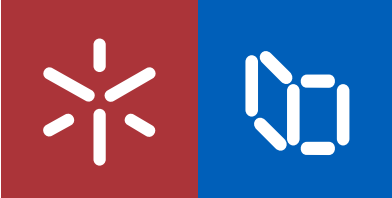


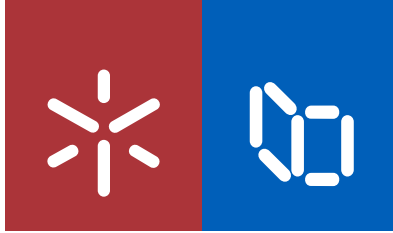


**Thresholds of the Sublime: Life, Death,
and Nature in the Works of Emily Brontë**

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Dissertação de Mestrado

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Trabalho efetuado sob a orientação da

**Professora Doutora Paula Alexandra Varanda Ribeiro
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This has been a long road, but it is finally done. To everyone who supported me along the way, this achievement is also yours.

Statement of Integrity

I hereby declare having conducted this academic work with integrity. I confirm that I have not used plagiarism or any form of undue use of information or falsification of results along the process leading to its elaboration.

I further declare that I have fully acknowledged the Code of Ethical Conduct of the University of Minho.

Thresholds of the Sublime: Life, Death, and Nature in the Works of Emily Brontë

Abstract

Although not always duly recognised, Emily Brontë's influence on the cultural, literary, and artistic world is undeniable. More than 175 years after the first publication of her works, hundreds, if not thousands, of critical studies have sought to unravel not only the intricate web of her narrative devices, structures, and characters but also the originality of her ideas and the complexities of her poetic creations.

This dissertation examines the works of Emily Brontë, including both her poetry and her sole novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), intertwining them with the operational concept of the Sublime, in its various dimensions. The Sublime is considered transversal to the thematic categories of her work's poetic and narrative structures, not only with regard to the natural landscape—particularly the moors and the wind—but also to her times, characters, events, and dialogues. Drawing upon the theories of the Sublime proposed by thinkers such as Longinus, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant, as well as the ensuing debates, including Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of Burke, this study explores how the Sublime serves as a lens through which Brontë's writing negotiates the boundaries (or absence thereof) of human experience.

Through a detailed formal and structural analysis, this dissertation focuses on a selection of five paradigmatic poems, branching out into other related lyric compositions, and also her novel *Wuthering Heights*, thus emphasising how Brontë's recurring exploration of thresholds—between the self, the Other, and nature—both represents and triggers the Sublime. The findings reveal that Brontë's depiction of the Sublime interconnects with and emerges from the persistent conflict between life and death, with natural, physical, metaphysical, and psychological thresholds acting as powerful catalysts for this dynamic. This study not only illuminates the richness and complexity of Brontë's works but also paves the way for further exploration of the intersections between the Sublime, liminality, and reader engagement in other works and literary traditions.

Keywords: Sublime, thresholds, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, poetry

Limiares do Sublime: Vida, Morte e Natureza na Obra de Emily Brontë

Resumo

Embora nem sempre lembrada, a influência de Emily Brontë nas diferentes facetas do mundo cultural, literário e artístico é inegável. Mais de 175 anos após a primeira publicação das suas obras, centenas, se não milhares, de publicações críticas tentaram já desvendar não só a sua teia intrincada de recursos narrativos, estruturas e personagens, mas também a originalidade das suas ideias e as complexidades das suas criações poéticas.

Nesta dissertação, analisamos a obra de Emily Brontë, tanto a sua poesia como o seu único romance, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), entrelaçando-a com o conceito operacional de Sublime, nas suas diversas dimensões. Considera-se o Sublime como transversal às categorias temáticas tanto das estruturas poéticas como narrativas da sua obra, e não só em relação à paisagem natural – particularmente as charnecas e o vento – mas também relativamente ao seu tempo, às suas personagens, eventos e diálogos. Com base nas teorias do Sublime postuladas por pensadores como Longinus, Edmund Burke e Immanuel Kant, e nos debates que se seguiram, incluindo a crítica de Mary Wollstonecraft a Burke, este estudo explora as diversas formas como o Sublime serve como uma lente através da qual a escrita de Brontë dialoga com os limites da experiência humana (ou a falta deles).

