense of self-determination, although she could never quite reach it within the societal framework of Victorian society. As a result, her monstrosity was never quieted. Although she is physically separated from the site of the Gothic, Wuthering Heights, she is still a monster in the sense that she never breaks from her representation of societal anxieties. If monstrosity is the manifestation of societal fears, then the act of Catherine leaving the site of Gothic antiquity and joining the dwelling of modern civilization should liberate her from her monstrosity. However, the Gothic novel never quiets her monstrosity, despite her assimilation into a higher social class. This is because Catherine represents the injustices in gender roles that is established in the whole of society, not just within particular subsets of society.

Heathcliff serves as a connection between Catherine's desires and the restrictions placed upon her as a woman. At Wuthering Heights, she is unrestrained. When she is

with Heathcliff she is unrestrained. Their love does not fit into the stereotypical male and female relationship of the early nineteenth century. They see each other as soul mates. When with Heathcliff, Catherine is not seen as weak or subordinate, but rather strong and assertive. These moments of freedom when with Heathcliff give her agency, but that agency does not matter if she is to live a successful life on the basis of Victorian socio-economics. In order to gain affluence, she had to marry up and suppress her wild and independent nature. As a result, Catherine married Edgar Linton. Up until Edgar became ill, Catherine's monstrosity broke through Edgar's male dominance. Edgar feebly attempted to mold Catherine into a proper lady, but she failed to conform because as a representation of societal injustices, she also represented a resistance toward gender inequalities. Edgar's fear of his wife opposed the gender roles of the nineteenth century. Catherine is even shown enacting authority enough to strike her husband, further instilling Edgar's fear of her.

Edgar's love for Catherine largely depended upon his mood and the way that Catherine would treat him. Catherine played a very subservient role in her relationship with Edgar after he became ill. When this happened, Catherine was at his beck and call and fulfilled his every request whether it be to sing a song, tell him a long ballad, or fix his pillow. Catherine's dynamic is again superior when she is shown with Hareton, her brother Hindley's son. Hareton was illiterate, a typical attribute to those of lower-class standing. Catherine, on the other hand, was able to better her mind through extensive reading, giving her leverage over a male character in the novel. Education was highly esteemed in Victorian society and an element of women's fight for equality. Lack of education provided a distinction amongst social classes and genders and was necessary to

maintain superiority. When compared to Hareton, Catherine's superiority goes against the male dominated world she was a part of and a reflection of.

Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* is strategic in its representation of women. Catherine represents the female monster in Gothic fiction that represents societal fears and expresses the dichotomy between freedom and oppression. Ellen "Nelly" Dean, the narrator of most of the novel, does not represent common Gothic characteristics very much at all. She is levelheaded, a voice of reason, and a confidant to most of the other female characters in the novel. She acts as a conscious voice to Catherine, Cathy, and Isabella. Her demeanor allows these women to vent and hear Nelly's thoughts in regard to their problems. In contrast, Isabella represents the Gothic virgin of early Gothic fiction. She was easily persuaded into thinking that Heathcliff was in love with her and never expected him to be a monster. Her lack of experience with indecency leads her to marry Heathcliff and move into the Heights. She is overcome with tears when she experiences Heathcliff's violent temper, Henley's drunken ramblings, Joseph's constant cursing, Harleton's lack of manners, and the overall lack of human decency. This culture shock leads Isabella to abandon her image of the Gothic virgin. She becomes aware of the evils in her presence and her experience with Heathcliff leads her to become deranged, almost as deranged as he, by the time she escapes from Wuthering Heights. The constant strain that she felt from being betrayed and oppressed by a man who she though loved her was enough for her to abandon her positive and naïve outlook on life.

CHAPTER 3: *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* AND THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MONSTROSITY

This is an analysis chapter that spells out the general understanding of genre, monstrosity, and iterations of gender and romance as exemplified in *Wuthering Heights*. Through a close reading of the narrative, *Wuthering Heights* will be shown as a foundational text in the construction of monstrosity and the Gothic. First, this chapter will overview the novel and establish its generic qualities. Next, I highlight the manifestations of monstrosity within the novel in order to understand its utility of a psychological monster motivated by revenge and constructs of gender. The following section will expand upon the concept of gender as it closely relates to the contextual representation of monstrosity within *Wuthering Heights*. Lastly, I bring romance fiction into the conversation as an extension of the genre and a culmination of the monstrosity and gender relationship within the Gothic.

3.1 *Wuthering Heights*

Wuthering Heights is a narrative that presents readers with harsh realities in its honest portrayal of Victorian life. Its structure, theme, and literary techniques are quite unusual in a Victorian novel. The typical Victorian novel, like that of Charles Dickens, would be voluminous, leisurely in nature with an inclusion of a great deal of material for intrinsic interests. However, Bronte takes a different route in displaying a sense of form that is characterized by an embodiment of themes that rises above entertainment. The narrative is physically restricted to a narrow, well defined area. The concentration of the world is limited geographically from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange and the moors that span the distance between the two houses. The description of the events is

such that the author does not allow the audience to follow any of the characters beyond this zone. The events of the novel begin with the introduction of Heathcliff into Wuthering Heights from the streets of Liverpool. The conflicts that famously characterize the novel begin at the point where Catherine and Heathcliff peep in through the parlor window at Thrushcross Grange at Linton's children.

Wuthering Heights could be described as a novel that deals with the surging passions of the human heart. While the aroma of the highest poetic conception is the market of these passions, they fail to get social approbation. Bronte creates a world representative of her own in that it highlights repressed fears and societal anxieties surrounding love, power, and agency. She places her characters in this world and creates a series of events that challenges the structure of nineteenth century cultural and social order.

The influence of Gothic elements in *Wuthering Heights* shows how Bronte took existing conventions to create characters that are both real and symbolic. Hate, revenge, and selfishness are real emotions that characterize Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar, driving them to act in irrational ways. These emotions add depth and dimension to the characters, transcending traditional stereotypes and symbolizing real people with real emotions, both redeeming and condemning. Because of these complex and well-rounded characters, readers in the Victorian Era and readers today can empathize with the complex nature of the human condition. Although the nineteenth century seems far from our current existence, people in the Victorian Era did not behave in drastically different ways from people today. According to Miller (2002) *Wuthering Heights* engaged with some of the most basic ideas of the Gothic genre such as expansive landscapes, a dark

and stormy atmosphere, marriage within a patriarchal society, and destructive love. Like many Gothic literatures of the time and within contemporary popular culture, the concept of love and its social implications is well captured through the various characters.

At the time of its publication, most of the reviewers focused on the Gothic features of the novel, arguing that these features were objectionable. Reviewers at the time struggled to position the novel's focus on emotion and psychology, finding it difficult to respond to the morals of some of the characters. As such, they predominantly rejected the construction of the characters in the novel. The initial publication of the novel failed to gain critical praise or local popularity due to its coarse and disagreeable episodes. The story's moral was highly objectionable at the time, with most critics applying a deductive reading of the novel. It was not until Emily Bronte's sister, Charlotte Bronte, became the novel's first critic and publicly praised *Wuthering Heights* that the novel began to be embraced. Equally appalling to Victorian audiences was that a woman created and published the novel, leading Bronte to initially publish under the pseudonym Ellis Bell.

The novel became a classic and canonical narrative. Modernist influence changed initial rejection of the novel, favoring the focus on psychology because of its ability to explain the human condition. The lack of didacticism was highly valued by the modernist reviewers, allowing interpretation to be valued above the formulaic quality of informative and instructive literature. Reviewers influenced by modernist perspectives argued the uncertain moral code and the high emotions that characterized the characters of the novel made it possible to explore thought processes and responses around unorthodox situations. Understood rhetorically, however, those unorthodox situations are actually

representative of repressed fears within society. Within the modernist perspective, rhetoricians were able to appreciate how Bronte explored darker psychological states, animalistic behaviors, and abnormal conditions of love especially between Catherine and Heathcliff.

