

FRANKENSTEIN AND WUTHERING HEIGHTS:
THE UNRELIABLE MALE NARRATOR AND ANONYMOUS FEMALE AUTHORSHIP
IN THE GOTHIC NOVEL

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ABSTRACT

Conventions of nineteenth-century British society restricted the subjects of women's authorship and biased the reception of women's writing. By publishing anonymously, or using a male pseudonym, women could evade the gender bias imposed on their literary works. The author's name, however, was not the only means by which women could influence society's reception of their works; a male narrator allowed the author not only a male persona, but a male voice through which to convey her writing. This paper will explore the characters of Captain Robert Walton in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Mr. Lockwood in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. As frame narratives, both *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* rely on these characters to shape the entire narrative. Walton and Lockwood enable Shelley and Brontë, respectively, to code their voices as male; publishing without identifying themselves as women allows these writers to further the perception. While comparisons have been drawn between *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*, research has not focused specifically on the male narrators in the text in synonymy with anonymous publication and the combined significance for the Gothic nature of these tales. The framing narrative structure of the novels fittingly accompanies their Gothic genre, which maintains a transgressive quality in its use of uncertainty. As expectations are thwarted and explanations are often withheld, the reader must surrender themselves to the narrative, granting Gothic authors immersive power over their readers. Within *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*, Shelley and Brontë use uncertainty to heighten the fearful nature of their Gothic tales for the reader. The authors create a sense of horror for a readership reliant on gender confines, the realization that such confines are permeable. By depicting their tales through frame narratives and publishing without revealing themselves as women, Shelley and Brontë engage a broader readership of both men and women, increase the freedom of their narrative voice, and heighten the uncertain nature of Gothic tales for the reader. Gothic tales thrive on uncertainty, which Shelley and Brontë then intensify through unreliable narrators and anonymity, leaving the readers uncertain of the authors' gender.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE.....	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
<i>FRANKENSTEIN AND WUTHERING HEIGHTS:</i>	
THE UNRELIABLE MALE NARRATOR AND ANONYMOUS FEMALE AUTHORSHIP IN THE GOTHIC NOVEL.....	1
WORKS CITED.....	21

Conventions of nineteenth-century British society restricted the subjects of women's authorship and biased the reception of women's writing. By publishing anonymously, or using a male pseudonym, women could evade the gender bias imposed on their literary works. The author's name, however, was not the only means by which women could influence society's reception of their works; a male narrator allowed the author not only a male persona, but a male voice through which to convey her writing. Two significant examples of this approach are Captain Robert Walton in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and Mr. Lockwood in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. As frame narratives, both *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* rely on these characters to shape the entire narrative. The characters of Walton and Lockwood enable Shelley and Brontë, respectively, to code their voices as male; publishing without identifying themselves as women allows these writers to further the perception. While comparisons have been drawn between *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*, research has not focused specifically on the male narrators in the text in combination with anonymous publication and the combined significance for the Gothic nature of these tales.¹ Walton and Lockwood frame the narratives within which the novels' tales are told. The framing narrative structure of the novels fittingly accompanies their Gothic genre. The perspectives conveyed in both texts create uncertainty, as information is withheld from the reader. The Gothic genre maintains a transgressive quality in its use of uncertainty; expectations are thwarted and explanations are often withheld. David Punter notes:

perhaps what Gothic and much contemporary criticism and cultural commentary share is indeed an overarching, even a sublime, *awareness* of mutability, an understanding of the ways in which history itself, and certainly narratives of history, are not stable, do not constitute a rock onto which we might cling—indeed, as Gothic has always sought to demonstrate to us, there are no such rocks, there is no sure foundation. (3)

¹ Recent scholarship focusing on Walton includes Barbara Witucki's article "Captain Walton's Divine Wanderer and The Dream of Scipio." *ANQ*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2009, pp. 24-30, and Terry W. Thompson's critical essay "Robert Walton as Reanimator." *Papers on Language & Literature*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2004, pp. 296-304; while recent scholarship on Lockwood includes Ian M. Emberson's article "Mr Lockwood and Mr Latimer: *Wuthering Heights* and the Ghost of *Redgauntlet*." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 39, no. 3, 2014, pp. 232-238, and Nicholas Frangipane's article "Lockwood the Liar: a Call to Reconsider *Wuthering Heights* as a Metafictional Work on the Limits of Narrative." *Brontë Studies*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2016, pp. 29-38.

The reader must surrender themselves to the narrative, granting Gothic authors immersive power over their readers.

Within *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*, Shelley and Brontë use uncertainty to heighten the fearful nature of their Gothic tales for the reader. The authors create a sense of horror for a readership reliant on gender confines, the realization that such confines are permeable. Traditional Gothic elements, such as madness and ghosts, further the sense of uncertainty throughout the novels. In *Frankenstein*, Victor's tale possesses uncertainty for the reader as Walton reveals him to be in a state of illness, potentially madness, and the tale is conveyed second-hand through Walton. The narrative then thwarts the readers' expectations by presenting the creature in a sympathetic light. In *Wuthering Heights*, the reader does not possess certainty regarding Cathy's ghost. Although Lockwood explains that he saw her in a dream, Heathcliff's willingness to believe in her manifestation causes the reader to question whether Heathcliff is mad. As neither Lockwood nor Heathcliff appears reliable, the incident leaves the reader uncertain. By depicting their tales through frame narratives and publishing without revealing themselves as women, Shelley and Brontë engage a broader readership of both men and women, increase the freedom of their narrative voice, and heighten the uncertain nature of Gothic tales for the reader. Gothic tales thrive on uncertainty, which Shelley and Brontë then intensify through unreliable narrators and anonymity, leaving the readers uncertain of the authors' gender.