Através de uma análise formal e estrutural detalhada, centra-se numa seleção de cinco poemas paradigmáticos, ramificando-se, depois, para outras composições líricas com eles associadas; e também no seu romance, *Wuthering Heights*, focando-se na forma como a sua reiterada exploração de limiares – entre o eu, o Outro e a natureza – não só representa como desencadeia o Sublime. Este estudo revela que a representação do Sublime em Emily Brontë se interliga e emana do persistente conflito entre a vida e a morte, com os limiares naturais, físicos, metafísicos e psicológicos a atuarem como um poderoso catalisador desta dinâmica. O seu resultado ilumina a riqueza e a complexidade das obras de Brontë, abrindo também a porta a novas investigações sobre as intersecções entre o Sublime, a liminaridade e o envolvimento do leitor noutras obras e tradições literárias.

Palavras-chave: Sublime, limiares, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, poesia

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Introduction

*The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell.*

Emily Brontë, "Often rebuked, yet always back returning" (n/d)

Most people know something about the lives of the Brontës, even if they have never read a word of their writing. We seem to absorb the fact that they lived in Yorkshire, in the north of England, in a house facing a graveyard, and that they loved the surrounding moors. Perhaps we also learn that some of the sisters died in childhood, that some of them became governesses, and that all died young. This is remarkable, considering that only one member of the family, Charlotte Brontë, enjoyed relative fame during her lifetime. If we happen to come across an adaptation of their work in film or theatrical play or we are somehow exposed to one of their works, we tend to want to learn more. As far as we know, the Brontë sisters left no memoirs (apart from Charlotte Brontë's correspondence and remarks in her prefaces), so we have to rely on what we can piece together from scarce evidence, such as letters, brief memoirs by the Brontës' contemporaries, and biographies.

Elizabeth Gaskell wrote the first biographical study on the Brontës. Published in 1857, it is titled *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, and focuses on Charlotte, Emily's sister. While it is not a direct biography of Emily, it contains insights into Emily Brontë's life, as Gaskell provided accounts of the Brontë family, through letters, notes and third-party testimonies. A more focused study on Emily alone came later, with works such as Mary Robinson's *Emily Brontë* (1883), which is considered one of the earliest biographies dedicated entirely to Emily Brontë. The Victorian poet and critic Charles Swinburne did not write a full biography of Emily Brontë. However, he did write extensively about her work, particularly in his critical essays. One of his notable essays discussing Brontë's is "Emily Brontë", included in his 1886 collection *Miscellanies*, where he analyses her work with great reverence. Many others have attempted to write about Emily's life. Some of the most significant biographies that consolidated their stance within scholarship are Winifred Gérin's 1971 *Emily Brontë: A Biography*, considered a seminal work in Brontë scholarship, by addressing the context of her family dynamics and the cultural and literary environment of her time, and Stevie Davies' 1994 *Emily Brontë: Heretic*,

which delves into Emily's unconventionality, her complex character, and the unique qualities of her writing. Two of the most recent biographies, profusely referenced in this work, are *A Chainless Soul: A Life of Emily Brontë*, by Katherine Frank (1990), which provides a vivid portrayal of her personal life and creative vision, and *The Brontës* by Juliet Barker (1994, revised edition 2010), which depicts a comprehensive and meticulously researched account of Emily's life within the broader family narrative, based on the (few) primary sources.

The lack of direct personal information is particularly critical in the case of Emily Brontë because her work suggests profound personal insight and experience, yet her private life remains shrouded in mystery. Unlike other authors of her time, Emily left behind few letters, diaries, or explicit reflections on her writing, making it difficult to build bridges between her personal experiences with her creative output. This scarcity of personal documentation compels critics to rely heavily on her poetry, *Wuthering Heights*, and purely contextual factors to infer her worldview, often resulting in widely differing interpretations of her character and intentions. As these works collectively offer diverse perspectives on the author, perhaps the combination of these biographies may shed some light on the matter.