3.2 Monstrosity in *Wuthering Heights*

The two distinct monsters in *Wuthering Heights* are Heathcliff and Catherine. They are monsters of psychological terror in which their monstrosity is displayed through their words and actions as humans, different from a monster of corporeal horror. Heathcliff's monstrosity develops as an effect of his mistreatment as a child. This leads him to assume that he is not worthy of the world he inhabits. Heathcliff does not just treat others cruelly, he treats himself cruelly as well. He rejects Nelly's attempt to comfort him during his time of grief following Catherine's death. Heathcliff becomes almost violent as Nelly wishes aloud that Catherine should wake up in the other world as gently as she left this one. Heathcliff replies "May she wake in torment! …Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living!" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 147-148). Exclaiming these words, Heathcliff bashes his head against the tree trunk on which he has been leaning and howls, not like a man but like a "savage beast" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 148).

Heathcliff displayed his brutish nature on several occasions. After Heathcliff and Catherine cross the moors and peer into the window of Thrushcross Grange, Heathcliff describes his and Catherine's despise for the "idiots" and "petted things" of the Grange (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 42). He expresses his wish to never exchange his own condition at Wuthering Heights for Edgar's at Thrushcross Grange, especially because he

has “the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley’s blood” (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 42. These violent impulses are caused by his desire for revenge. Although he does not verbalize his wish for revenge, we see the worst of Heathcliff’s character upon losing Catherine to Edgar. It is at this point in the novel that Heathcliff becomes obsessed with revenge due to his lack or loss of love. At the core of Heathcliff’s character, he is always the lonely boy that was adopted from Liverpool. As a result of his childhood, his deep-rooted loneliness, and the loss of his one true love, Heathcliff makes those around him feel the loneliness and the lack of love that he has known in his acts of revenge.

The way that Heathcliff treats Isabella, his wife, upon Catherine’s sickness is another example of how Heathcliff’s monstrosity escalates as a result of Catherine’s demise. Before this point in the novel, Heathcliff was not particularly kind as readers see him as a tormented child and a mistreated boy. After Catherine falls ill, however, all sense of his humanity seems to vanish. His own wife wonders if he is a devil rather than a man (Bronte & Small, 1995). Isabella becomes afraid of what, not who, she married as she witnesses the cruelty that Heathcliff is capable of:

> I sometimes wonder at him with an intensity that deadens my fear: yet, I assure you, a tiger or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens. He told me of Catherine’s illness, and accused my brother of causing it; promising that I should be Edgar’s proxy in suffering, till he could get a hold of him (Bronte & Hall, 1995, p. 128).

Heathcliff is shown successful in enacting revenge throughout the narrative, although it never brings him happiness or penance for what he had been deprived of.

After Catherine dies, the novel begins to display a second plot that follows the children of Catherine and Heathcliff's marriages. On one occasion Hindley, Catherine's brother, locks Heathcliff out of Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff bursts through a window of the Heights and beats Hindley in an act of revenge. As the novel progresses, Linton, Heathcliff and Isabella's son, becomes a pawn in Heathcliff's revenge endeavor. Heathcliff readily admits that he does not love his son and refers to Linton as property and an opportunity to gain access to Thrushcross Grange. He plans to have Linton marry Cathy, Catherine and Edgar's son, so that he can take possession of the Grange. During this point in the novel, Edgar's health is deteriorating, and it is less of a planned or arranged marriage than it is a forced union on Heathcliff's order. After visiting the dying Edgar, Heathcliff's rage convinces Cathy and Nelly to accompany Heathcliff and Linton on the walk back to Wuthering Heights. Linton in this scene is crying in anguish as a result of Heathcliff's directed rage toward him. Once at the Heights, Heathcliff imprisons Cathy and Nelly inside and will not release them until she marries Linton. Cathy is imprisoned in a room at night and allowed to leave the room in the morning; however, Nelly is held prisoner for five days and only allowed to see Hareton who is tending to her.

There is some resolve in Heathcliff's monstrous revenge plot. During breakfast the morning after imprisoning Cathy at Wuthering Heights, Hareton takes Cathy's side in an argument against Heathcliff. As Heathcliff is about to strike Cathy, he looks into her eyes and controls his rage. Hareton is Catherine's nephew, son of Hindley, and eventual husband to Cathy. Later that night, Heathcliff sees Hareton and Cathy sitting together. In that moment he is reminded of Catherine upon seeing Cathy's eyes and Hareton's entire

being. Heathcliff then admits to Nelly that his desire to complete his revenge has evaporated because now everywhere at the Heights is uprooting Catherine's memory and tormenting him.

The incongruity of Heathcliff's character is at the heart of the novel's consideration of monstrosity. The impenetrability of this persona and the enigma of both Heathcliff's ancestry and his adult life draws on the unknowable and unnamable aspect of identity. This unknowability is effectively what reduces his character to that of an inhuman monster as elucidated in Isabella Linton's account of her husband. In her letter to Nelly, Isabella implores her former servant to tell her what he is: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? I shan't tell my reasons for making this inquiry; but I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 120). This description by Isabella captures the complex nature of Heathcliff's character. She is desperate to know this man because even after her romantic illusion of him is revealed false, she still cannot comprehend or abandon him. In a conversation with Nelly, Isabella says, "Don't put faith in a single word he speaks. He's a lying fiend, a monster, and not a human being! I've been told I might leave him before; and I've made the attempt, but I dare not repeat it!" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 134).

Heathcliff is not a monster by account of his physical appearance alone. The audience comes across the character of Heathcliff through Lockwood who describes him as,

> a dark-skinned gypsy 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—possible some people might suspect him of a degree of under-bred pride (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 3).

He does not embody a monster of intense corporeal horror, although his physical description lends to his position as Other: a projection of dominant Victorian society's fear of the foreign and underprivileged.

Throughout the novel, dissonance marks the character of Heathcliff as he is both handsome and morose, slovenly but erect, gentleman and gypsy. Nelly in her description of Heathcliff observes that he is tall and athletic, a well-formed man; but, with a half-civilized ferocity that lurks in his dressed brows and eyes full of black fire. This description by both Nelly and Lockwood asserts the impossibility that researchers face in confining Heathcliff into a unified description. This has made it difficult to reconcile the opposing aspects of his nature, leading to the construction of his monstrosity.

Heathcliff fits the description of contemporary monsters; like most monsters today, Heathcliff is a hybrid, fierce by description, pitiless by mannerism and wolfish in action. He embodies excess in passion, too, which transgresses aspects of being human. In addition to the fact that his actions are inhuman, he is also uncontrollable. He enacts a disruption of the Victorian imperial and patriarchal system of identity. For example, in his revenge, he destroys the lineage of the Earnshaw and Linton families, methodically breaking down the long ancestry that had granted those families their dominant status in the society.

Upon Heathcliff's eventual death, he is only mourned by Hareton. The novel ends with Heathcliff being buried according to his wishes, next to Catherine's casket that he violated by removing one of the sides. It is rumored amongst the villagers that he and

another walk the moors, alluding to their everlasting monstrosity. Heathcliff's monstrosity was shown at numerous areas in the novel when he overtly enacted revenge and mistreated other characters. Catherine's monstrosity, on the other hand, is a bit different and somewhat difficult to characterize.

Catherine uses her emotions to manipulate everyone around her. Manipulation is a strong force in her nature from childhood until her untimely death. As a child, she is part of Heathcliff's torment as she aides Hindley in his active hatred toward their adopted brother. When Heathcliff first arrived at Wuthering Heights, she tormented him and helped build the hatred against Hindley that eventually led to Heathcliff's need for revenge. Eventually, she grows to romantically love Heathcliff and turns her manipulation around to torment her brother with Heathcliff. Without her, Heathcliff could never have treated Hindley the way he did.

