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"Why am I so changed?": Vampiric Selves and Gothic Doubleness in Wuthering Heights

Cover Page Footnote

Lakshmi Krishnan was born in Bombay and grew up in the UK and United States. She is currently a doctoral student at New College, Oxford, where she focuses on the novels and critical essays of A.C. Swinburne. Her research interests include Gothic fiction, the Victorian novel, and Aestheticism.

“Why am I so changed?”: Vampiric Selves and Gothic Doubleness in *Wuthering Heights*

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Gothic: Literature of Opposition

“I wrote it in spite of rules, critics, and philosophers ... it seems to me the better for that.”
- Horace Walpole, of *The Castle of Otranto*¹

From its inception, Gothic fiction has been a literature of resistance, defying tradition and transgressing boundaries. At a time when the Enlightenment lauded reason and clarity, the Gothic persistently emphasized the presence of darkness and despair, of ambiguity and uncertainty amidst seemingly definite surroundings. With early authors such as Walpole, Radcliffe, and Matthew “Monk” Lewis, the bizarre and uncanny emerged as elements of the everyday. Lewis’ *The Monk* portrayed sexual perversion, spiritual confusion and violence with such explicit language that it was condemned as pornographic, libidinous and impious.² The novel, chronicling the corruption of the hitherto pure monk Ambrosio, cast doubt upon the purity of people and places once deemed inviolable. If a monk, cloistered in a monastery, could descend to such depths of brutality, what limits could separate good from evil, what walls could confine corruption?

The Gothic insisted that such boundaries are artificial, that the brutal lies beneath the veneer of the civil. Equally significant, however, is the potential for extraordinary circumstances – while challenging everything that established science, reason and religion have taught us to believe – to render us a new faith, a belief in what was once considered impossible:

The uncertainty evoked by the Gothic oscillation between reality and the imaginary can either result in faith, when new laws of nature are entertained to account for the strange phenomenon.... Or it can result in incredulity, leaving the laws of reality intact and seeking an explanation of the extraordinary phenomena within the confines of this reality. (Bronfen 40)

¹ *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) is considered the first “Gothic Novel.”

² The critical outcry raised against *The Monk* (1796) was immense; not surprisingly, the book was a bestseller. Its importance was, however, unacknowledged in literary discourse until relatively late. Now, it is considered one of the darkest and most important works of the early British Gothic.

The co-existence of opposites characterizes the Gothic; its narratives offer us a veritable spectrum of alternatives: reality and the imaginary, ghostly and corporeal, self and other. These doublings define Gothic literature, and perhaps represent its only static characteristic; as a genre, it shifts, taking its structure from the movements or forces against which it reacts. We note this transition as the Gothic continued (and indeed, proliferated), both in collaboration with and in spite of Romanticism.

If, as Walpole suggests, the Gothic is “an oppositional” fiction, finding its power in rebellion, we must examine *how* it flouts and defies conventions. Peter Garrett asserts that it depicts “isolated individuals and extreme experiences ... absorbed in the self-enclosure of madness, the excess of passion, or the transgression of crime” (3-4). These conditions are closely connected, as they exemplify emotions and behaviors not traditionally sanctioned. The triangulation represents extreme margins of human experience, when the self violently clashes with its society, obsesses over its counterpart/lover, or, in the model of insanity, becomes lost in its own labyrinthine recesses. These situations are versions (or alternatives) of undercurrents that course through everyday life. The Gothic heightens affection to passion, introspection to monomaniacal obsession, and discontent to criminal action. We see this preoccupation with marginal experiences continue beyond the early, eighteenth-century Gothic into later texts. Some, like Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, are only incidentally Gothic; others, such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, are highly conscious horror novels.

The states of madness, crime and passion connect, indirectly or directly, not only to each other, but to death itself. Brontë’s interest in these extreme conditions is very evident in *Wuthering Heights*. Like Lewis’ *The Monk* almost a century before, critics were outraged at its intense depictions: “In *Wuthering Heights*, the reader is shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity, and the most diabolical hate and vengeance,” and “it is wild, confused; disjointed, and improbable.”³ Brontë’s images of violent passion, suicide, self-induced sickness and mental disturbance and, in particular, the perverse – both fiendish and intensely sympathetic – character of Heathcliff, identify the text as breaking conventions and transgressing boundaries, a narrative with profoundly Gothic sensibilities.