Lucasta Miller has written about “the Brontë myth” – the stories that have grown around the Brontë sisters since Charlotte’s death in 1855, and which stood in the place of known facts for decades – and she has interrogated the most popular and prevalent myths. Is it true that Emily loved wild landscape and wild weather, that Charlotte was pious and kind, that Anne was shy and retiring? That all were unwilling to become famous? Miller writes that while working on her thesis (on John Milton), she would go home from the library to devour books on the Brontës. Their fiction provided her with emotional nourishment, but “the legendary tale of their lonely moorland lives, which had gripped my imagination even before I was old enough to read *Jane Eyre* or *Wuthering Heights*, seemed to offer the allure of a more escapist fantasy” (Miller, 2001, p.ix). Later in her book, Miller recollects the reaction of an accountant who was taking “a polite interest” in her work: “The Brontë sisters – weren’t they fictional characters?” She adds: “The Brontë sisters only existed on the vaguest fringes of his consciousness, but the space they occupied there – between reality and fantasy – said a lot about their role in the cultural imagination” (p.140). In his *Myths of Power*, Terry Eagleton (2005, p. xix) links the Brontës to Shakespeare as “a literary industry as well as a collection of literary texts”. He asserts it is worth asking why this should be and how it came to be.

The Brontë mythos began to solidify with the early biographical efforts, particularly Elizabeth Gaskell's *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), which cast the sisters in a romantic light, emphasising their isolation, genius, and struggles. The Victorian fascination with the tragic, almost ethereal image of the Brontë siblings and the critical acclaim and scandal surrounding the first publication of *Wuthering Heights* contributed to their growing legend.

Additionally, the later 19th and early 20th centuries saw the emergence of literary tourism, with Haworth becoming a pilgrimage site for admirers, further entrenching the Brontës as cultural icons. There were guided tours, souvenir shops, and special meals bearing a Brontë-related name, such as the "Heathcliff Sandwich". This process mirrors the commodification of Shakespeare's legacy, where the works transcend their literary merit to become cultural institutions. Critical and popular reinterpretations across generations also played a role. From feminist readings of their works in the mid-20th century to modern adaptations in film¹, television², and literature³, the Brontës have remained relevant, with their texts being constantly reframed to resonate with new audiences.

This dissertation reflects on the works of Emily Brontë both as a poet and a novelist (and their combination). It will have as its central object a group of selected poems from the author's complete anthology and her single novel, first published in 1847, *Wuthering Heights*. As an analysis of her entire corpus would prove to be rather extensive, the criteria used for the selection above were based on those poems that would provide more context and connections with the working concept of the Sublime and the other literary work under analysis, *Wuthering Heights*. We strived to maintain a reasonable balance between her juvenilia, developed since

¹ Numerous films have been based on Emily Brontë's life and work, particularly her novel *Wuthering Heights*. The earliest adaptation was a silent film released in 1920, which marked the beginning of her influence on cinema. Since then, the story has been adapted multiple times, with notable versions including the 1939 classic starring Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon, and modern interpretations like Andrea Arnold's 2011 film, *Wuthering Heights*, which premiered at the 2011 Venice Film Festival and was awarded the golden Osella for Best Cinematography. Regarding biographical works, Emily Brontë's life has inspired films such as the recent biopic *Emily* (2022), which (very loosely) explores Emily's journey as a writer, blending fact with an imagined narrative about her personal life.

² According to Guimarães (2014, p.6), "Christopher Fry's television series *The Brontës of Haworth*, a sensitive and intelligent retelling of the family's story, caused a spectacular explosion of tourism, and in 1974 admissions to the Parsonage exceeded 200,000."