As the novel progresses, Catherine refuses to marry Heathcliff because of his low social status and marries a character that Heathcliff hated-- Edgar Linton. She spends a lot of her time in the novel showing a callous disregard for both the men that love her and uses manipulation to exploit their emotional vulnerability. When Nelly compares Cathy and Catherine she says,

> that capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother; still she did not resemble her; for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice, and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender (Bronte & Small, 1995, p.167).

Here, Cathy is described as more sensitive than her mother, perhaps due to her father's nature, but it nicely summarizes the intensity and potency of the elder Catherine's

personality. Catherine moves from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange-- a house representing domesticity that could not, even still, suppress the monstrosity that Catherine brings with her. As she acclimates to her life at the Grange, Nelly describes her presence as "not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing the thorn" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 81).

It seems that characters outside the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship have to tip-toe around these temperamental, violent, and malevolent characters at risk of becoming their next target. It was, however, their initial and intense connection that transformed both Catherine and Heathcliff into their monstrous selves. This speaks to how love can misguide lived realities and personal natures. Here, love acts as a sanctioning agent that justifies Catherine and Heathcliff's motives and actions and aligns with contemporary romance novels' use of love (Hubbard, 1985).

3.3 Gender in *Wuthering Heights*

Gender and romance have played an important role in Gothic literature since the earliest publications of the genre. The iterations between romance and monstrosity that began to emerge over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are of rhetorical importance. Romantic literature and the Gothic were developing in approximate time periods, thus sharing several similarities. The subjects of monstrosity, gender, and romance interact in *Wuthering Heights* as a touchstone for broader societal problems surrounding gender and romance in Victorian society. Using monstrosity, Bronte highlights issues such as appropriation, inequity, and normativity among others that dominate the Victorian age. While these conditions initially reflect aspects of life in

nineteenth century England, I argue that the proliferation of the novel across space and time renders it relevant and transformative.

At a very basic understanding, the story of *Wuthering Heights* revolves around the social structure of marriage. Under this plotline, one reading of *Wuthering Heights* highlights marriage as a destructive rather than a protective institution, adverse to the Victorian outlook on marriage. Catherine chooses to marry Edgar Linton because of the prospect of upward socioeconomic mobility that he provides, despite her passionate love for Heathcliff. As rival males in the narrative, Heathcliff and Edgar represent different societal viewpoints. Edgar, being born and raised a gentleman, is elegant, courteous, and representative of civic virtues. These qualities make him more desirable as a husband (as does his affluence); however, they do not prove useful in his conflict with Heathcliff. During the time of publication, women were more closely aligned with the characteristics that Edgar represented. His constancy and tenderness are suggestive of Emily Bronte's intention to identify these characteristics as basic virtues inherent in all human beings, not just women.

The concept of gender in *Wuthering Heights* is also examined in relation to class and economic power. Catherine's tragic fate provides a lens into gender as related to class and economic power, one that encompasses the world of upward mobility for women. Catherine is deeply devoted to Heathcliff, but the state of affairs with Heathcliff will only leave her as a house wife. She, therefore, chooses to pursue her ambition of being more than a housewife that serves her husband. In her quest to become more than her prescribed obligations, she ends up marrying Edgar. While trying to be part of both worlds, she ruins her life and brings unhappiness to the Thrushcross Grange residents.

Her desire to continue a friendship with Heathcliff turns out to be tragic. At some point, she feels exhausted and she is pictured lying in her bed sick and weak, contemplating a return to her life before marrying Edgar. The character of Catherine is one of Bronte's representations of an ambitious woman who is active in her pursuit of a higher class and economic power. The challenges and downfalls that Catherine experiences in her journey represent the difficulties of gendered agency.

One unique element of marriage in late eighteenth to early nineteenth century society is that only women released their legal status. As a society designed to embrace laws that do not foster love as a reason to marry, a gendered understanding of individuality denies women of certain rights. According to the law, upon marriage a woman became a *feme couverte*, meaning she lost her separate legal status of *feme sole* and fully came under her husband's tutelage. Women could be considered the man's children or part of his property. This attitude toward marriage created power dynamics that valued males, husbands, and patriarchs. When a man and a woman married, the woman's existence as a legal person ceased immediately and was consolidated into her husband's legal status, coming under his protection while she undertook all domestic duties. Moreover, the law allowed the husband to moderately correct his wife. The husband was responsible for answering to the wife's misbehavior and the power to restrain a woman was bestowed upon men. If, however, a couple separated, the woman was stripped of her legal identity, thus exposing her to all forms of violence and control.

Powerlessness characterized the condition of women during the time that *Wuthering Heights* was published. The representation of marriage within the narrative highlighted these conservative marriage laws and customs in the relationship of Isabella

and Heathcliff. Powerless, yet infatuated, Isabella is sadistically abused by Heathcliff to his amusement. He, himself, points out that he is amused by the amount of mistreatment that Isabella endures and finds sport in how much she will take while still coming back for more. Joyce Carol Oates (1982) aligns Isabella's continuous return to Heathcliff, despite his violence, with the reader's continuous engagement with his monstrosity, despite moments of shock. Both the reader and Isabella repeatedly insist on seeing Heathcliff as a romantic hero instead of a masochistic monster.

It can be argued that the logic behind creating the character of Isabella was done with the law of coverture in mind. Isabella, read as Cathy's frail doppelganger, captures Bronte's exploration into gender roles and the possibilities for women who were abused by their husbands. According to Smith (2007) the novel exemplifies a situation where divorce as *a mensa et thoro* is applied. That is, a divorce more akin to separation where husband and wife are not obligated to live together by court order, but their marriage has not been dissolved. Moreover, by creating the separation of Isabella with Heathcliff, Bronte revisits the concept of self-created divorce via the concept of *a mensa et thoro.* The pseudo-voice that is given to Isabella by the author goes a long way in challenging the cultural and social values of the Victorian era. Even when Isabella represents a change from the traditional view of marriage, the truth is that the separation that takes place between Isabella and Heathcliff happens because he allows it.

Although these concepts of marriage and separation were in the context of English society, they were publicly important in American rhetoric as well. Dominance, gender roles, abuse, and idealized assumptions of domesticity have been an undercurrent in American history. Nineteenth century America saw marriage as a reinforcement of

patriarchy, similar to the United Kingdom. A woman's property was expected to be given to her husband once they were married. With regard to divorce in nineteenth century America, women had to prove their obedience, attentiveness, attractiveness, piousness, and sexual faithfulness in order to have a standing case against an abusive husband.

The problem of powerlessness among women and the responsibilities assigned to the husband by the law were some of the central, critical points of observation in *Wuthering Heights*. Using both Isabella and Heathcliff, Bronte reflects the need for a shift in the existing cultural attitudes toward victims of domestic abuse. Her attention is specifically drawn to the aspect of coverture that left women with the lack of legal authority to save themselves from the cruelty of their husbands. This way, Bronte was able to reveal the repressed fears associated with marriage law and expose the abuse and isolation that characterized marital union at the time. The public importance of marriage, gender, and romance in *Wuthering Heights* surfaces in the representation of marriage as anything but a domestic haven. Heathcliff is a Gothic monster rather than the model husband, especially given the dominance and growth of romantic literature and the romantic hero. In this way, the novel was able to disrupt the middle class, domestic ideal that was common for women in fiction.

Bronte offers a gendered twist to Gothic monstrosity when Catherine becomes villainous herself. Isabella highlights Catherine's monstrosity when responding to her cruel warning: "you are worse than twenty foes, you poisonous friend!" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 91). From the eyes of Isabella, Catherine is poisonous, deadly, and an enemy in every aspect of the word. However, Catherine's actions in thrusting Isabella into Heathcliff's path demonstrates the fact that Victorian women could be monstrous, too.

Female monsters at the time were not that uncommon in literature; however, the traditional use of female monsters differed from the representation of Catherine. Female monsters would traditionally take the shape of a creature who was powerful, sexual, and political, like the figure of the *femme fatale*, Medusa. These traditional features of a female monster embody the fears a patriarchal society has regarding powerful women. Considering this typology of female monstrosity, Catherine is less powerful at inciting fear within the patriarchy; therefore, she ended up sacrificing other women in her struggle.