Recurring Gothic motifs can be read as an extrapolation of self-fragmentation (a condition that was considered unnatural), while its “realm of ghosts and spirits, of revenants and vampires” (Bronfen 40) becomes, ultimately, an area of psychological crisis, re-evaluation, and either recovery or collapse. The Gothic fosters severe circumstances through supernatural means, thus artificially creating extreme situations similar to those experienced in mental illness, a malady that appears with astonishing frequency in *Wuthering Heights*. In doing so, it examines many preoccupations of nineteenth-century literature (the self and its society, mystical and transcendent concerns) under an even more focused, exacting lens and invites us to approach the limits of mental and spiritual strain. It is the introverted cousin of realism, and its brooding quality of dark self-reflection lends it the intensity that made it such a compelling genre for writers.

³ See Douglas Jerrold’s *Weekly Newspaper* (January 1848) and *Examiner* (January 1848).

The Gothic experience is that of marginalized life, of the self transgressing not only tradition, but also its own borders. As a highly metaphorical medium, Gothic literature explores these nuances, not merely in the abstract, but through monsters. These strangely terrifying figures, grossly physical creatures with animal affinities or insubstantial phantoms that fade into mist and moonlight, have been subjected to intensive analysis. As Garrett observes, “Sometimes Gothic fiction is credited with deliberate subversion; sometimes it is read symptomatically for the ways its terrors betray cultural anxieties about sexuality and gender, the menace of alien races or the criminal classes – about whatever threatens the dominant social order or challenges its ideologies” (1-2). Gothic fiends occupy as ambiguous a position as the narratives themselves. Thus, to decipher Gothic fiction, we must turn to its monsters, figures that embody its doubleness. A common interpretation classifies them as literal and metaphorical Others. Dracula has been construed as a corrupter from the East, both a sexual and ethnic Other. Heathcliff, too, although human, is repeatedly described in *Wuthering Heights* as a fiendish creature, demonic because of his obscure origins and devilish in his inclinations. Less common, however, are readings that view Gothic monsters as reflections, either of other characters, or of the readers themselves. This analysis is compelling, namely because of the prominence of doubling in Gothic fictions; as a literature that defines itself in *opposition*, it is appropriate for its creatures to be figures of contrast.

In the tradition of Gothic fiends, the vampire is one of the oldest; its legends flourished in Eastern Europe long before Gothic writers appropriated the vampire for their tales. Why, however, has there been such sustained interest in the vampire? As a species, literary vampires possess almost no unifying characteristics: Le Fanu’s affectionate Carmilla awakens her victim to the possibility of homosexual love, Polidori’s Lord Ruthven binds his to a pledge of honor; Stoker’s Dracula, the most ancient of these, offers neither love nor friendship, but an annihilation of all ties and the establishment of a new world order. Vampires share, however, a dualistic quality: the ability to be both the self and its counterpart, the Other. Their monstrosity is inflected by the fact that they were *once* human; they are neither inextricably connected to nor fully separate from us. They are perhaps the most Gothic of all Gothic monsters; like the genre, framed with ambiguities and alternatives, the vampire itself is a contradictory, double-figure.

The idea of psychological transferal, in which the vampire’s attack destabilizes not only the individual’s physical health, but his or her mental integrity as well, is arguably the least studied aspect of literary vampires. Their capacity to absorb and transfer intangible qualities along with fluids, characteristics that undermine the permanence of the self, can be seen in Gothic literature predating *Dracula*, especially *Wuthering Heights*. In Brontë’s novel, psychological vampirism is an intensely exploited trope, a metaphor that can scrutinize the borders between selfhood and otherness. The penetration of the self by external agents, an image that was later construed in various ways – foreign invasion, disease transmission, and spreading vice – originates, for Brontë, on an individual level, as the encounter of selves. The ability of one self (the vampire) to influence another (its supposed victim), either with negative or liberating outcomes, becomes a very attractive literary concept.