³ There have been numerous spin-offs, prequels, and retellings inspired by Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. These works often reimagine characters, fill in narrative gaps, or explore untold perspectives. For instance, Micheal Stewart's 2018 novel *Ill Will: The Untold Story of Heathcliff* imagines Heathcliff's life during his three-year absence from *Wuthering Heights* and *Nelly Dean: A Return to Wuthering Heights*, by Alison Case (2015), is a contemporary reinterpretation of the events depicted in the original novel. The collection of short stories *I Am Heathcliff: Stories Inspired by Wuthering Heights* (2018), edited by Kate Mosse, relies on the contribution of sixteen authors reinterpreting the classic in unique ways.

a very early age, together with the other Brontë siblings, Charlotte, Branwell, and Anne, with the creation of Glasstown, Angria and Gondal, and other poems of orthonimic nature, where Emily, now detached from the sibling-shared fantasy world, speaks as herself, as woman, as, in her own words, a "chainless soul".

We seek to answer the question(s): How does the concept and experience of the Sublime take form in Emily Brontë's works, and what role do thresholds (both literal and metaphorical) play in creating a unique Sublime experience within the text and for the reader?

The Sublime, in all its conceptual complexity and centrality to Romantic and early Victorian thought, is an aesthetic category generally associated with a sense of awe mixed with fear, that is, an experience that often brings one to the limits of rational comprehension and control. This notion of the Sublime was particularly influential in art, literature, and philosophy in the 19th century, as a means of grappling with forces beyond human understanding – such as nature, the cosmos, primal instincts, and the unconscious mind.

Thinkers as different as Longinus, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant were instrumental in shaping the concept of the Sublime. Longinus associated the Sublime with a specific quality in literature that evokes a sense of grandeur and reverence, thus elevating the reader's soul and inspiring deep emotion; Burke intertwined his concept of the Sublime with feelings of terror, vastness, and obscurity, where nature's overwhelming power evokes awe; and Kant synthesised the Sublime as an experience of reasoning with something beyond our sensory limits, where the mind encounters its own limitations but, in doing so, achieves a sense of transcendence. To Kant, the Sublime is the power of human reason confronting and reconciling with the infinite.

Together, these theories offer a comprehensive lens through which to analyse Brontë's unique treatment of the Sublime. Each theory sheds light on different dimensions of the author's work, from the emotive power of her language to the overwhelming natural and psychological forces her characters face. This multi-theoretical framework will reveal the complexity of Brontë's Sublime, thus depicting how she blends sensory, emotional, and philosophical elements to create an exploration of human experience and transcendence.

The Sublime became a central theme in 19th-century literature when poets and novelists sought to capture moments of heightened emotional and spiritual intensity. Nature,

for instance, became a powerful symbol of the Sublime in works by Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron, who explored the relationship between the human mind in conflict with itself, seeking resonance in vast, wild landscapes. These Romantic writers often sought to represent moments where characters experience fear, awe, or rapture in response to forces that transcend human understanding – especially through encounters with natural elements or supernatural powers. Thus, the Sublime served as a gateway to explore humanity's deeper ontological and emotional questions.

While Emily Brontë draws from these conceptions of the Sublime, she also reframes it, by adding her own personal twist. For example, where Wordsworth's Sublime encounters with nature often lead to a sense of unity with the world, Brontë's Sublime landscapes may be profoundly alienating. For instance, Heathcliff's intense, consuming love for Catherine and the fierce, untamed nature of the Yorkshire moors are not merely Sublime in the traditional sense – they carry a violent, almost otherworldly quality that challenges the Romantic notion of harmony between humanity and nature. Brontë creates a unique experience of the Sublime that includes not just awe and reverence but also horror, mystery, and even existential ambiguity. This makes her exploration of the Sublime more introspective and disquieting than her contemporaries', by blurring the lines between reality and imagination, self and other, life and death.

This dissertation argues that the Sublime in Emily Brontë's work is inextricably linked to the concept of thresholds, which serve as liminal spaces that amplify the Sublime experience for both characters and readers. Through thresholds, Brontë constructs a Sublime that is both an external force and an internal, transformative experience, immersing the reader in the same emotional intensity as her characters. These are not merely borders or transitions but sites of heightened tension and transformation where characters confront the unknown, the terrifying, or the transcendent. By standing in these liminal spaces, Brontë's characters (and readers) encounter an unsettling yet revealing Sublime.