Bronte uses gender to challenge the ingrained patriarchy and existing social order of Victorian society. According to Tyder (2006), the question of gender is one of Bronte's primary focuses in *Wuthering Heights*. In the novel, Catherine challenges the societal expectations of her contemporaries in the ways she acts, speaks, and in her mannerisms. Unlike women in her society, she was neither soft nor tamed. For example, after hearing Hareton sob complaints to Nelly about "wicked aunt Cathy, [Catherine] drew her fury on to his unlucky head: she seized his shoulders and shook him till the poor child waxed livid" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 63). Even at the age of six Catherine shows signs of a harsh personality when her father asks her and Hindley what they would like him to bring back from Liverpool. Hindley chooses a fiddle, while Catherine chooses a whip (Bronte & Small, 1995).

Alternatively, and as previously mentioned, the character of Edgar appears to contrast that of Heathcliff. He is tender, indulgent, and more conscious of emotions than the concept of a traditional Victorian man. Gender, therefore, in *Wuthering Heights* takes an inverse role where women are given features that reverse traditional gender norms.

This is a rhetorical move that shows the arbitrary and fluid nature of male and female identity. The characters of Catherine Linton, daughter of Catherine and Edgar, and Linton Heathcliff, son of Heathcliff and Isabella, continues to capture Bronte's unique characterization of gender in *Wuthering Heights*. As a milder version of her mother, Catherine Linton is presented as healthy and active with a positive attitude toward life. Contrastingly, her cousin Linton Heathcliff is physically and emotionally weak and dependent. His mannerisms are "girlish", and in some instances, he gets his way by crying and sulking.

In the novel, Bronte uses colors as a sign for female and male characters; thus, Linton having blond flaxen hair compared to Catherine's darker hair. This also challenges the constructs of gender. In addition to the conflicting gender characteristics that the characters are given in the novel, the author ascribes the two families in the novel different genders. The Earnshaws exemplify masculine characteristics (e.g. strong, healthy, and dark). Contrastingly, the Linton's have "fair skin, and small features, and yellow curling hair" (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 167). The Linton's features are delicate, more sensitive to illness among other weak characteristics described as feminine traits.

Overall, Bronte mixes genders in ways that move beyond the confines of society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This way, she unmasks the prejudices that existed about authorship and women in the Victorian era. Bronte uses gender to produce a rhetorical protest that challenges the traditional approach to the description of women and men. This is a rhetorical move that highlights instability in ubiquitous gender stereotypes and norms. The act of undermining gendered logics remains popular within contemporary representations of monstrosity and the Gothic.

3.4 Understanding Romance

Reading *Wuthering Heights* at the time of its publication presented a new formula for the novel. It could be assumed that a story about monsters that employs the Gothic narrative would be void of romance, love, or passionate endeavors. The presence of horror, terror, and monstrosity does not fit nicely within the definition of a romance novel. Explicit in most Gothic narratives, however, is a romantic arc. *Wuthering Heights* was influenced not only by the Gothic narrative, but also by emerging romanticism.

Romanticism is a movement in literature, music, and painting that began in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries (Rosenthal, 2012). It represents rebellion against an overemphasis on reason or logic in the arts. Romanticism celebrated nature rather than civilization and valued emotion and imagination over reason (Rosenthal, 2012). This movement influenced *Wuthering Heights* as it is a novel that values emotion and presents complex romantic relationships. *Wuthering Heights* is a seminal narrative because it challenged conventions of the novel up to that point, introduced a new Gothic monster, and demonstrated injustices of a patriarchal society. The novel is comprised of a nonlinear structure, different levels of narration, letters, and an assortment of multi-dimensional characters and conflicts that exemplify the romantic emphasis of emotion over reason. It is through the influence of romanticism that Heathcliff, an immoral and monstrous character, is likened to a well-loved Byronic hero of sense and depth. The setting in *Wuthering Heights* represents emotion and feeling, rather than just being a place. It incorporates romantic characteristics with its use of Gothic conventions as it explores the imagination and references the supernatural with the existence of Catherine's ghost. In the only manifestation of supernatural monstrosity, Catherine's

ghost is depicted grabbing Lockwood with icy hands through the window of her old room at Wuthering Heights:

> finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I [Lockwood] pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes: still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious gripe, almost maddening me with fear (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 21).

This scene implies that even beyond death, Catherine's monstrosity cannot be quieted. She is still monstrous, terrifying, and full of egotism in her belief that she can cross the threshold of death into the realm of the living.

Value is given to childhood experiences and shown to impact people later on in life as the mistreatment of Heathcliff as an orphan child lends to his psychological monstrosity throughout his adulthood. There is also the romantic notion of yearning to attain a dream or sense of satisfaction, but not being able to do so in a mortal existence. This yearning allows Gothic monstrosity to surface as Catherine and Heathcliff's monstrosity creeps through their denial of satisfaction until eventual death. It is here that the passionate villain/hero Heathcliff, and the curious heroine Catherine, enact psychological torture of characters as they strive to attain what they desire. Heathcliff wishes to enact revenge on people that wronged him as a child, and he yearns for his true love for his entire life.

Wuthering Heights is a Gothic novel that was also influenced by the Romantic movement that gained momentum at the time of its publication. There is a true sense of the Gothic found in the way the boundaries of normality within the novel are trespassed, specifically in the places where love crosses the boundaries of life and death. An example

of this is when Heathcliff attempts to reunite his soul with Catherine's after her death. He has the sexton, who was digging Edgar Linton's grave, to remove the earth off of Catherine's coffin lid and open it. Heathcliff proceeds to say,

> I thought, once, I would have stayed there, when I saw her face again—it is hers yet—he had hard work to stir me; but he said it would change, if the air blew on it, and so I struck one side of the coffin loose—and covered it up—not Linton's side, damn him! I wish he'd been soldered in lead—and I bribed the sexton to pull it away, when I'm laid there, and slide mine out too—I'll have it made so, and then, by the time Linton gets to us, he'll not know which is which! (Bronte & Small, 1995, p. 255).

After this scene, Heathcliff dreams that his cheek is frozen to Catherine's when he joins her in their final resting place (Bronte & Small, 1995). This area of the novel exemplifies a Gothic monster maddened enough by his passionate love to disturb the dead in their grave. It shows a unique connection between Gothic conventions and romance within the novel, albeit an extreme romance.

The romantic arc in *Wuthering Heights* and the love story embedded in the Gothic narrative have inspired a generation of romance novels. There is, however, ample debate over whether romance is a good or appropriate generic extension of *Wuthering Heights*' meanings. Thus far, *Wuthering Heights* has been defined as a foundational novel in its representation of monstrosity that reflected social problems surrounding gender and romance, like appropriation, inequality, and normativity. Most prominently *Wuthering Heights* inspired romance novels that further instilled hegemonic ideologies. The Catherine-Heathcliff love story is iconic and lent to the novel's canonical success. It also

influenced the production of numerous other love stories throughout contemporary literature.

Romance fiction became a publishing phenomenon in the twentieth century (Hubbard, 1985). Traditional, contemporary, popular romance novels are characterized by the Harlequin or Mills and Boon publishing companies established in the 1950s (Hubbard, 1985; McAlister, 2014). From 1950 to 1979, Harlequin Books was the sole publisher of romance novels (Hubbard, 1985). This line of fiction in 1979 was the most successful ever published with 99% of the American readers of these books being female, numbering in the multi-millions (Hubbard, 1985). These novels provide readers "a way of looking at the world, interpretations of gender roles, a set of expectations, and implied guidelines for romantic success" (Hubbard, 1985, p. 114). They serve as escape novels while simultaneously validating specific social orders.