With its incursion, the vampire subverts all notions that the self and its boundaries are intact. Initially, literary vampires appear to be wholly alien beings. Many critics have referred to their variegated qualities of otherness, describing the vampire as an “alien kind” or “invader” (see, for example, Auerbach 84 and Garrett 123). The vampire clearly signifies a threat, not only to its victims, but also to the established order that it infiltrates. To dismiss the vampire as simply Other, however, is reductive and denies the essential qualities of Gothic literature: the point/counterpoint, image/reflection tropes that construct alternative structures in opposition to conventional ones. The vampire’s quasi-corporeal presence gives it the freedom that humans lack: a liberty of movement that allows it to bend material boundaries and enter where natural laws affirm it should not. For Brontë, its part-physical, part-phantom nature provides an even more valuable freedom: the opportunity to read the individual self through a lens that, while bizarrely warped, nevertheless reflects it as it functions at the extremes of experience. The vampire’s nature as once-mortal is as important as its monstrous propensities, because it is kin to that which it attacks. The individuals who come under the vampire’s spell are its living counterparts, the images of what it once was. Similarly, vampires – in limbo between life and death – emblemize the fragmented selves of their victims. If we conceive of death signifying ultimate understanding, and life as an enigmatic riddle, then vampires stand at the threshold between incomprehension and ultimate knowledge. They serve as a weighty metaphor for the individual self, poised on the brink – either of discovery or dissolution – at a time when internal forces threatened it as much as external ones. The vampire is a poignant symbol for an era obsessed with defining the self, with demarcating boundaries between the “Ich” and “Nicht ich,”⁴ while simultaneously realizing that these margins were more indistinct than previously hoped.

Vampirism and its accompanying penetration can be interpreted in a variety of ways: as disease-transmission, infection, psychological suggestion, or even barrier-shattering liberation. Indeed, *Wuthering Heights* and *Dracula* stand as opposites on this continuum. For Stoker, retaining integrity of self, whether mental or physical, is paramount; for Brontë, the potential merging of selves that transpires through metaphorical vampirism is both necessary and liberating. These contradictory views resonate with the overarching preoccupations and inherent doubleness of the Gothic.

Wuthering Heights: Vampires, Death, and the Unholy Communion of Selves

“The action is laid in Hell – only it seems places and people have English names there.”

- Dante Gabriel Rossetti, of *Wuthering Heights*

“I had read of such hideous incarnate demons.”

- Nelly Dean (*Wuthering Heights* 250)

⁴ German: “I” and “Not I.” One is defined by what is *not* (the Other), rather than what one is (the Self).

The first mention of vampirism in *Wuthering Heights* ironically appears almost at the conclusion of the novel, when Heathcliff experiences the “strange change” (245) that signals his death. These final chapters are in marked contrast to the earlier text, as Heathcliff becomes increasingly detached from his mission of vengeance, the destruction of all Linton and Earnshaw descendants. For the greater portion of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff’s preoccupation with amassing wealth and holdings has dictated his trajectory after Cathy’s death. Now, however, it seems that worldly affairs no longer interest him; his emotions (whether delight or sorrow) come solely from an external, otherworldly source. This becomes clear as Nelly questions him:

“Have you heard any good news, Mr. Heathcliff? You look uncommonly animated.”

“Where should good news come from, to me?” he said. “I’m animated with hunger; and, seemingly, I must not eat.” (248)

Heathcliff, normally a morose, gloomy man, is virtually “thrilling” (248) with an emotion (one that mimics, but cannot be characterized as, pure joy) that masters his physical frame, engendering a transformation that has no apparent, material root. Nelly, in her prosaic manner, asks Heathcliff whether he has “heard any good news.” As she attempts to rationalize his sudden metamorphosis, he firmly denies that anything worldly could effect such a change: “*where* should good news come from?” He then affirms that he is “animated with hunger,” but none that can be satiated by food: “I take so little interest in my daily life, that I hardly remember to eat, and drink” (245). Heathcliff, speaking in metaphors, hopelessly baffles Nelly, who cannot fathom this new shift in his persona.