Although critics have acknowledged the similar use of frame narratives in *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*, they have not explored the significance of women's authorship in conjunction with the unreliable male narrator and anonymous publication in these Gothic novels. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar are among the relatively few critics who draw these two texts together, noting the parallels in narrative structure. Their focus, however, concentrates on the narrative structure of the novels and does not incorporate the authors' withholding of identity. Alexis Easley provides an exploration of anonymous women's authorship in the nineteenth century, but Shelley and Brontë are not subjects of her focus. The use of both the unreliable male narrator in a frame narrative and anonymous publication combines to further the uncertainty and allow a more transgressive impact of these Gothic tales.

Male narrators provide a significant way for Shelley and Brontë to attempt to free themselves from gender-biased assumptions about their writing. Walton and Lockwood are crucial in providing a "male" voice, leading readers away from concerns regarding authorship

and towards appreciation of the tales themselves. In their discussion of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, N.M. Jacobs explains:

By contrast with the relatively innocuous masquerade of a male pseudonym—a common enough ploy, and one justified by ladylike modesty as well as economic prudence—the extended assumption of a male persona must have required a great deal of courage in a time almost obsessively concerned with defining the differences in consciousness between men and women. Nevertheless, Emily and Anne Brontë seem to have found their male impersonations necessary, as a way to silence the dominant culture by stealing its voice, to exorcise the demon of conventional consciousness and male power by holding it up to ridicule. (208)

Shelley exemplifies through Walton the same courage Jacobs ascribes to Emily Brontë and her sister. In *Frankenstein*, Victor Frankenstein demonstrates the danger of male power in pursuit of scientific accomplishment. Jealous of the only power his sex does not possess, he attempts to usurp women's power of giving life; Shelley then blatantly exhibits his ignorance in the catastrophic repercussions. Likewise, Brontë's Heathcliff demonstrates the ignorance of the male pursuit of power. Despite all of the violence and misery he inflicts on those around him in his determination for control, the novel concludes with his death and the impending union of Catherine and Hareton. Leaving no heir, the entire fortune he schemed to possess reverts back to its rightful owners. Shelley and Brontë query the male quest for power and the pride that blinds men to the consequences of their pursuit.

Walton and Lockwood provide the textual voice with which to criticize society for its misogynistic gender binaries. Indeed, as Shelley published *Frankenstein* decades before Brontë published *Wuthering Heights*, she may have provided an example of the male narrator by a woman writer. Gilbert and Gubar further this assumption in their textual comparative of an "evidentiary narrative technique"² in *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*. Gilbert and Gubar note, "in its use of such a technique, *Wuthering Heights* might be a deliberate copy of *Frankenstein*" (249). The similarities of Shelley's and Brontë's narrative technique accord with their responses to the misogynistic literary canon preceding them. In confronting the tradition of misogynistic writing, Shelley and Brontë each adopted a "male" voice. This voice allows them to

² "A Romantic story-telling method that emphasizes the ironic disjunctions between different perspectives on the same events as well as the ironic tensions that inhere in the relationship between surface drama and concealed authorial intention" (Gilbert and Gubar 249).

criticize men such as Victor and Heathcliff, respectively, without readers dismissing such criticism as having been written by women ignorant of reality. Male narrators who frame their novels provide both authors the freedom to question the consequences of male power.

Both *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* feature narration within narration, with Walton and Lockwood framing the outermost narrative. In both novels, the inner tales are conveyed orally. In Juliann E. Fleenor's *The Female Gothic*, she explains that the frame narrative is a common structure for Gothic novels, particularly those by women: "The narrative structure is usually one or multiple narrators. Epistolary novels or narration within narration are used" (12). Fleenor notes, "Even in choosing the narrative structure Gothic writers, and in particular Female Gothic writers, choose one which by its nature undermines its validity" (12). Walton commits his to paper in letters to his sister, Mrs. Margaret Saville. Lockwood does not state that he is writing, but his use of dates, though restricted to just the year, suggests that he is recording a written diary: "1801—I have just returned from a visit to my landlord—the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with" (37). The written authority of Walton and Lockwood conveys their importance as narrators. As the outermost frame, all of the story, in the case of both novels, must pass through the male narrator. Shelley and Brontë thereby cast a "male" voice over their novels. The framing structure in Shelley's novel, however, does markedly differ from Brontë's. The most significant structural difference regarding the narrative is the reader's consciousness of the male narrator. In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Walton bookends the tales of Victor Frankenstein and the creature; Walton begins and ends the novel with his letters to his sister. During the tales, Walton disappears from the view, silently taking in their horrific stories. By establishing Walton's presence at the beginning and end of each tale, Shelley establishes an uncertainty of perspective throughout the entire novel.

In a different approach, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* continually reminds the reader of Lockwood's presence. Lines regularly appear during the tale reminding the reader that the story is being framed for them through Lockwood. When Nelly Dean tells her part of the tale, the narrative periodically draws back to the frame of Lockwood. After reading about the death of Edgar Linton, Brontë pulls the reader back to the outer frame with Nelly saying, "He died blissfully, Mr. Lockwood" (268). While the reader can forget Walton's presence during the middle of Shelley's novel, Brontë regularly jars the reader back to Lockwood and the outer frame. Paralleling Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* begins and ends entirely

in the hands of the male narrator. In *Frankenstein*, Walton's first three letters to his sister are about himself. It is not until the fourth letter that Walton begins the tale of Victor Frankenstein. Similarly, the first three chapters of *Wuthering Heights* feature Lockwood discussing his own experiences. The fourth chapter then begins the central tale of Catherine and Heathcliff. Both *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* conclude with their male narrators; the central tales ultimately return to them. Although their presence in the novel varies, Walton and Lockwood frame the central tales of the novel. Though the stories of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* are greatly distinct from one another, the unreliable male narrators create the same effect of uncertainty for the reader.