These novels are shown to reinforce heteronormative gender roles as they construct femininity and masculinity to represent hegemonic sexuality and romance. Contemporary romance novels, beginning in the 1950s, present a hero that is typical of masculine, hegemonic stereotypes. He is always handsome, powerful, educated, successful, and passionate (Hubbard, 1985). His representation of hegemonic masculine stereotypes offers upward mobility, protection, and enduring love to his chosen heroine in exchange for her obedience, support, admiration, nurturance, purity, and devotion (Hubbard, 1985). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the practice of legitimizing men's dominate position in an organized and hierarchical society. Typical romance fiction contains two essential and basic elements: a central love story and an optimistic ending. Tania Modleski (2008) and Janice Radway (2009) greatly contributed to the early

scholarly research into the romance genre. They argued that romance novels work within ideological frameworks and reflect societal anxieties that women hold against work, identity, and power in relationships (Parnell, 2018). More contemporary scholars argue that while current romance novels continue to feature stronger and more empowered heroines, love is still depicted as a redemptive force and happily-ever-after endings continue to stabilize and reaffirm heteronormative, masculine culture (Parnell, 2018).

Despite the progression of women's rights and gender equality, romance novels did not reflect a change in gender norms until the 1980s. Romance novels emerging in the 1980s began to represent a reversal of gender norms by having both sexes share traits that are formally considered gender specific (Hubbard, 1985). These novels eventually reflected feminist ideals of female independence and the male acceptance of sexual equality (Hubbard, 1985). Romance fiction in the last 30 or so years shows a gradual movement from patriarchy toward the equality of the sexes. This is, however, a slow progression considering the centuries between *Wuthering Heights* and the romance novels published after it.

In contemporary representations of male characters, power, danger, and wealth still dominate the archetype of heteronormative masculinity (Parnell, 2018). Legislative changes in the United States and the United Kingdom, such as those relating to same-sex marriages, have represented a correlation between popular trends in romance and queer romance (Parnell, 2018). Especially in the 2010s when legislation began to pass, and the gay rights movement gained momentum, the hero became an alpha-male related to capitalism, war, heterosexuality, and white Protestantism and mirrored hegemonic societal anxieties about hidden homosexual desire (Parnell, 2018). This alpha-hero has

remained a dominant archetype since Harlequin novels constructed heroism in this light in the 1950s. These narratives followed a policy stating that Harlequin heroes should be "powerful and dangerous, with their only weakness the love for the heroine" (McAlister, 308-309). The romance genre has historically maintained an overarching heteronormative representation of sex and sexuality; however, given sociocultural, legal, and organizational changes, representation is shown to transform within the genre. Sex and sexuality are more explicitly represented in contemporary romance novels. This vein of research analyzes the way that sexual relationships within romance novels reinforce traditional gender roles, an extension of the other archetypal and narrative depictions of gender roles.

Romance novels represent and create definitions of gender roles and rules, distinct for males and females. The expectations of these gender roles and rules align with heterosexual romantic love which is rooted in the courtly traditions of the Middle Ages (Hubbard, 1985). Radway (1981) argues that the Gothic asserts the validity of the feminist agenda and self-realization for women; however, "its narrative structure demonstrates that achievement of it comes only with submission to traditional gender arrangements and assumptions of a typically female personality structure" (p. 155). The Gothic used monstrosity to represent societal anxieties; however, Radway argues that it failed in liberating women from the patriarchal agenda. By extension, the romance novel transformed as a means to reinforce gender inequalities, offering no alternative to such injustices until it evolved in more recent contemporary romantic fiction. Perhaps romance fiction is not such a good or appropriate generic extension of *Wuthering Heights* and the

meanings embedded in it because it only further entrenches women in a structured and polarized society.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

An analysis of *Wuthering Heights* shows how Bronte offered an honest portrayal of cultural and societal constructs through the figure of monstrosity. This was done to highlight the fears and anxieties of the members of the upper and middle class and proponents of patriarchy. The narrative displays the complex nature of the human condition by incorporating multidimensional characters by utilizing monstrosity as a way to articulate oppression, discrimination, and maltreatment. The dark psychological states and underlying marriage plot represent fears associated with socioeconomic status and gender, rather than idealizing or reinforcing hegemonic masculinity.

Heathcliff is a hybrid, like most monsters today. He upholds a sense of terror and also comes across as alluring and attractive. This and his relationship with Catherine evoke the component of love and romance within the novel. This was inspired by the burgeoning Romantic movement in literature and other forms of art and entertainment. The way monstrosity and gender are represented in *Wuthering Heights* also influenced romantic literature throughout the two decades between its original publication and now. Romance novels, however, have largely reinforced and fallen under the structure of gender norms and stereotypes where the Gothic sought to confront the problems within this societal discourse. Up until the past 30 years, romance fiction has presented feminine and masculine stereotypes that reflect societies slow progression toward gender equality.

It is important and worthwhile to study monstrosity and gender from its inception in the original well of literature that comprised the Gothic up to its contemporary reproductions and adaptations. Bronte showed how social anxieties about socioeconomic status and gender can be articulated through the use of monstrosity, bringing a public

importance to the Gothic genre. These are concepts of monstrosity and gender that contemporary societies. As such, this chapter will discuss the contemporary reproductions of *Wuthering Heights*, considering its continued relevance to audiences across various time periods and cultures. I will then discuss the way that contemporary rhetoricians approach monstrosity and gender. Lastly, I will highlight contemporary and illustrative manifestations of the Gothic monster and romance. This will show how the figure of monstrosity remains relevant but shifts over time and across texts as a response to its historical, cultural, and societal changes. It is, however, still a genre defined by enduring tropes of monstrosity and romance.

4.1 Contemporary Representations of *Wuthering Heights*

The Gothic tradition was a byproduct of increased social, cultural, and theological changes taking place in eighteenth-century Europe. These changes included medical advancements, increased industrialization, and active resistance against gender norms in the growing women's rights movements. Its popularity among American audiences both then and now highlights the psychological monster related to notions of gender and romance continue to serve representational and public importance. Works written during this period are inherently linked to the cultural and societal context of the time and offer a great deal of commentary on Gothic era societal fears with the increased dissolution of tradition, oppression, gender roles, and race. Bronte offers a look into the psychology of a monster motivated by revenge, and in a "position at the margins of and outside of human society" (Feilla, 2008, p. 167). Bronte required the gothic landscape because it affords more space for Heathcliff and Catherine's pride, self-regard, and severity. Locating

contemporary representations of *Wuthering Heights* will provide evidence that the text is still part of relevant generic reading practices today.

First published in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* has influenced adaptations and reproductions of the canonical work in popular culture from 1920 to the present. The earliest cinematic interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* was filmed in England in 1920. The next filmic adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* surfaced in 1939 in the form of a black and white American film. Similar to later adaptations, this film eliminated the storyline of the second generation within the original novel, young Cathy and Hareton. This may have been due to the director's intent to highlight the monstrosity that Heathcliff and Catherine embody as a representation of societal fears. Airing at the end of the Great Depression in 1939, this film represented similar societal fears through the manifestation of monstrosity as the original publication of the novel.

The English economy in 1840, around the time that Bronte was composing *Wuthering Heights*, was severely depressed, especially defined by the abysmal conditions experienced by factory workers in industrial areas. It was, however, the upper and middle classes that feared revolt and regarded the factory workers with a mixture of sympathy and fear. As Bernadette Marie Calafell (2015) argues, it is the dominant culture that determines who are monsters and what is monstrous. Therefore, the societal fears supported by the upper and middle classes in nineteenth century England are represented in the character Heathcliff as he was adopted out of Liverpool which was one of the industrial areas in England. He embodies the fear that a low-class industrial worker might gain affluence and seek revenge on those that wronged him. As an outsider, he represents both an obscure, yet, somehow intimate figure that reflects the fear and sympathy held by

upper- and middle-class people toward the lower-class factory workers. (Cameron 2008). This formulation of monstrosity is transported across time. The adaptation of this Gothic novel at the end of the Great Depression serves as evidence that *Wuthering Heights* is rhetorically relevant to audiences in conditions of parallel economic unrest.