By focusing on thresholds, we shall analyse how Brontë uses these moments of transition and boundary-crossing to evoke a sense of the Sublime. These include physical thresholds (windows, doorways, and other liminal spaces), psychological thresholds (the inner world as opposed to the outer world), consciousness thresholds (between awareness, sleep

and dreams), metaphysical thresholds (between the realms of the dead and the living), and spiritual thresholds (by experiencing the collision between forces of heaven and earth).

The question we pose here serves to broaden discussions of the Sublime in Emily Brontë's studies. While many critics have noted the Sublime in Brontë's work, this study foregrounds thresholds as essential to understanding her particular vision of the Sublime. This approach not only enriches interpretations of her poetry and *Wuthering Heights* but also offers insight into how liminality functions as a narrative and psychological device in 19th-century literature.

Brontë's writings have been extensively analysed from diverse critical perspectives, including structuralist, feminist, Marxist, and psychoanalytic approaches. These studies have illuminated relevant aspects of Emily's themes, character psychology, and social contexts, demonstrating her complex relationship with the 19th-century's social, political, literary, and cultural landscape(s).

While references to the Sublime do appear in scholarship, they are rarely central to the analysis. Many critics have examined the novel's complex structure, its dark and supernatural atmosphere, its depictions of gender and power, and its transgressive love story. In these interpretations, the Sublime is often acknowledged – such as through the wild landscape of the moors or the haunting intensity of Heathcliff and Catherine's bond – but typically as a secondary aspect rather than a primary focus. As such, few studies treat the Sublime as an organising theme in Brontë's work and even fewer examine how her treatment of the Sublime operates across her poetry in dialogue with *Wuthering Heights* or how it may involve specific structural and thematic devices, such as thresholds.

Mary Visik's *The Genesis of Wuthering Heights* (1958) and Chitham's *The Birth of Wuthering Heights* (1998) do intertwine specific poems (particularly those pertaining to the Gondal saga) with narrative points of *Wuthering Heights*. And it is undeniable that Brontë's poetry often serves as a foundation for the themes and imagery in her novel, as *Wuthering Heights* amplifies and extends many of the Sublime elements found in Emily's poetry. Despite these efforts, critics typically focus *either* on the novel *or* her poetry, and few of these studies consider the Sublime as a unifying theme across both genres.

We intend to address this gap by analysing how Brontë uses the Sublime consistently across her novel and poetry, thus illuminating a thematic continuity in her work. A dual-genre approach will illustrate the consistency and complexity of Brontë's exploration of the Sublime by linking it to the theme of thresholds, arguing that Brontë uses these liminal spaces to intensify characters' and readers' engagement with the Sublime. Therefore, this research opens a new line of inquiry that adds depth to interpretations of both her novel and poetry. It will not only enrich the understanding of her literary vision but also integrate her unique contribution into 19th-century representations of the Sublime.

In Chapter I, we shall contextualise the social and economic climate of the first five decades of the 19th century and outline the significance of the French Revolution's aftermath. The Revolution, with its radical overturning of the old order, was itself an event of the Sublime. The upheaval of the masses, the vast scale of social and political transformation, and the terror that accompanied it all resonate with the concept of the Sublime as a force that both overwhelms and challenges human understanding.

The Great Reform Act of 1832, while less violent than the French Revolution, can still be seen as a Sublime political moment. It was a massive shift in British society that broke down some of the barriers to political participation, as it expanded suffrage to previously excluded groups and addressed some inequalities in political representation. The act represented the vast and overwhelming forces of change and reform, which, though more gradual, still carried the weight of transformation, echoing the philosophical undercurrents of the Sublime.

Other events include the Irish Question, concerning immigration and Ireland's nationalist struggle, and the Catholic Question, resolved partly by the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, which allowed Catholics to hold public office. These are also linked to the Sublime by portraying human suffering and the struggle for freedom. The pain and resilience involved in the Irish struggle and the Catholic struggle for civil rights invoked a moral and emotional response that could be considered Sublime.