Paradoxically, as Heathcliff becomes progressively unconcerned with basic physical necessities such as eating and sleeping, Nelly makes great efforts to bind him to them. She persistently pushes him to reconnect with his material surroundings and constantly interrogates him about his “strange change”: “Tell me why you are so queer Mr. Heathcliff?” (249). Eventually, it is Heathcliff’s dismissal of all sustenance that prompts her musing: “Is he a ghoul or a vampire?” In Nelly’s conception, only a fiendish, demonic creature could survive, against all rational odds, on nothing but “exquisite extremes” (251) of pleasure and pain. Upon further consideration, she remembers tending him as an infant, and rejects her demonic hypothesis as impossible. But if Heathcliff is not a demon, he is at least – for Nelly – an irrevocable sinner. She expresses concern for Heathcliff’s mortal soul, reminding him that from a young age, he has lived “a selfish, unchristian life” (252). His self-imposed starvation, she avows, will only have one tangible result: death. This effective suicide will render him unworthy of burial in the sacred ground of the Kirk, a wish that he has expressed since Cathy’s interment within its precincts. Heathcliff, according to Nelly, is at risk of becoming one of the damned, a state that has eerie resonance with vampirism. He will be outcast, banned from burial alongside his earthly love, but – unlettered in orthodox religion – equally “unfit for heaven” (253). Like the Undead, condemned to exist in limbo between mortality and immortality, Nelly depicts Heathcliff’s fate as horrifyingly ambiguous.

The prospect of haunting earth after death does not, however, terrify Heathcliff. Like Catherine Earnshaw who, years before, dreamt of being a pariah in heaven, whose “angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy,” (62) he suggests that the conventional hereafter would be alien to him. He embraces the possibility of such a purgatory, as he repeatedly threatens to “walk” after death if his earthly wishes remain unfulfilled. He tells Nelly that if she does not take care to bury him alongside Catherine, she “shall prove, practically, that the dead are not annihilated!” (253). By claiming to defy mortality and haunt Nelly should she countermand his desires, Heathcliff affirms his ardent belief in the permeability of the boundaries between life and death. More importantly, he suggests that desires that were thwarted in life can and will be reached in a medium beyond the grave. This conviction is the root of his monomaniacal obsession with Cathy’s ghost; reunion with Cathy signifies, to Heathcliff, the realization of *his* heaven. “That of others,” he asserts, “is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me!” (253). He thereby rejects Nelly’s condemnation of his profane, irreligious condition. The punishment offered by dogma –an outcast, purgatorial state – does not menace him; indeed, he welcomes it.

This inversion has important consequences for our interpretation of vampirism in *Wuthering Heights*. Vampires, traditionally damned to eternal non-life/un-death, fated to destroy the innocent in order to survive, are typically construed as secret, dangerous, and corrupting figures. To a certain degree, Brontë’s depiction of Heathcliff borrows from this prototype: his early life and youth are shrouded in mystery; he disappears during his early adulthood, returning mysteriously edified and refined. He then proceeds to destroy the Linton and Earnshaw houses, assembling whatever means necessary: stealth, corruption, money, fiendish cunning, and psychological manipulation. Heathcliff’s villainous behavior peaks during middle age, having escalated throughout his adult years. But during the final weeks of his life, his intent to destroy transforms into a desire for merging and reunion, for the bending of boundaries between life and death. Both of these tendencies, while contradictory, are vampiric traits. Brontë’s presentation of metaphorical vampirism privileges the doubling inherent in the Gothic convention. Instead of dismissing Heathcliff as a figure of unadulterated evil, a psychological vampire who consumes others in his individual quest, *Wuthering Heights* examines his fragmented self in its ceaseless desire to attain its counterpart.

Within Cathy and Heathcliff’s communion, the most integral relationship of the text, there is much more at stake than love. Their encounter becomes a metaphor for one self that is divided and then broken into separate parts. As Catherine herself affirms, “I *am* Heathcliff – he’s always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself – but as my own being” (64). Thus, Brontë is meditating on notions of selfhood and the irreparable trauma experienced by a self that cannot re-form. Just as Heathcliff believes in a porous barrier between life and death, Cathy avers that the boundaries between them are artificial, that their souls are formed of the same intangible material. Their separation, compelled because of their gendered split, dictates their courses as different individuals, subject to differing pressures. It is clear, however, that

neither Heathcliff nor Catherine recovers from this amputation; both ultimately strive to cross whatever margins split them, even one as seemingly impenetrable as that between life and death. As one scholar has observed, “Catherine and Heathcliff ... like all doubles once sundered, are more threatening in their thrust toward reunification than in all the edginess of their unnatural divorce” (Sedgwick 118). Their impulse “toward reunification” “threatens” to transgress pre-existing borders, constructs that Brontë clearly views skeptically. Since Heathcliff and Catherine’s union is viewed as traditionally “unnatural,” their prevailing, all-surmounting desire to reconnect only makes sense in the wild, marginalized world of *Wuthering Heights*. In parallel with other Gothic fiction, *Wuthering Heights* posits a worldview opposing that espoused by the “rules” that Walpole so flagrantly disregards. The world stands on its head, as souls that by *natural* law should be together are driven apart, dismissed as abnormal and mad.