The reproduction of *Wuthering Heights* at the end of the Great Depression shows that its construct of monstrosity was relevant to that time period. As the deepest and longest lasting economic downturn of the United States, the American economy at the time saw a large divide between the upper class and the middle- to lower- class (McDaniel, 2013). Similarly, Heathcliff highlights the anxieties within a structured economic system as a monster that represents the association between fear and socioeconomic status. Thus, *Wuthering Heights* resurfaced at the end of the Great Depression as an expression of fear associated with class, affluence, financial stability, and economy.

The most recent film based on *Wuthering Heights* is a 2011 movie directed by Andrea Arnold. Critics praised the film for its ability to capture and reiterate the darkness of the settings in the original novel (Arnold, 2011). The most compelling aspect of this contemporary adaptations is that it foregrounds a monstrosity born out of the nineteenth century to a postmodern audience. It presents, yet again, Heathcliff as the psychological monster born out of poverty that seeks revenge against those who wronged him. This reproduction of the original narrative illustrates the continued adoption and interpretation of societal fears surrounding gender, romance, and otherness as related to Heathcliff's character and socioeconomic status.

The concept of monstrosity as used in rhetorical literature differs slightly with the representation of the monstrous in other generic forms. Within the film industry, for example, the monster carries a slightly different connotation, one that is synonymous with horror. The contemporary understanding of monstrosity within the film industry is comprehensively captured by Noel Carroll's 1990 publication of *The Philosophy of Horror.* Carroll's work is foundational in its thought and characterization of the monstrous given the most recent view on the representation of monsters in horror fiction and film. In Carroll's view, monsters are either supernatural or science-fictional in origin and, therefore, cannot be human. Defining monsters, Carroll argues that monster refers to any being that is not believed to be in existence according to contemporary standards of science (1990).

In film, monsters are primarily represented through horror because horror stirs bodily impulses. It aims to elicit bodily responses from audiences like elevated blood pressure, increased heart rate, sweating, and nervous reactions to fear like jumping or screaming. These films play to the fight or flight defense mechanism that takes effect when the body is perceiving a threat or extreme circumstance. In this light, horror films bring viewers in contact with death, lessening their anxiety associated with inevitable mortality. Thus, horror can be described as shocking and taboo because it transgresses society's defense mechanism against death anxiety (Becker, 1997). This aligns horror with the Gothic genre because both can be described as taboo. Victorian readers of *Wuthering Heights* found the novel shocking and inappropriate and it did not gain popularity when first published in 1847. Like the Gothic, horror films develop "the genre's engagement with mortality by shifting the locus of fear from specific Others to

the structural conditions under which some lives are more precarious than others" (Kelly, 2017, p. 237). Those structural conditions in contemporary societies can range from concepts of privilege, race, wealth, and opportunity and impact the way monstrosity is manifested in literature and film alike.

In between the release of the first filmic adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* and the most recent reproduction of the original novel, there have been television productions, soap operas, theatrical adaptations, dramas, musicals, web-series, and various movie productions around the world. In 1970, the second episode in *Monty Python's Flying Circus* featured a sketch titled, "The Semaphore Version of *Wuthering Heights*." This extremely short and watered-down version of the novel pokes fun at filmic attempts to capture the tonality, unchanging dispositions, and complex narrative of the original novel. Sally Wainwright and director Robin Shepperd produced *Sparkhouse* for the BBC in 2002 as a modern interpretation of the story with gender roles reversed. The role of Heathcliff in this reproduction is played by a woman, actress Sarah Smart. Additionally, there have been movie releases based on the story of Heathcliff and Catherine by French, Japanese, Filipino, Italian, and Bollywood production studios.

The reproduction of *Wuthering Heights* in popular culture has proliferated from the 1920s to the present. Adaptations take influence from their time of production and release, while still adhering to the characteristics of the original narrative that make it generic. The initial versions of the story rejected the extreme emotional element of the novel, while focusing more on the moral code of society. In most of the recent film adaptions, there has been a balance between the representation of the monster Heathcliff, gender issues, and the ideological questions raised in the novel. In essence, the

representation of the film has evolved over time. The shifting popularity of the novel in popular culture depends on the trends in social attitudes that influence how the work's representation of monstrosity influences its public importance.

4.2 Contemporary Rhetoricians' Treatment of Monstrosity

Monstrosity is used rhetorically to communicate societal injustices or fears (Calafell, 2015; Kelly, 2016; Kelly, 2017; Poole, 2011; Ramirez-Berg, 2012; Phillips, 2005). It serves to represent cultural anxieties and repressed fears of a particular historical moment. Casey Kelly (2017) notes a "generic shift from a specific monster to an anonymous and relentless force" (p. 234) in the film *It Follows* (2014). Generic shifts draw attention to present conditions that induce monstrosity within the prevailing socioeconomic order (Kelly, 2017). Kelly attributes the manifestation of the anonymous and relentless monster in *It Follows* to "the systematic and existential threats to the human condition under late capitalism including poverty, racism, and deindustrialization" (2017, p. 235). This form of the monster is befitting and unique to postindustrial America.

The monster in this film, Kelly argues, represents the day-to-day antagonization of "unemployment, limited upward mobility, substandard health care, crumbling infrastructure, environmental degradation, and divestment in the public good" (Kelly, 2017, p. 235). Beyond the fictive and cinematic attraction of horror, urban horror films like *It Follows* are rhetorical in the sense that they shape ideological discourses (Kelly, 2017). Rhetoricians like Kelly find an interest in monstrosity because its production "intervenes into the political commonsense of urban/suburban divide" (Kelly, 2017, p. 237). Monstrosity serves to represent sources of everyday fear, horror, or anxiety by

inviting audiences to consider the origin of that fear. In other words, the construction and manifestation of monstrosity provides a lens into cultural consciousness that points out specific injustices. It does so by presenting an anonymous and relentless force as the monster rather than a specific monster. This draws attention to the existential threats of postindustrial America that are larger than a specific threat. Poverty and racism are threatening forces, therefore represented by the presence of the "*It*" that follows in the film.

As a representation of contemporary anxieties regarding gender and romance, Kelly also offers a rhetorical analysis of the 2007 film *Teeth*. Women have long recurred as monsters in horror cinema in various manifestations: "witch, vampire, succubus, possessed body, primal mother, femme fatale" (Kelly, 2016, p. 86). These feminine constructions of monstrosity suggest that the fear of women arises from their eviscerating power as the femme castratrice (Kelly, 2016). An important aspect of contemporary rhetorical treatments of monstrosity is that they are often described, first, as reaching into the past for inspiration. It is, however, an awareness of critical consciousness that lends to the monster's adaptation as a product of its time.

Kelly's argument contends that recent treatments of the femme castratrice in film illustrates the potential of horror films to subvert the women-as-monster archetype. Films such as *Teeth* serve to represent contemporary feminist viewpoints as influenced by second and third wave feminism. Femme castratrice films "help trace feminist struggles for sexual autonomy" (Kelly, 2016, p. 91) by opposing hegemonic notions of female agency. Monstrosity within popular culture highlights significance beyond the manifestation of the monster itself. There is also significance in the time that *Teeth* was

released (Kelly, 2016). Because it was released "near the end of a political epoch during which decades of hard-won victories for women's reproductive rights were counteracted by restrictions of abortions and Medicaid" the representation of monstrosity within the film subverts the tensions of war on women discourse (Kelly, 2016, p. 91). The film reframes female monstrosity previously defined by cultural mythology and the vagina dentata (Kelly, 2016). It frames female monstrosity as an enabling power that arms women against a culture of gender violence.