By situating these historical events within the context of the Sublime, we see how thresholds—whether political, moral, or ideological—generate not only transformations in society but also powerful emotional responses that are integral to the human experience. The threshold is a moment where individuals and communities confront vast, often uncontrollable

forces, leading to a Sublime encounter that transcends ordinary life and reshapes the way individuals perceive the world around them.

Chapter I will also cover the potential literary influence in Emily's work by writers such as Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth, Lord Byron, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, as they explored the interplay between humanity and nature, the power of the imagination, and the value of emotional authenticity, themes that became central in Emily's writings. It will also include a short section on the critical reception of her works both in her time and during the 20th and 21st centuries.

In Chapter II, we shall move on to the definition(s) of the Sublime, by analysing, contrasting, and synthesising the concept in light of the above-mentioned writings on the subject; the precursor of the term 'Sublime', Longinus, who defined it as a feeling of grandeur and awe; Edmund Burke, to whom the Sublime and the beautiful were mutually exclusive, thus stating that what is "dark, uncertain, and confused" may well evoke awe and a degree of horror, the dual emotional quality of fear and attraction, which he called delight or "negative pleasure"; and Immanuel Kant, who sees the Sublime as evocative of not only awe but also a form of terror-inducing violence, when faced with "a formless object" in all its boundlessness.

Chapter III shall include a detailed analysis of how the Sublime takes its shape in and applies to the works of Emily Brontë. By analysing a specific selection from the vast corpus (both published and unpublished) she left us with, we shall try to depict what lies on the threshold of the imagery of light and darkness, heaven and earth, one character and the Other. This analysis will include a variety of textual sources: not only poems from Emily Brontë's different stages in life, from her juvenilia to later poetry, but also compositions written in her own poetic voice and those portraying the imaginary world of Glasstown and Gondal, in which she lends her voice to different characters and narrators of such world(s). Other than their motifs, themes and narrative content, such poems will also be analysed as to their form and style, which also contribute to the description of Emily Brontë's particular, almost exclusive, style. From this point, we shall establish a bridge to her novel, *Wuthering Heights*, and, cumulatively, show how both the concept of the Sublime and Emily Brontë's poetry find an echo in the bursting lines of her narrative in its different categories: setting, time, characters, action, and dialogue.

We conducted a close textual analysis of the selected poems and extracts from *Wuthering Heights*, focusing on elements of prosody (rhythm, meter, stress, and alliteration, assonance, and consonance), structural analysis (arrangement, length, rhyme scheme, and pattern of stanzas), and rhetorical analysis (figures of speech such as metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, and other rhetorical devices). We examined how these elements interact to create meaning and emotional depth, with a specific emphasis on identifying instances of the Sublime. This included analysing how language and imagery evoke grandeur, awe, or intensity and exploring thematic and stylistic connections that resonate with the concept of the Sublime.

This dissertation makes an original contribution by combining insights from Longinus, Burke, and Kant, thus creating a nuanced framework that captures the sensory, emotional, and philosophical dimensions of Brontë's Sublime. This multi-theoretical approach allows one to analyse how Brontë's language, imagery, and character dynamics work together to evoke the Sublime in different layers. By integrating these theorists, we demonstrate that Brontë's Sublime is both multifaceted and anticipatory of later literary and philosophical explorations of human psychology and existential boundaries. This approach not only deepens our understanding of Brontë's aesthetic but also offers a valuable methodological model for studying the Sublime in other literary contexts.

Ultimately, this research positions Emily Brontë as a pivotal figure in 19th-century literature, whose exploration of the Sublime continues to speak to universal questions about human nature, the limits of understanding, and the boundaries of existence.