Unlike conventional religion, which predicts a passionless, dreamless peace in the afterlife, Heathcliff’s ideal heaven represents the attainment of mortal desires. Like Cathy’s dream counterpart, flung back to *Wuthering Heights* sobbing with joy, Heathcliff finds solace in the thought of walking his earthly haunts. Gilbert and Gubar propounded the seminal notion of inversion that threads throughout *Wuthering Heights*, where – in a Blakean shift – conventional Hell (as epitomized by *Wuthering Heights*) is Heathcliff and Catherine’s Heaven, while the heavenly, elegant grace of Thrushcross Grange (as well as the Biblical Heaven preached by Joseph and the demented Branderham) embodies their Hell. Brontë’s text is clearly subversive, capsizing traditional views, not only of religion and society, but of existing literary tropes, particularly that of the vampire. If *Wuthering Heights* is Cathy and Heathcliff’s idyllic Hell, the site of their unholy communion, then the vampire, a damned creature of Hell, becomes the ideal inhabitant of their space.

Unlike *Dracula*, there is no single, colossal vampire in *Wuthering Heights*, and the intricacy of Brontë’s art is evident in her multifaceted depictions of vampirism. Like the Gothic, existing as an undercurrent below the most civilized veneer, metaphorical vampirism emerges in many forms. As mentioned, Heathcliff’s behavior often mimics that of stereotypical, fiendish vampires; at other times, a more complicated, psychological transgression occurs. Still other characters engage in such mental suggestion and transfer, particularly Cathy, Heathcliff’s spiritual counterpart and ghostly predecessor.

Mental illness, in particular, becomes a deeply compelling condition in *Wuthering Heights*, a theme that Brontë exploits in order to subvert traditional norms about the individual will and its power. Madness, like vampirism, causes characters to doubt their own physical and mental integrity. Cathy, afflicted with brain fever, poignantly asks, “[W]hy am I so changed?” (97). She is confounded by her transformation, which has altered her self beyond its own recognition. Even more literally, she cannot recognize her reflection in a mirror. As Nelly states, “I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own” (96). At this, we should remember that vampires cannot see their own images in mirrors. Although this convention surfaced much later, with Stoker’s text, the mental and individual disjunction implied has valid significance for Brontë’s narrative. As Veronica Hollinger points out,

For this reason, the figure of the vampire always has the potential to jeopardize conventional distinctions.... We look into the mirror it provides and we see a version of ourselves. Or, more accurately, keeping in mind the orthodoxy that vampires cast no mirror reflections, we look into the mirror and see nothing *but* ourselves. (201)

Without exhibiting distinctly vampiric traits, Catherine – in her fragmentation – embodies both monster and victim. The vampire, who is fated never to see its reflection, serves as a poignant metaphor for her utter self-alienation. Her situation is truly terrifying because she realizes that the reflected “version” she sees is not an Other, a monster gazing in return, but rather Catherine Earnshaw Linton, *as she is*. No longer a child, “half savage, and hardy, and free” (97), she is a magistrate’s wife, removed from everything that she knows, including herself. This moment of comprehension is rapidly followed by delirium, as the full significance of her permanent separation from Heathcliff, as well as her own irreversible transformation, impacts Cathy. As alienation leads to brain fever, Catherine’s mental integrity collapses. Brontë implies that, lacking wholeness of self, Cathy disintegrates internally. Similarly, vampire victims doubt their sanity, unsure of whether they are attacked by a physical being or simply a figment of their disordered imaginations. The distinction between vampires and hallucinations is ambiguous, as they often penetrate more than skin and blood. Indeed, like delusions, they impact the mental states of those whom they attack. Cathy, reliant on her psychological and spiritual connectivity to Heathcliff, sickens in the artificial separation created by social norms: marriage, class, and, most significantly, self-imposed division. Heathcliff identifies this when he tells her that she is her own “murderer,” and parted them “of her own will” (125). In a highly reflexive gesture, Brontë suggests that Cathy is herself both vampire and victim. She is the aggressor whose actions prey upon her own mind and self; simultaneously, she suffers from the consequent fragmentation. Catherine finds herself in her own purgatory, trapped between the Heaven of Thrushcross Grange and the Hell of the Heights, where she ultimately longs to be.