Contemporary rhetoricians examine how representations of monstrosity are tied to historical shifts, cultural anxieties, and specific events, ideologies, and discourses (Calafell, 2015, Poole, 2011; Ramirez-Berg, 2012; Phillips, 2005). Recent representations reframe the monster by justifying rhetorical decisions within a contemporary context. Monsters have been transported over time, changing as a result of the prevailing socioeconomic order. Thus, "monsters are shapeshifters whose meanings morph within their given contexts" (Abdi & Calafell, 2017; Calafell, 2015; Hoglund & Khair, 2013). The original construction of the vampire in *Dracula* made a metaphorical connection to threats of proletariat and monopoly capital inherent in the developing bourgeois society (Cameron, 2008). Subsequently, contemporary manifestations of the vampire, especially its characteristic need for blood to survive, can be argued to represent sexual hunger or "the U.S. reliance on international oil trade to survive economically" (Abdi & Calafell, 2017, p. 363). The connection between representation and public importance is made due to specific characteristics, embodiments, constructions, and manifestations of the monster within its textual and societal context.

Casey Kelly (2016) unpacks the gendered construction of monstrosity in contemporary manifestations of gender and romance within horror films, such as the film *Teeth* (2007). In his rhetorical approach to monstrosity within *Teeth*, he argues that the "sadistic and castrating female figure [in the film] subverts the patriarchal mythologies undergirding the gendered logics of both screen violence and cultural misogyny" (Kelly, 2016, p. 86). Other rhetoricians highlight monstrosity as a touchstone of ideological importance that gets at social problems surrounding gender and romance. Bernadette Marie Calafell (2015) argues that monsters are dominant cultures' projection of fear and internalized hate. She identifies gender, among race, class, sexuality, body size, and ability, as cultural anxieties that manifest in monstrosity (Calafell, 2015).

Just as "urban horror films have contributed to ideological discourses supporting the tough on crime politics of mass incarceration" (Kelly, 2017, p. 236), the trope of monstrosity within Gothic literature, specifically as exemplified in *Wuthering Heights,* contributes to the ideological discourses of gender, romance, and the precariousness of social class. Genre is the lens into the rhetorical importance of Gothic monstrosity, later influencing the construction of contemporary manifestations of monstrosity. It is the generic framework that, for example, "invites [audiences] to consider economic and environmental stratification as the source of everyday horror" (Kelly, 2017, p. 238). The monster in contemporary popular culture continues to represent inequalities and injustices as it did in the original works of Gothic literature. In his analysis of *It Follows*, Kelly (2014) demonstrates how "the film links monstrosity to the conditions of America's postindustrial decline, where the myths of upward mobility have transparently disintegrated" (p. 246). Unpacking this, monstrosity represents the shifting nature of

social status, addressing audiences by highlighting this repressed fear. Similarly, this representation of social status links back to the considerations of class status that motivate monstrosity in *Wuthering Heights*.

In the novel, Catherine decides to marry Edgar because of his gentry status. Additionally, Heathcliff's monstrosity is representative of the rising fear of the upper class of the industrial workers. The same ideological discourses serve to represent a cultural consciousness, although adapted to the historical shifts from century to century. As Kelly (2017) demonstrates in his treatment of *It Follows*, "the film invites audiences to rethink the urban nightmare as a problem to be addressed at a structural level rather than as an aberration to be eradicated or repelled" (p. 247). In this way, monstrosity is representative of public concerns just as it was in *Wuthering Heights*.

Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* represents an otherness that is both detested and desirable. Rhetoricians have addressed this complexity of the monster (Calafell, 2015; Lemaster, 2016) in its "dynamic tapestry reflecting a multitude of intersectional cultural producers' and consumer's desires and fears… [that] are often one and the same" (Lemaster, 2016, p. 183). Even in contemporary representations of monstrosity, that which we defile is also that which we desire. The figure of the monster is, therefore, constituted through excess (Calafell, 2015; Lemaster, 2016). Heathcliff's monstrosity is excessive, as well, and uncontainable by nature. Numerous instances in the narrative show Heathcliff violating confining boundaries because he represents a detestable and desirable monster of cruel passion.

Monsters emerge out of repressed societal fears because of the very nature of historical movement and forward progression. The glorification of a time period in terms

we are familiar with (age of reason, awakening, enlightenment, etc.) transforms the psychic and cultural imperatives (Castle, 1995). These transformations also produce "a kind of toxic side effect, a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse" (Castle, 1995, p. 8). Because of these changes in cultural consciousness, especially in response to significant historical shifts, constructions like monstrosity become rhetorically important. In this example, literature offers the manifestation of an actual monster, something that reality cannot offer. This allows the figure of the monster to represent a societal anxiety that is historically internalized.

4.3 Illustrative Manifestations of the Gothic

Highlighting some of the transformations of the Gothic and its attending tropes allows for a conjecture on what has changed within the genre and where the genre is going. *Twilight* (2008), *Fifty Shades of Grey*, and *Game of Thrones* are contemporary examples that intertwine monstrosity, gender, and romance to extend the gender politics of *Wuthering Heights* over time. They show that the internal dynamic of the Gothic genre is present in contemporary popular culture and also demonstrate how today's society influences nuanced changes in the ways monstrosity, gender, and romance are constructed.

Twilight (2008) is Catherine Hardwicke's film adaptation of Stephanie Meyer's vampire romance novel. It is illustrative of monstrosity, gender, and romance in various ways and shows how these generic conceptions are still articulated within popular culture. There are points of comparison between *Twilight* (2008) and *Wuthering Heights* and areas that depart from Bronte's representation of Gothic tropes. First, *Twilight* appealed to a largely female audience and was particularly receptive to female adolescent

audiences (Bode, 2010). It manifests monstrosity in a different way than the psychological monstrosity within *Wuthering Heights* because the monster takes the form of a 108-year-old teen vampire (Bode, 2010). The vampire serves as a way to articulate anxieties associated with death and portrays young adults' feelings of defiance (Bishop, 2009). Researchers theorize that death and dying portrayals in popular culture occur as a reflection of society, especially when that society undergoes significant or traumatic changes (Bishop, 2009; do Vale, 2010). This aligns with the manifestation of monstrosity within popular culture as a reflection of societal fears and anxieties.

Twilight (2008) offers an illustration of gender in relation to monstrosity that was exemplified in *Wuthering Heights*. The film reveals the dynamics of power within society related to gender, age, and class. Some critics have argued that *Twilight* displays a feminine other in the character of Bella that is too easily seduced by a hybrid monster, Edward, of alluring and frightening qualities (Bode, 2010). It instills notions of femininity and masculinity in the characteristics and mannerisms that Bella and Edward exemplify. The film series also presents gender roles in relation to marriage. While this is a common thread throughout the Gothic and its manifestations of monstrosity, gender, and romance, *Twilight* reflects newer conversations around virginity and marriage that comprised media debates in North America during the 2000s (Bode, 2010). During the time, North America saw a "rise of the 'True Love Waits' movement, 'purity balls', and media debate about the 2000s neo-fetishization of virginity" (Bode, 2010, p. 712). Against this societal backdrop, the marriage of the virgin Bella and the emphasis on her virginity in the *Twilight* films equates abstinence with the conformity to gender norms and stereotypes within a patriarchal system. It represents a denial of female sexual

freedom by upholding the importance of Bella's virginity in her marriage to Edward: a marriage that he advocated for.

This film expanded into a series that continued to manifest monstrosity in the form of an alluring male monster. Similar to *Wuthering Heights*, it saw an overlap between monstrosity and gender. Just as Catherine's monstrosity surfaces when she is forced to conform to gender roles to gain upward mobility in *Wuthering Heights*, Bella's monstrosity surfaces at a similar time in *Twilight*. She agrees to marry Edward on the condition that he make her a vampire after their union. This shows a conformity to a marriage system bound by virginity and heteronormativity.

Originally published as fanfiction paying "a sexualized homage to *Twilight*" (Brienza, 2015, p. 89), *Fifty Shades of Grey* offers another illustration of contemporary treatments of monstrosity within the Gothic genre. It portrays characteristics of psychological monstrosity and the struggle to achieve domestic hetero-normality "reminiscent of the narratives found in classics such as Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*" (van Reenen, 2014, p. 228). This trilogy is another example of the Gothic that repeats and diverges from its originary well, *Wuthering Heights*.