Chapter I

An Introduction to Emily Brontë's Work and the Times of the Sublime

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*

The first five decades of the 19th century in England were marked by significant social and economic changes, driven mainly by industrialisation, urbanisation, and political reform. We need, however, to go back at least a hundred years to truly understand how not only the English landscape but the entire European scene influenced the artistic and literary manifestations of the mid-19th century, of which Emily Brontë, along with her sisters Charlotte and Anne, were a part. Although the Brontë literary canon is more commonly associated with the three Brontë sisters, their brother Branwell Brontë was also a writer and an artist and contributed largely to their early creative endeavours. Branwell wrote poetry and prose, collaborating with his sisters in their fictional worlds of the Glass Town Confederacy and, later, with Charlotte in their kingdom of Angria. Despite his literary talent, Branwell's work never achieved the same acclaim and "immortality" as his sisters' poetry and novels. A life of excess, addiction, and poor health overshadowed his potential and cut short his artistic aspirations.

The county where they were born and lived most of their lives, Yorkshire, home to the Brontë family, played a significant role in the Industrial Revolution during the 19th century, contributing to the transformation of England's economy and society, namely in the textile industry. Cities such as Leeds, Bradford, Huddersfield, and Halifax, a mere 6 miles from Thornton, the birthplace of the Brontë children, and 10 miles from Haworth, where the Brontës lived their childhood and adult lives, became major centres for woollen and worsted cloth production. The mechanisation of textile manufacturing, including the invention of the spinning jenny, patented by James Hargreaves in 1770, and the power loom, by Edmund

Cartwright in 1785, revolutionised the production process and led to the establishment of large-scale textile mills in Yorkshire.

The Industrial Revolution also led to the rapid urbanisation in Yorkshire, as rural workers migrated to industrial towns and cities in search of employment in factories and mills. The largest urban centres experienced dramatic population growth, leading to the expansion and, more often than not, degradation of housing, sanitation, and public services. In addition, these migration movements also brought about profound social changes to Yorkshire's harsh landscape, including the emergence of a working-class population, the rise of industrial capitalism, and the development of class consciousness among workers. Industrialisation also led to significant environmental degradation, as pollution from factories and mines contaminated the air and waterways, with the exodus of rural migrants flocking to urban areas in search of work. This influx of people resulted in overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions in urban slums. Cities like Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool became centres of industrial activity. It is in the latter, Liverpool, that *Wuthering Heights'* Mr Earnshaw travels for unspecified business affairs and brings back a foundling, Heathcliff, thus changing the course of literature.

As industry reshaped the landscape, factories, railways, and urban expansion confronted individuals with new forms of overwhelming power and vastness, both physically and metaphorically. The Sublime, traditionally associated with nature's grandeur—like mountains, storms, or oceans—found a new expression in these technological and societal shifts. The mechanical dominance and sheer scale of industrial innovation inspired a sense of awe at human ingenuity while simultaneously invoking feelings of insignificance, fear, and even alienation in the face of unstoppable progress. Writers of the time, such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, often grappled with these dualities, depicting dystopian sceneries and reflecting the tensions between technological advancement and the individual's emotional and psychological response to the colossal forces of industrialisation. Thus, the Industrial Revolution, much like nature itself, became a powerful symbol of the Sublime in 19th-century literature. Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) critiques the dehumanising effects of industrialisation on society. Describing on the fictional town of Coketown (a stand-in for industrial cities like Manchester or Birmingham), the author highlights the pollution and environmental degradation and depicts the monotonous, bleak lives of factory workers under

the oppressive power of factory owners, revealing the crushing social inequalities arising from industrial capitalism:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if *the smoke and ashes had allowed it*; but as matters stood, it was a town of *unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage*. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable *serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled*. It had a *black canal* in it, and a *river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye*, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very *like one another*, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the *same hours*, with the *same sound* upon the same pavements, to do the *same work*, and to whom *every day was the same* as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.⁴ (p.32)

Likewise, Elizabeth Gaskell, in *Mary Barton* (1848), explores the harsh conditions and class divides created by the Industrial Revolution. Gaskell, a Mancunian herself, portrayed both the grim realities of factory life and the struggles between workers and industrialists. The conditions of the poor people of Manchester are abject, and men like John Barton contrast these conditions with the lifestyles of the rich factory owners for whom time off work means a holiday rather than death and suffering.