Unreliability and uncertainty are part of the mysteriousness inherent in the Gothic novel, and the unreliable narrator carries this further for the reader. Although Walton and Lockwood are the narrative authorities in their novels, their versions are fallible as Shelley and Brontë respectively cast them as unreliable narrators. The framing structure of their narratives particularly allows Shelley and Brontë to render the reader uncertain. Fleenor notes, "Even in choosing the narrative structure Gothic writers, and in particular Female Gothic writers, choose one which by its nature undermines its validity" (12). The unreliability of the male narrator allows the reader to question the influence of perspective. The reader must be conscious of misconceptions and biases that may prejudice understanding. Beth Newman notes, "While Shelley and Brontë do not specifically ask us to be suspicious of the reliability of their narrators, they do cast suspicion on the stories they tell" (169). The framing narrative befits the Gothic nature of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* as it provides uncertainty, allowing the male narrators to influence the tales they hear, and to experience the influence of such tales: "A story can be cut off from its origin in a particular speaker and tell itself in other speakers, who to some extent are shaped by it instead of shaping it" (Newman 168). The reader does not presume the narrator is free from bias, but cannot determine where lies the distinction between truth and fiction in the narrator's account. Newman explains that both novels make the reader clearly aware that there are biases and misconceptions present that may be influencing the tale:

The paradox of frame narratives like *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* is that they present first person narrators whose singular and even bizarre stories suggest highly individualized tellers, but they ask us to believe that the stories they contain are repeated virtually word for word by other, quite different tellers; and in the process they efface a

particular set of markers in the text that would permit us to distinguish the individual tellers, those tonal markers and indices of character inscribed in the narration itself, markers often loosely called ‘voice.’ (168)

Despite Shelley and Brontë making the reader aware that the narrator is unreliable, the reader must continue with the tales only as told. Although the reader knows the tales may not be entirely reliable, they are uncertain of precisely which aspects are questionable. Bette London comments, “Confronted with a narrative in two clearly discernible hands, like Lockwood we feel sure about which one to choose. But Lockwood’s unconscious betrays his overt preference for the writing of the rebellious Catherine, and the novel makes us ask whether we have been similarly beguiled, whether we can be sure of our choice of which text we read” (37). As there is no higher authority provided in the novel, the reader must discern the tales through the unreliable perspectives of the framing male narrators.

While the uncertainty and destabilization created by their unreliable narration is the same, Walton and Lockwood possess different flaws as narrators. Shelley’s Walton seems prone to emotional bias, as he longs for a friend, while Brontë’s Lockwood seems especially poor at reading situations. Walton and Lockwood each present their capacity for bias and misconception straight from the beginning. In the early pages of *Frankenstein*, Walton writes, “You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of friend” (54). Shelley portrays Walton as isolated, prone to bias for the sake of friendship. She furthers this portrayal as Walton appears almost pitiful in his loneliness. Walton continues, “I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavor to regulate my mind” (55). His desperation for companionship leaves his character vulnerable. Victor Frankenstein, as a potential friend for Walton, therefore occupies a position in which he can significantly influence him. After Frankenstein dies, Walton struggles with his own perceptions of the creature, having so far allowed them to be entirely dominated by his friend’s viewpoint. Walton observes, “His voice seemed suffocated; and my first impulses, which had suggested to me the duty of obeying the dying request of my friend, in destroying his enemy, were now suspended by a mixture of curiosity and compassion” (217). Walton begins to battle against himself. He demonstrates his unreliability for the reader by questioning his own decision-making capabilities. The influence of Frankenstein, however, having been the primary source of Walton’s knowledge regarding the creature, vies for domination in Walton: “I was at first touched by the

expressions of his misery; yet when I called to mind what Frankenstein had said of his powers of eloquence and persuasion, and when I again cast my eyes on the lifeless form of my friend, indignation was rekindled within me” (218). For Walton, his emotional biases towards his friend are the greatest cause of his unreliability as a narrator.

The unreliability of Brontë’s Lockwood stems from his tendency to misconstrue situations. His inability to correctly interpret his physical and emotional surroundings seems to border on haplessness, despite his wealth and education. Robert and Louise Barnard highlight Lockwood as an unreliable narrator: “A superficial observer, the fact that he gets so many things wrong on his first two visits to the Heights emphasizes his status as outsider and gives a kind of comedy to his observations. He claims with some pride an unhappy love affair in the past, but his view of himself as a misanthropist is as wide of the mark as his judgment of Heathcliff” (199). This statement refers to several notable miscalculations by Lockwood. In the first lines of the novel, Lockwood makes his observations of Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights: “A perfect misanthropist’s Heaven—and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us” (37). Lockwood is hardly a misanthropist, and relishes the company of his housekeeper, Nelly Dean: “I desired Mrs. Dean, when she brought in supper, to sit down while I ate it, hoping sincerely she would prove a regular gossip, and either rouse me to animation, or lull me to sleep by her talk” (62). He prefers human company, and he often asks Nelly to sit with him and continue her tale. Later in the novel, he bemoans becoming ill and being separated from human society: “A charming introduction to a hermit’s life! Four weeks’ torture, tossing and sickness!” (110). His reference to his isolated state as that of a hermit reveals his longing for company. Whereas initially in the novel he seems to harbor a romantic idea of himself as a misanthrope, the reality of his isolation assuages him from such a delusion. Not only are his initial perceptions proven incorrect by other characters, Lockwood contradicts his own descriptions of himself: “In narrative theory he provides a superb example of the ‘unreliable narrator’” (Barnard 200). Unfortunately, Lockwood’s errors in judgment are not limited to himself. Upon visiting Wuthering Heights, he thoroughly misconstrues the social dynamics and then sits confused by them: “I thought, if I had caused the cloud, it was my duty to make an effort to dispel it. They could not every day sit so grim and taciturn, and it was impossible, however ill-tempered they might be, that the universal scowl they wore was their everyday countenance” (45). Gilbert and Gubar point out Lockwood’s ignorance of the situation: “The disorder that quite