Considering how a previous Gothic text is re-shaped by contemporary political climates, *Shades* articulates and grapples with the complexities of female agency within modern society. Both *Wuthering Heights* and *Shades* present a male protagonist that embodies a certain degree of psychological monstrosity that is said to stem from childhood trauma. There is also a female counterpart in both texts that shares a passionate and sometimes destructive love for her pursuer. In *Fifty Shades of Grey* Anastasia Steele is "a young everywoman protagonist" (Brienza, 2015, p. 89) and Christian Grey, her

lover in pursuit is enigmatic, devious and mysterious (Brienza, 2015; Harrison & Holm, 2013). It is a novel series that sexualizes a young woman and that portrays has a very intense, submissive sexual relationship. Namely, Christian Grey asserts hegemonic masculinity while Anastasia's inferiority is characteristic of stereotypical femininity (Altenburger, Carotta, Bonomi & Snyder, 2016; Milestone & Meyer, 2012).

Fifty Shades of Grey means something to a large fanbase of people and is important as a cultural phenomenon. The appeal of the series to an audience of mostly straight women is an important dialectical tension, especially given the gains that women have made in the past century. Whether the series is viewed as a reinforcement of heteronormative hegemony or as an example of sexual freedom and freedom in women's' reading practices, there is no doubt that readers find value and entertainment in the erotic novel series. That value might be in its empowerment of women or in the fulfillment it provides in real, lived situations. Regardless, how and why people consume *Fifty Shades of Grey* offers insight and perspective into the social climate of the twenty-first century as an extension of deeply rooted Gothic tropes.

4.4 Conjecture of the Gothic

While *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey* show how contemporary Gothic depictions reinforce the internal dynamic of the genre and adapt its tropes to changing societies, other manifestations of monstrosity and evolving audiences allow speculation to be made about where the genre is going. I argue that forms outside of the Gothic romance, like horror and even fantasy, feature increase use of monstrosity, gender, and romance to represent normative gender roles.

Game of Thrones, for example, is a fantasy television series based off of George R. R. Martin's novel series. It has manifestations of psychological monstrosity and supernatural elements, although it also incorporates tropes of medieval fantasy. It can be approached through a Gothic lens via an analysis of its monstrous characters, the importance of marriage within the narrative, and the portrayal of women within a patriarchal society. One aspect of this television series that highlights a conjecture of the Gothic is in the depiction of women working to achieve or hold political and military power (Marques, 2019). However, despite the "roles and values that women have achieved or have been trying to achieve in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries," *Game of Thrones* depicts women having to forfeit their femininity "to be taken seriously in a male-dominated world and to perform deeds mostly ascribed to men" (p. 47).

Brienne of Tarth, Arya Stark, and Yara Greyjoy are examples of women who "disrupt gender norms by displaying few feminine traits, acting out displays of violence, and attempting to perform traditionally masculine roles" (p. 47). Their success, however, relies on the fact that they forfeited their femininity. While this series shows women in male-dominated roles and in positions of power, it does so by subverting their feminine traits and portraying them in alignment with stereotypical male traits. This shows how women in the Gothic genre might hold active and powerful roles, but only by adopting conventionally masculine characteristics (Marques, 2019).

Game of Thrones, although not inherently Gothic, displays notions of monstrosity, gender, and romance that are consistent with the Gothic genre. It represents a changing notion of gender in regard to female characters. The television series shows women in pursuit of and in possession of traditionally male-dominated positions of

power. Although the females that gain political and military power sometimes have to subvert feminine traits, I think this portrayal of gender roles continues to push the prominence of powerful women in twenty-first century popular culture.

In addition to the evolution of gender in relation to monstrosity and romance, the increasing female audience for horror films means that the genre is becoming even more illustrative of the Gothic, albeit with an emphasis on physical and visceral monstrosity. These contemporary and illustrative manifestations of the Gothic could be explored in more depth; however, it is my aim to show that the threads of monstrosity, gender, and romance that are found in *Wuthering Heights* continuously reappear in contemporary representations of the Gothic and beyond.

Focusing on the concept of monstrosity makes it possible for an individual or a researcher to critically understand human nature and societal fears. Perhaps the simplest and most direct understanding of humanity is in the investigation of inhumane actions. This brings out the need to understand the motivation and inspiration behind constructions of monstrosity. These constructions are emblematic of a specific time period and collectively understood as monstrosity because it is not the specific convention that defines it. Monstrosity has been transported across countries, time periods, and manifestations. It continues to be an emblem of the human condition as it resurfaces within literature and popular culture, safe spaces to critique society. Although monstrosity did not begin with *Wuthering Heights*, Bronte's novel demonstrates a monster transformed from its original manifestation, in response to larger ideological discourses. In light of the continued rhetorical interest in the Gothic, it is valuable to go back to *Wuthering Heights* as people are still interested in the relationships the novel

represents. Continued interest in these relationships is shown in the contemporary manifestations of the Catherine-Heathcliff romance and in adaptations made to the construct of monstrosity and gender.

4.5 Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of my approach to monstrosity lie in the reservations commonly held by critics in regard to rhetorical and generic conceptions. Genre approaches can be limiting and reductive (Conley, 1979). Because of the narrow lens that is used in genre criticism, it "detaches us from our experience of the work" (Conley, 2009, p. 52). Genre also invokes comparison, leading to the threat of elaborate taxonomies of genres and subgenres constructed by "precise and rigorous classification" (Conley, 1979, p. 52).

These limitations led to the decline of genre criticism among rhetorical scholars. As an approach said to promote essentialism and reductionism, genre criticism is sometimes regarded as formulaic (Conley, 1979; Gunn & Frentz, 2008; Jameson, 1981; Jancovich, 2000; Patton, 1976). Genre criticism is argued to promote essentialism because in order to place a work into a generic category, the researcher has to conform to a set of characteristics that define said genre. This leads to reductionism. Monstrosity is a complex phenomenon that I have described in terms of phenomena, *Wuthering Heights* and Gothic literature, that are held to represent fundamental institutions within society. In this way, I have fixed upon the singularity of the Gothic genre to represent and produce monstrosity. Literary works, in this light, are less compliant to generic analysis than rhetorical works, "owing to the very nature of rhetoric as a practical, situational art" (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986, p. 14). Approaching a literary work rhetorically requires interpretation and tempts a degree of essentialism and reductionism.

Genre explains why texts are publicly important to authors and readers. Genre criticism brings with it, however, the limitations of solipsism and prescription. Solipsism speaks to the critic's view that their definition of genre is all that is known, although that definition may not be shared by others. Prescription follows as a limitation in which the critic uses their "definition of genre to praise or damn works as they meet or fail to meet its specifications" (Simons & Aghazarian, 1986, p. 42). These limitations to rhetorical and generic criticism are acknowledged in this analysis of monstrosity as a rhetorical device. By narrowing my argument to monstrosity and by reasoning that *Wuthering Heights* is a historically and generically important, generative, and representative text I have, perhaps, failed to acknowledge other salient aspects of the narrative.

With these limitations in mind, I believe that future research into *Wuthering Heights* as a generative and representative text could expand contemporary understandings of monstrosity in rhetorical studies. Religion within *Wuthering Heights* as related to monstrosity could be a way to better understand how nineteenth century religious beliefs influenced the construction of monstrosity and how that construction of monstrosity is still prevalent in contemporary understandings. Future research might also consider a psychoanalytic approach to the monstrosity within *Wuthering Heights* as representative of the human psyche instead of "intimately connected to our pasts, presents, and futures as a society" (Calafell, 2015, p. 5). Future research can also continuously highlight the manifestations of monstrosity, gender, and romance that repeat or transform, adding to the understandings of the Gothic genre.

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