In *Wuthering Heights*, “mad” episodes and deathbed scenes figure as crucial times for colorful Gothic language and imagery. In particular, the contrast between rosiness and pallor, one signifying health, the other illness, becomes evident. Through Catherine’s convalescence, Nelly remarks on her “paleness of face,” a characteristic that endures even after her recovery, and which, Nelly believes, “stamped her as one doomed to decay” (121). During her last encounter with Heathcliff, she again appears pallid, practically cadaverous except for her glowing eyes: “her present countenance had a wild vindictiveness in its white cheek, and a bloodless lip and scintillating eye” (123). This paleness is remarkable for Catherine, who is characterized by her explosive personality, a hot temper that has constantly erupted since childhood, leaving her “flushed and gloomy” (88). Infuriated at this tranquility during one of her outbursts, she even accuses her husband, Edgar, of being cold-blooded: “your veins are full of ice water, but mine are boiling, and the sight of such chillness makes them dance” (91). Repeatedly associated with heat and rage, strength and spirited good health (as doctor Kenneth remarks, “a

stout, hearty lass like Catherine does not fall ill for a trifle” (101)), she transforms into a pale, corpse-like woman.

This “strange change” marks a larger shift: her link to the earth slowly disintegrates as she turns outwards, to life beyond death. Her appearance, previously distinguished by its glowing vitality, now possesses “*unearthly* beauty” (121; emphasis mine), a quality that horrifies Heathcliff when he visits Cathy. Like Nelly, he interprets her altered aspect as a sign that she is “doomed” to pass beyond any earthly constraints, even one as binding as their attachment. In her last days, Cathy assumes a distinctly vampiric appearance, a Gothic gesture that bends the separation between life and death. With her “bloodless” features and flowing, white robes that resemble grave coverings, she becomes an attenuated, phantom figure, more an inhabitant of the afterlife than the present. Equally apparent, however, is her desire for this change; she is “tired of being enclosed here,” (124). Cathy longs for an “escape” from the “shattered prison” (124) of her body, yearning after a transcendence *not* espoused by conventional spirituality. Heaven is not her aim. Her escape will, in fact, allow her to return to earth, experiencing it without the weakness of a mortal frame, as a phantom presence, a woman who “walks.” We find her craving the freedom possessed by vampires, with its associated interconnectivity between life and death. Once again, Brontë’s inversion of norms becomes apparent: the state of limbo occupied by vampires is not – as in Nelly’s traditional version – feared for its ambiguity. Rather, it develops into a space of great potential. Cathy, whose misery in “heaven” was palpable even in her dream, must obviously seek an alternative experience of the afterlife, one that a transitional state (such as Un-death) might provide.

While *Wuthering Heights* maintains a distinctly metaphysical scope, it should not be undervalued as an index of social, political and economic concerns. Although the vampire as metaphor for national parasite, foreign invader, and cultural threat has been heavily studied, its presence in *Wuthering Heights* often escapes our critical eye. From Heathcliff’s arrival, he is viewed with suspicion and fear, and this distrust is couched in markedly ethnic terms. Nelly, the text’s informal voice of Yorkshire common-sense and tradition, describes the Earnshaws’ reaction to him: “Mrs. Earnshaw ... did fly up – asking how he could fashion to bring that *gipsy brat* into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for?” (29; emphasis mine). Even Mr. Earnshaw, who until his death remains Heathcliff’s staunchest supporter, obstinately defending him above the interests of his own children, introduces him with a double-edged phrase, “take it as a gift of God, though it’s as dark almost as if it came from the devil” (28). Heathcliff’s darkness identifies him as an ethnic Other, a creature of indeterminate origin who arrives in the Earnshaw household. Further, it is associated with the demonic, as if he hails from hell itself. Later, Hindley calls him “imp of Satan,” (31) spawning a proliferation of fiendish imagery (vampires included) repeatedly associated with Heathcliff throughout the text. This suggestion, that ethnic otherness was kin to devilishness, was not radical; indeed, it was a prevalent stereotype during the nineteenth-century, as “the fear of ... ‘miscegenation,’ which allows racial others to pass for whites and continue secretly to infect their blood, threaten[ed] a secret moral pollution damaging to both the fecundity