naturally accompanies the hatred, silence, and death that prevail at *Wuthering Heights* on Lockwood's first visits leads to more of the city-bred gentleman's blunders, in particular his inability to fathom the relationships among the three principal members of the household's pseudo-family (261). Gilbert and Gubar do, however, allow for the likelihood of such ignorance: "But of course, though Lockwood's thinking is stereotypical, he is right to expect some familial relationship among his tea-table companions, and right too to be daunted by the hellish lack of relationship among them" (261). Lest the reader think Lockwood is entirely without social understanding, Gilbert and Gubar clarify that Lockwood actually fails to comprehend the violation of a common social norm. Lockwood's misconceptions, however, render him more naïve than simply ignorant.

The naïveté of the unreliable narrator heightens the uncertain nature of the Gothic tales. A significant element of his unreliability, Lockwood shares the trait of naïveté with Walton. Judith Pike asserts, "When *Wuthering Heights* was first published in 1847, the critics' response was strikingly similar to Lockwood's own response to *Wuthering Heights* as a strangely interesting place inhabited by something wilder and more savage than his own naïve and clichéd romanticism could fathom" (158). Lockwood's naïveté echoes that of Walton. In one of Walton's letters, he admits, "I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight" (51). Romantic inclinations and a tendency for naïveté influence the reliability of these male narrators. Walton and Lockwood as unreliable narrators heighten the reader's awareness of the uncertainty encompassed within a Gothic text; they represent how expectations are thwarted and denied in the Gothic genre.

Walton and Lockwood exist outside the central tales of the novels and represent the reader as onlookers of the narratives. By using these narrators, who demonstrate tendencies of naïveté and unreliability, Shelley and Brontë place the readers in a state of minimal power. More broadly, Walton and Lockwood also metaphorically represent Shelley and Brontë and the outsider status they face in confronting the gender confines of the nineteenth century. As writers, Shelley and Brontë have a certain degree of power, but as women, they face limitations on that power. Walton and Lockwood each have a degree of power, and yet they have no bearing on the central stories. Carol Margaret Davison notes, "It is important to recognize in regard to the intersecting issues of gender and genre that early Victorian Gothic often advanced a new ideal of

masculinity featuring a novel type of gentleman, one free of the class, monetary or criminal associations this figure possessed in the political Godwinian Gothic of the 1790s”³ (131). As the daughter of William Godwin, Shelley is not critiquing the male figure of the Godwinian Gothic;⁴ she incorporates older and newer definitions of masculinity in her novel. Shelley and Brontë address old and new definitions of masculinity in their exploration of gender confines within their *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights*. In the nineteenth century, associations of masculinity began to shift from the basis of class and education, to the more daring and adventurous self-made man. Walton, of limited means and education, seeks to establish himself as a self-made man through a successful voyage to the North Pole. Lockwood, of a gentlemanly status, represents Victorian society’s old definition of masculinity, while Heathcliff represents the new. Having no money of his own, Heathcliff forges his own wealth. He embodies the daringness that nineteenth-century society comes to value as defining manliness. Like Shelley’s Victor, Heathcliff is a man of action. As a villainous figure, Brontë uses this embodiment to question the confines of this masculinity. Alternatively, neither Walton nor Lockwood represents the emerging ideal of masculinity in the nineteenth century. Lockwood represents the old conditions of masculinity, based upon gentility and lineage. Walton, without these conditions, falls short of both the old and new definitions of masculinity. He laments his lack of education and thus strives to meet the new conditions of masculinity by attaining a name for himself as an explorer. He fails, however, as an explorer, ultimately discouraged from reaching his mission to reach the North Pole. By representing their unreliable narrators as men outside the emerging confines of masculinity, Shelley and Brontë create uncertainty regarding the gender constrictions of the nineteenth century.

The unreliable male narrators in the novels are not men of action, casting dispersion on gender assumptions of the time. Walton himself is not a man of action, nor is Lockwood. They can influence the telling of actions, but they do not influence the actions themselves. For, as Behrendt notes, “Although *Frankenstein* is a novel about *acts* and *actions*, it comes to us not in actions but in *reports* of actions” (70). Behrendt’s statement is also true of *Wuthering Heights*. In

³ As a political thinker, William Godwin’s 1794 publication of the gothic novel *Things as They are: Or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* focused on political criticism and specifically criticized institutions such as the justice system and the church. See Peter K. Garrett’s *Gothic Reflections*, pp. 54-60.

⁴ Pamela Clemit’s *The Godwinian Novel* expands on how Mary Shelley adapted Godwin’s techniques as ideologies evolved.

both novels, the central actions in the tale have already occurred and the narrators then relay them to the reader. Walton and Lockwood have opportunities to insert themselves into the tales they hear, but Shelley and Brontë choose to keep their narrators outside of the action. Frankenstein begs Walton to find the creature and destroy it. While Walton originally resolves to fulfill Frankenstein's request, when the creature finds him, Walton then lets the creature leave. Walton attempts to muster the courage to kill the creature, but struggles over whether he should: "Never did I behold a vision so horrible as his face, of such loathsome, yet appalling hideousness. I shut my eyes involuntarily, and endeavoured to recollect what were my duties with regard to this destroyer. I called on him to stay" (Shelley 217). The novel concludes with the creature leaving, having vowed to Walton to destroy himself: "I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly" (221). The novel ends with the creature's disappearance: "He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance" (221). The creature removes Walton from the pressure of deciding, as Walton has already promised his crew to return to England. The pursuit thus ends, without Walton entering the action of the tale, despite the opportunity. Lockwood also possesses the opportunity to enter the action of the tale by pursuing the heart of the young Catherine Linton. When Mrs. Dean suggests taking such action, Lockwood refuses: "It may be very possible that I should love her; but would she love me? I doubt it too much to venture my tranquility by running into temptation; and then my home is not here. I'm of the busy world, and to its arms I must return" (Brontë 245). He refuses to risk heartbreak and claims himself outside the search for female companionship. After Catherine falls in love with Hareton, Lockwood laments his decision not to pursue her: "I bit my lip, in spite, at having thrown away the chance I might have had of doing something besides staring at its smiting beauty" (287). Past the point of action, Lockwood can only look upon Catherine's face and pine for what might have been. His inability to act causes him to retreat entirely. Nelly's celebration of Catherine and Hareton's upcoming union only heightens the perception of his inaction. Nelly tells him, "You see, Mr. Lockwood, it was easy enough to win Mrs. Heathcliff's heart; but now I'm glad you did not try" (294). Nelly's statement affirms Lockwood's role as an inactive participant. Not wanting to again view Catherine's beauty and his missed opportunity for love, Lockwood departs before Catherine and Hareton return to the Heights, stating: "I felt irresistibly impelled to escape them again; and pressing a remembrance into the hand of Mrs. Dean, and disregarding her expostulations at my rudeness, I vanished through the kitchen as they opened the house-door" (312). He chooses to

remain outside the action, despite his interest in it. London notes that the conclusion of

Wuthering Heights emphasizes Lockwood's significance to the novel, though he is an outsider:

Lockwood's narrative ends, then, where it began, when the pattern of his love for his new goddess, Catherine, reproduces the frustration of his experience with the last. It ends at the point it does, not because of the closure the moment provides for the story of Cathy and Heathcliff, but because the proposed union of Catherine and Hareton completes a circle that effectively seals Lockwood off on the outside. (London 39)

Walton and Lockwood do not conform to contemporaneous ideals of masculinity, but as the tales they frame contain such vast extents of Gothic horror, the reader can empathize with the choices of these narrators to remain outside of the action.

While they share similarities, most significantly in their effect of uncertainty, the narrators are markedly different from one another. Although they are both outsiders, Walton is more emotionally invested in the tales he hears than Lockwood. As Richard J. Dunn notes "[Walton] is not as psychologically distant from what he hears as Emily Brontë's Lockwood" (409). Walton remains outside the action, yet he has clearly listened to Frankenstein with the intent of taking action. The novel concludes without Walton taking action, having been uncertain whether he should. From the beginning he expresses a keen interest, not only in the story, but also in his hopefulness for friendship with the teller: "I felt the greatest eagerness to hear the promised narrative, partly from curiosity, and partly from a strong desire to ameliorate his fate, if it were in my power" (Shelley 62). Walton empathizes with Frankenstein and longs to help him. Later, Walton's empathy for the creature prevents him from hurting the creature. Lockwood, contrarily, demonstrates no interest in becoming involved in the action of the tale. At the end, however, he expresses regret at not having taken action. Lockwood's interest in the tale comes from wanting entertainment and the tale's offer of intrigue. He exemplifies his own emotional removal from the story, when he prompts Nelly to continue in its telling: "Yes, I remember her hero had run off, and never been heard of for three years: and the heroine was married" (111). By refraining from using their names, Lockwood demonstrates his apathy towards the participants in the tale. While Walton is empathetic towards others, Lockwood is largely apathetic. Although Walton and Lockwood are both unreliable narrators in a framing narrative structure, they differ in their emotional attachment to the characters in their tales.

Shelley and Brontë use the transgressive freedom of the Gothic genre to destabilize notions of gender; Walton and Lockwood display passionate emotions without facing gender-biased assumptions of hysteria. Although Shelley and Brontë face outsider status as women writers, pairing male narrators with anonymous publication in Gothic novels allows them to present emotional voices. Fleenor explains, “the Gothic is shaped by a male reality, formed by a patriarchal society and perpetuated by the female writer choosing a form outside of the literary mainstream” (27). As women writing in a “male reality,” Shelley and Brontë use male narrators to maintain a strong literary presence within a patriarchal society. Their feminine texts have increased power because they do not reveal their authorship as female. Shelley and Brontë reject the gender confines society seeks to impose upon them and their work. Fleenor continues, “The Gothic has been formed by dichotomies, the patriarchal dichotomy between woman’s prescribed role and her desire and hunger for change, and the dichotomies of good and evil projected by men upon women and consequently internalized by them” (28). In order to escape these binary projections, Shelley and Brontë create narrators who, though identified as men, do not display dominant conceptions of masculinity. They transgress the boundaries of nineteenth-century masculinity, reflecting the transgressive capabilities of Gothic literature. If anything, Walton and Lockwood display “feminine” emotion, but because they are men, society attributes such emotions as romantic rather than hysterical. Walton exemplifies such emotion at the conclusion of the novel, when he writes, “My tears flow; my mind is overshadowed by a cloud of disappointment. But I journey towards England, and I may there find consolation” (Shelley 217). The emotional statement could be conveyed by either a man or a woman. Lockwood also expresses strong emotion: “The vehemence of my agitation brought on a copious bleeding at the nose, and still Heathcliff laughed, and still I scolded” (Brontë 49). Nineteenth-century readers might dismiss such forceful emotion in a woman as hysteria. This dismissal could thereby cause readers to distance themselves from the narrator, hindering their experience of the novel. By expressing such statements through men, Shelley and Brontë evade judgments about their authorship as women and the societal prejudice towards women. Heathcliff is also emotional, but violence frequently accompanies his emotional reactions. There is one instance of violence Lockwood exhibits, when he has a nightmare that the ghost of Cathy as a child is trying to enter through the window: “Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran

down and soaked the bedclothes” (56). Lockwood’s instance of violence stems not from anger, but from fear. Walton, though he strives to commit violence and destroy the creature, ultimately lets the creature depart. Shelley and Brontë indicate that men’s power lies not in their potential for physical violence, but in the freedom of expression society allows them. Gilbert and Gubar state, “Since even the most cultivated women are powerless, women are evidently at the mercy of all men, Lockwoods and Heathcliffs alike. Thus if literary Lockwood makes a woman into a goddess, he can unmake her at whim without suffering himself” (289). Male narrators allow Shelley and Brontë to empower their narrative voice and present feminist criticisms with higher authority. Writing in the Gothic genre allows them to question the gender binaries of society, and male narrators allow them to do so with increased acceptance.

In their lives as nineteenth-century women, Shelley and Brontë faced societal opposition to their authorship. This paper uses as base texts Shelley’s 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, and Brontë’s 1847 edition of *Wuthering Heights*, as these are the initial publications, which did not identify their authorship by women.⁵ Upon initial publication, critics presumed the authors of both *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* to be men. E.J. Clery notes “In the case of *Frankenstein* a number of reviewers besides [Walter] Scott assumed that the author was male” (132), and Nicola Diane Thompson states, “on its first appearance, *Wuthering Heights* was thought of as overwhelmingly masculine; there was little question in the minds of the reviewers that Ellis Bell was male” (44). Society readily accepted that the author of *Wuthering Heights* was a man, figuring that a male author accompanied a male narrator. Not only did critics largely presume the authors as male, theories circulated attributing the authorship to relatives of Mary Shelley and Emily Brontë. In Shelley’s case, many believed the author of *Frankenstein* to be her husband, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Michael Eberle-Sinatra observes, “Most critics assumed that the anonymously authored *Frankenstein* was written by a male disciple of the dedicatee, William Godwin, and several supposed this disciple to be none other than P.B. Shelley himself” (Eberle-Sinatra 98). Such assumptions distanced the reader from the true author, allowing greater reflexive capabilities when reading the authors’ works. Anonymity and pseudonyms created mystery surrounding the life of the author. While readers, particularly critics, may have presumed the real identity of the authors, their incorrect presumptions mirror the misconceptions of the

⁵ Shelley’s 1818 edition was published anonymously, and Brontë’s 1847 edition was published under the pseudonym Ellis Bell.

male narrators. The Gothic genre engages uncertainty and thwarted expectations, which are then reflected in the authorial assumptions regarding the tales themselves. Gender bias during the nineteenth-century encouraged these misconceptions of authorship, and prejudices often continued after the true authorship was revealed. Decades after Mary Shelley faced gender-biased assumptions, Emily Brontë faced similar prejudice. Some presumed Emily Brontë's brother, Patrick Branwell Brontë, was a significant contributor, if not the actual author of *Wuthering Heights*. Edward Chitham notes, "the introduction of Branwell into the supposed conditions of writing stems from subjective Victorian views of Emily. Quite simply, it seemed hard to believe that it could have had a female author, and readers looked round for a male collaborator" (127). Chitham reveals how the gender biases of Victorian society created tension and confusion about the authorship of Brontë's novel. The severity of gender binaries in the nineteenth century made the authorship of *Wuthering Heights*, a tale society considered to feature a "masculine" voice, nearly unfathomable by a woman. The struggle of nineteenth-century readers to reconcile what they perceived as "masculine" tales with women's authorship reveals the societal judgments about gender roles facing Shelley and Brontë.

Anonymous publication frees Shelley and Brontë from their gender identity, and offers increased freedom to explore identity in their work. In Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the authors present anxieties regarding naming, which are significant given their decision to withhold their own names when publishing. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their canonical feminist text *Madwoman in the Attic*, provide a personal history of Shelley's anxieties regarding naming and identity:

the problem of names and their connection with social legitimacy had been forced into her [Mary Shelley's] consciousness all her life. As the sister of illegitimate and therefore nameless Fanny Imlay, for instance, she knew what bastardy meant, and she knew it too as the mother of a premature and illegitimate baby girl who died at the age of two weeks without ever having been given a name. Of course, when Fanny dramatically excised her name from her suicide note Mary learned more about the significance even of insignificant names. And as the stepsister of Mary Jane Clairmont, who defined herself as the "creature" of Lord Byron and changed her name for a while with astonishing frequency, Mary knew about the importance of names too. Perhaps most of all, though, Mary's sense of the fearful significance of legitimate and illegitimate names must have

been formed by her awareness that her own name, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, was absolutely identical with the name of the mother who had died in giving birth to *her*.