and the vigor of the race” (Malchow 148). Ethnic minorities represented a possible source of racial corruption, either through their mere presence or – more effectively – through heterosexual connections; for this reason, Heathcliff’s tight bond to Catherine, the female descendant of an established lineage, poses an even more frightening threat. The children of such a union, illegitimate offspring of racial amalgamation, would embody the “pollution” that endangers the “vigor” of the Earnshaw line. Ethnic Others also epitomized moral peril, an infiltration of the demonic into conventional life. Brontë’s distinct reading of the demonic inverts such accusations, but these tropes nonetheless emerge in her text.

Heathcliff is most menacing, however, as an economic threat. According to Nelly, “[F]rom the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house” (30). The “bad feeling” is rooted in suspicion that he will seize that which rightfully belongs to the Earnshaws. Hindley views Heathcliff as “a usurper” both of his father’s affections and his primogeniture rights. Mrs. Earnshaw expresses anger that her husband could rescue a “gipsy brat” when they must provide for their own, legitimate children. Limited resources, then, foster their anxieties about appropriation; Heathcliff, the alien, poses a threat to their economic stability and very livelihood. Ultimately, Mrs. Earnshaw’s fear proves prophetic, as Heathcliff engages in metaphorical blood-sucking, draining his oppressive family dry and capturing from Hindley all that was once his. If Hindley embodies the entrenched, established Anglo-Saxon class, Heathcliff’s onset threatens not only Hindley’s individual security, but also the integrity of an entire society. Heathcliff’s formidable deployment of capitalism to engineer the downfall of both Earnshaw and Linton families is a testament to his economic skill, a power that emerges when Dracula infiltrates London by such pedestrian means as Bradshaw’s guide or legal and economic transactions. Heathcliff, in effect, breaches the boundaries of the existing class structure, penetrating its depths and supplanting its former inhabitants.

In another distinctly vampiric move, Heathcliff disappears for three years, reappearing genteel: “his manner dignified,” he “retained no marks of former degradation” (74). Nelly remarks that his voice has become “foreign in tone,” (72) and that his bearing suggests “the idea of his having been in the army” (74). The ambiguity of this interim period, during which Heathcliff seems to amass wealth and incubate his plans for revenge, parallels Dracula’s meticulous preparations to penetrate British society and create a new order under his own auspices. Nelly’s intense suspicion of Heathcliff’s activities during his absence reinforces the anxiety that his reappearance engenders. It is implied that he might have worked as a spy, selling national secrets to foreign countries for profit. Once again, the potential of vampires as corrupting agents, breaching national and cultural security, reappears in the text.

Eighteen years after Cathy dies, Heathcliff’s approaching death enacts a parallel transformation on him. The “strange change” that alters him, however, has effects radically divergent from Cathy’s. His metamorphosis is revitalizing; he trembles with delight and is animated by an “unearthly” force that keeps him from taking sustenance or sleep. In contrast to Catherine, who blanches and fades into ghostliness, Heathcliff seems intensely alive. Although pale, he trembles with a “strange joyful glitter in his eyes”

(247). Nelly characterizes his appearance as “unnatural,” his face “the same bloodless hue, and his teeth visible, now and then, in a kind of smile ... I’d rather have seen him gnash his teeth than smile so” (248-51). Later, she is horrified by his “deep black eyes! That smile, and ghastly paleness! It appeared to me, not Mr. Heathcliff, but a goblin” (249). Upon his death, she sees him “laid on his back. His eyes met mine so keen and fierce, I started; and then he seemed to smile” (249). Heathcliff’s “frightful, life-like gaze of exultation” (254) imprints itself on Nelly’s mind, and as she tries to shut his mouth and restore normality to his appearance, “his parted lips and sharp, white teeth sneer” at her efforts. Unlike Cathy, whose final days are marked by a faraway, otherworldly beauty, Heathcliff’s appearance evokes horror and fear. Cathy’s pallid loveliness is ghostly and haunting, while Heathcliff seems invigorated by a nervous, muscular energy. Nelly repeatedly describes her fright at his canine teeth, “glittering” eyes, and mysteriously sneering smile. His “sharp, white teeth,” in particular, evoke vampirism, as this lupine, hungry image persistently reappears in *Dracula*. In literal vampire texts, such “sharp teeth” signify biting and penetration, as well as the vampire’s appetite for blood. The fangs connect vampires to their animal counterparts, embodying an almost insatiable carnivorous hunger. Dracula himself calls attention to wolves, creatures that peripherally circle Stoker’s text: “Listen to them, the children of the night. What music they make!”⁵