(241-2)

Publishing anonymously allowed Shelley control over her identity. Withholding her name kept her free from associations with her novel, whether negative or positive. Even Shelley's own name held tragic connotations, and her decision to publish anonymously reflects not only her professional interests, but also her personal experience. Within *Frankenstein*, the creature is nameless, exhibiting Shelley's anxieties regarding names. The creature's namelessness may represent his uncertainty of his identity, an uncertainty Brontë expresses through Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. When Lockwood stays at the Heights for the night, he discovers the three names "Catherine Linton," "Catherine Earnshaw," and "Catherine Heathcliff" etched into the windowsill (Brontë 50). Gilbert and Gubar note, "Catherine obsessively inscribes on her windowsill the crucial writing Lockwood finds, writing which announces from the first Emily Brontë's central concern with identity [...] What Catherine, or any girl, must learn is that she does not know her own name, and therefore cannot know either who she is or whom she is destined to be" (276). From Gilbert and Gubar's feminist perspective, a woman's name confronts her with the uncertainties of her identity. By not including their names with their published novels, Shelley and Brontë protect their personal search for identity, evade the public constrictions placed on their work in synonymy with their gender, and elevate the reflexive potential of their work.

Although *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* faced some criticisms upon initial publication, the revelation of their true authors exposed Shelley and Brontë, and particularly their narratives, to new and harsher criticisms. Neither Shelley nor Brontë chose to reveal themselves as authors; Shelley's father, William Godwin, and Brontë's sister, Charlotte Brontë, revealed the true authorship of the novels. Godwin republished Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1823, declaring Mary Shelley the author.⁶ Charlotte Brontë wrote a preface to *Wuthering Heights* for the 1850 edition revealing Emily Brontë, who died in 1848, as the author.⁷ Stephen Behrendt comments on

⁶ Eberle-Sinatra, Michael. "Gender, Authorship and Male Domination: Mary Shelley's Limited Freedom in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man*." *Mary Shelley's Fictions*. Macmillan Press, 2000. p. 99.

⁷ Thompson, Nicola Diane. *Reviewing Sex: Gender and the Reception of Victorian Novels*. New York University Press, 1996. p. 51.

the stigma placed on women writers of the nineteenth century: “Entering explicitly into competition with the dominant caste of male authors, the woman writer seemed to violate not just social decorum but also the nature and constitution of her own sex” (73). While he is referencing the challenges faced by Shelley, his statement also extends to Emily Brontë. Thompson observes, “Victorians struggled with varying degrees of bafflement to see *Wuthering Heights* as the production of a woman” (59). In their bafflement, Victorians tried to reframe Brontë as a non-feminine woman: “One of the ways in which critics attempted to reconcile the ‘unfeminine’ qualities of *Wuthering Heights* with the sex of its author was by attributing androgynous or male qualities to Emily Brontë” (Thompson 59-60). Society begrudged Brontë the creative powers of alternative voice and, confined within their ideals of gender representation, began to question her “femininity.” Michael Eberle-Sinatra notes, “both Shelley’s first and third novel evidence a struggle, in paratext and text, over whether she is to be present as a (pseudo-) male author, a female author, a usurped author or an author of indeterminate gender” (95). He captures the ongoing consideration of an author’s gender and its connection to his or her, particularly her, literary works. By publishing without revealing their true identities, Shelley and Brontë provided themselves some personal freedom from critics attributing the novels to the authors’ lives and gender roles.

While anonymous publication protected their personal lives, by withholding their identities Shelley and Brontë more importantly protected their novels from gender criticism. Alexis Easley explores the reasons behind anonymous publication for women: “Famous women writers were often held accountable to confining definitions of ‘female authorship’, which constrained their choice of subject matter and exposed their personal lives to public scrutiny” (1). She notes, “Anonymous publication provided women with effective cover for exploring a variety of conventionally ‘masculine’ social issues. It also allowed them to evade essentialized notions of ‘feminine’ voice and identity” (1). Anonymity provided freedom from a society seeking to allocate its men and women within strict confines of “masculine” and “feminine.” If they published openly as women, Shelley and Brontë faced a readership intent on finding the feminine aspects of their writing, or risk being attacked for their lack of femininity; “anonymity allowed women to appear and disappear in their work” (Easley 7). This risk of attack may have been less important to Shelley and Brontë than protecting the integrity of their writing, as Easley suggests,

“view[ing] pseudonymous publication as a strategy designed to complicate the authorial position, rather than a defensive means of obscuring an essential ‘self’ or ‘voice’” (7). The protection of the author is less important to these texts than the benefit of anonymous or pseudonymous publication to the narrative genre. The freedom of women’s authorship under anonymous publication is significant, but more significant is the enhancement of the Gothic nature of such texts for the reader.

Shelley and Brontë experienced increased freedom as women through anonymous publication, evident in the altered perceptions of their works after their identities were revealed. Responses to *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* after these revelations expressed backlash regarding the text itself. Such criticism did malign Shelley and Brontë, but more specifically it maligned their novels. The narratives themselves were subject to untoward criticism having been revealed as women’s writing. Once their authors were revealed as women, critics struggled to realign the texts of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* with women’s authorship. In *Writing Men*, Berthold Schoene-Harwood observes:

What has horrified readers of *Frankenstein* so enduringly is perhaps first and foremost Shelley’s acute insight into the male psyche as formed by patriarchal conditioning. Her representation of Victor and Walton’s death-bound masculinities is far from fantastic; on the contrary it gives a realistic portrayal of actual sentiments, values and pursuits of traditional masculinity. (8)

Walton conveys his “death-bound” masculinity as early as the first letter to his sister. He writes, “I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death” (52). Walton is willing to face death in his quest to establish his masculinity. Shelley writes with an understanding of the patriarchal pressures imposed on men. She powerfully represents such “death-bound” masculinity in Victor’s impassioned speech to the crew upon hearing they might turn back for England: “Oh! Be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes, and firm as a rock” (214). For readers of *Frankenstein*, a woman author of such a text proved not only baffling, but threatening. Shelley’s understanding of the male gender suggested that the gender binaries society instilled were permeable, that “masculinity” was accessible to women. Shelley then exerts judgment regarding the dangers of this masculinity, by having Walton ultimately resist such “death-bound”

masculinity. Nicola Diane Thompson writes how the revelation of authorship altered the reception of Brontë's novel:

we see that when *Wuthering Heights* was thought to be written by a man, the book was shocking, but at the same time it was appreciated for its 'masculine' qualities: power, originality, and all the ways it differentiated itself from 'effeminate' works. With the provision of the new biographical context in Charlotte Brontë's 'Preface', preconceptions about women writers formed the particular horizon within which *Wuthering Heights* was subsequently viewed, and the critics' attempts to classify the work became tortured as they struggled to fit Brontë's powerful, vigorous, and forceful—that is, 'masculine'—writing into the same category with the refined, moral, and tender-hearted narratives women were supposed to write. (109)

The concern of critics for authorial position rendered confusion about how Emily Brontë could have authored such a novel. Like Shelley, Brontë threatened societal order by writing outside the traditional confines of gender binaries.

Nineteenth-century reviews of *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* reveal how the gender of the author influenced criticism and dictated literary interpretation according to gender binaries. The public response to these works altered once their authorship was revealed. Texts could be considered masculine or feminine, and masculine texts by female authors were viewed as transgressive, violating societal order. Critics expected men to author "masculine" texts, and women to author "feminine" texts. *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* greatly challenged this notion. Thompson states, "Whether critics thought the author male or female, Victorian gender schema functioned as a primary structuring framework for literary criticism on *Wuthering Heights* throughout the nineteenth century" (64). From a literary perspective, the novel itself posed enough of an interpretive challenge for critics prior to the difficulty in reconciling the author as a woman. Sir Walter Scott praised *Frankenstein*, attributing its authorship to Shelley's husband, Percy. Under its anonymous publication, *Frankenstein* received much positive attention: "The majority of the other reviews were also favourable, all echoing Scott's observations on the author's uncommon powers of mind and imagination" (Clery 132). After Shelley's father revealed her authorship of *Frankenstein*, she and her work were subject to hateful misogyny that had hitherto been avoided. In editor Harold Bloom's *Mary Shelley*, he quotes an unnamed reviewer from the *British Critic* who degraded Shelley's *Frankenstein* for its

authorship: “The writer of it is, we understand, a female; this is an aggravation of that which is the prevailing fault of the novel; but if our authoress can forget the gentleness of her sex, it is no reason why we should; and we shall therefore dismiss the novel without further comment” (75). Shelley and her novel endured prejudices due to her gender.

Like Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* encountered a notably different reception once the readership knew the author was a woman. Under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, “Brontë’s novel received a significant amount of critical attention, sold out of the first edition, and was not condemned totally or unanimously. In fact, what is perhaps most striking in the early reviews is the reviewers’ ambivalence about the quality and effect of *Wuthering Heights*” (Thompson 46). Thompson also notes, “When *Wuthering Heights* first appeared, critics unanimously assumed the author was male. They admired *Wuthering Heights* for its so-called masculinity, for the ways in which it diverged from conventional popular (and, by implication, feminine) novels, but they also felt that the novel went too far in this direction, to the point of being offensively unfit for social consumption” (Thompson 47-8). Without the knowledge that the author was a woman, critics found the novel overwhelmingly masculine, and simultaneously non-feminine. Some critics were affronted by the powerful extent to which the novel was “masculine”: “Despite their admiration for the power of *Wuthering Heights*, reviewers abhorred its ‘coarseness’ of plot, character, and language—Ellis Bell had gone so far in an otherwise admirable direction that he had over-stepped acceptable boundaries of taste” (Thompson 49). The criticism faced by *Wuthering Heights* largely pertained to a “coarseness” of masculinity already considered as too extensive by a male author. Heathcliff most clearly exemplifies such coarseness, muttering oaths such as “You’ll go with him to hell!” (48). While some critics disliked the work entirely, under the belief that the author was male many critics merely noted an excessive coarseness in otherwise favourable reviews. Interpretations altered after Charlotte Brontë revealed Emily Brontë was the author: “Reviewers began discussing Brontë as a female novelist, a sub-group regulated by other rules than those for male novelists” (Thompson 57). Once Brontë’s authorship was revealed, readers began searching for “feminine” elements in her novel, despite their earlier preoccupation with the text’s masculinity: “Everything about *Wuthering Heights*—subject-matter, characterization, and language—was perceived as masculine, although, as noted above, critics did discover some so-called ‘feminine’ traits after they learned the author was female” (Thompson 61). For both Shelley and Brontë, their

revelation as women authors meant criticism as to their own femininity. The critical concern for the gender of the author, and more importantly the preconception to read their work as therefore “masculine” or “feminine” explains why it was preferential for Shelley and Brontë to publish anonymously.

The unreliable male narrators, Walton in *Frankenstein* and Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*, in conjunction with the uncertainty of the authors’ gender identity, heighten the unstable nature of these Gothic novels and create a stronger connection to the narratives for both men and women readers. By publishing anonymously, both authors allowed the male narrators to take precedence in the telling of their stories. Walton and Lockwood are unreliable narrators, allowing Shelley and Brontë to question what is true and indicate the fallibility of perspective, reflecting the Gothic nature of these tales as an experience for the reader. Neither Walton nor Lockwood embody the emerging ideal of “masculinity,” furthering their outsider status and making them more accessible characters for a readership of both men and women. As outsiders to their tales, the narrators also reflect Shelley and Brontë’s own struggle as women writers. When paired with anonymous publication, male narrators Walton and Lockwood allow the readership to appreciate the central Gothic tales without gender preoccupations regarding the narrative structure.

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