Whereas Dracula’s carnivorous hunger affirms his dependence on blood, Heathcliff’s “sharp teeth” emblemize a different kind of hunger. His burning, surmounting desire is to attain his “single wish,” (246) reunification with Cathy; this longing, he claims, has “devoured [his] existence” (246). His physical (and mental) self has been consumed in a singular hunger. Since *Wuthering Heights* is a text occupied with psychological vampirism, Heathcliff’s appetite for reunion with his lost counterpart becomes – to pursue the vampire metaphor – an overwhelming thirst that he cannot slake until death. This is the root of the “life-like gaze of exultation” that so frightens Nelly; like a vampire, satiated and renewed after its hunger is fulfilled, Heathcliff appears “exultant” and revitalized. Material sustenance and the trappings of mortal existence no longer satisfy him, as a “strange change” transforms his passion for Catherine into an irresistible appetite that cannot be denied or fulfilled until he achieves the final transition of death. The literal, as well as figurative tropes of vampirism are sustained throughout *Wuthering Heights*, as rich metaphors for a multitude of transgressive ideas: illicit passion, psychological dependence, obsession, childhood trauma, and – perhaps most significantly – the possibility that death and life are only incompletely separated.

When Nelly enters Heathcliff’s room, she “could not think him dead.” His appearance, even in death, belies the fact that he has crossed the boundary of mortality. Even prosaic Nelly is spooked, scared to close his eyes in an ultimate gesture of death because his life-like expression defies such relegation. Cathy and Heathcliff’s remarkable dualism is very evident in the manner of their passing: just as Cathy becomes ghostly in life, Heathcliff is enlivened in death. This parallelism reinforces the idea that they are

⁵ Referring to this odd declaration, Auerbach claims that “he is exhibiting, for no particular reason, his animal affinities” (90).

fragmented selves, whose doubleness is echoed in their deaths. If we conceive of Cathy and Heathcliff as conjoined, individuals whose psychological connection persists even after their material ties have been severed, then the dualism inherent in vampirism epitomizes their relationship. On a literal level, they encompass the mortal/immortal, corporeal/phantom paradox of vampires. Both intensely healthy individuals in life, their deaths are ironically untimely and ambiguous. Cathy fades away into another world before her literal decease, while Heathcliff's death seems to actually animate him, eluding natural explanation. In addition, we are left with the nagging suspicion that they are not, contrary to Lockwood's ignorant declaration, slumbering peacefully in the "quiet earth" (256). The local folks, rambling the moors (significantly, the site of Catherine and Heathcliff's childhood play), "swear on their Bible that he [Heathcliff] *walks*" (255). A shepherd boy sees "Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t'Nab" (255). Although not literally Undead in a vampiric sense, Heathcliff and Cathy seemingly appropriate a new, indeterminate space for their afterlife.

Brontë's text is postmodern in its ambiguity, meditating upon the experiences that mediate crisis and, ultimately, revision. It turns to the vampire figure as a much denigrated, but constantly evasive and shifting medium for such concerns. Brontë fundamentally rewrites the literary vampire tradition by suggesting that the Other complements the self. Bram Stoker, writing fifty years later, created a text whose notorious vampire reinscribed the anxieties about self-integrity that had animated the early Gothic tradition. *Dracula* is obviously apprehensive of penetrated boundaries, vulnerability, and the self's susceptibility to outside influences. Like *Wuthering Heights*, it is intensively preoccupied with psychological transfer and assimilation. Its reaction to such merging, however, is fraught with tension and distrust, as its uneasy perspective gains credence from emerging medical and infectious theory. In the characters of Catherine and Heathcliff, Brontë explores a complex psychological and metaphysical characterization of vampirism, one that elevates it beyond a mere metaphor for those *separate* from us. Instead, *Wuthering Heights* compels us to believe that our very selfhood is often artificially fragmented, and that the rich vampire metaphor becomes a powerful, albeit ambiguous way to reunite these counterparts.

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