She took the bread, when it was put into her hand, and broke a bit, but could not eat. She was past hunger. She fell down on the floor with a heavy unresisting bang. The men looked puzzled. 'She's well-nigh clemmed,' said Barton. 'Folk do say one mustn't give clemmed people much to eat; but, bless us, she'll eat nought.' (p. 90).

The living conditions of the poor extend beyond hunger and pain. They have so little that they cannot even bring themselves to eat when they are offered food. The woman is described as being "past hunger." The conditions of the people have extended beyond the uncomfortable and beyond the painful. Even sustenance can no longer help her because she is so far beyond hungry that she barely even recognises the sensation.

Even though Burke's theory of the Sublime, as outlined in his *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), primarily focused on nature's power to evoke awe and terror, his ideas can be projected to understand the urban and

⁴ Our italics.

industrial sublime that emerged during the Industrial Revolution. Burke argued that the Sublime arises from experiences that overwhelm the senses, confronting individuals with vastness, power, or danger that exceed their capacity to comprehend, provoking a mixture of admiration and fear. This provides a useful framework for interpreting the “urban Sublime” that emerged as industrial cities expanded and technological advances transformed the landscape. The vast factories, towering chimneys, and relentless pace of industrialisation paralleled the natural phenomena Burke associated with the Sublime. The scale and intensity of these man-made environments, filled with noise, pollution, and overcrowding, would overwhelm individuals in the same way that Burke described nature's Sublime effects. The experience of witnessing the seemingly boundless potential of industrialisation and its capacity for destruction and dehumanisation mirrored the emotional charge Burke considered akin to the Sublime: a mixture of fascination and dread.

Amidst the interplay between the Sublime's natural and now urban instances, both captivating and overwhelming in their grandeur, Emily Brontë's sensitivity to such experiences was evident from her earliest years. Born in Thornton, Yorkshire, on July 30th, 1818, her childhood was shaped by moments that echoed these sublime forces, for instance, when she witnessed the great Crow Hill bog eruption on September 2nd, 1824. After enduring the typical child illnesses of the time (whooping cough, chickenpox and measles, which struck all six Brontë children), Patrick Brontë delayed Emily's entry into Cowan Bridge. That September afternoon, she was out on the moors with Branwell, Ann and Tabby (house servants) when a massive storm broke out. Taking shelter from the heavy rain in an abandoned stone farmhouse, they watched in awe and exhilaration as the day turned pitch black and the raging storm swept over the hills in a whirlwind of rain and loose branches. There was a small and short earthquake, and the Crow Hill bog exploded before their eyes in an eruption of peat, soil and boulders up in the air and then running down the hills. Emily was six years old. For her, this was, in Frank's (1990, p.49) words, her very first “wuthering heights”, and doubtlessly this episode would always be in the back of her mind as the moment she connected almost at a spiritual level to the harsh, craggy landscape surrounding the family home: “In time, it became more of a home to her than the parsonage, permeating nearly everything she ever wrote. The natural world for Emily was a realm of unpredictable, superhuman forces compounded of equal parts of beauty and violence.” (49).

Not even a year later, the two eldest Brontë girls, Maria and Elizabeth, would be dead. The subhuman conditions the girls were subjected to at Cowan Bridge, where the nights were cold and food scarce, which left their bodies feeble and prone to illness, together with an epidemic of typhoid fever, proved fatal for the two sisters. Maria was the first to succumb, aged 11, in May 1825; Elizabeth followed soon after, aged 10, in June. After the traumatic death of their mother, the death of her little mother (Maria) and their sister, Elizabeth, had a massive impact on the young siblings. In fact, Haworth was a place where death and loss were permanently lurking as it faced a severe sanitation and water supply issue. The sewage system was barely existent, and the cesspools of stagnated water were the ideal ecosystem for the prosperity of all sorts of diseases: dysentery, typhoid, cholera. Toilets and other facilities were shared by up to a dozen families, rarely sanitised or disinfected, and the water supply was minimal and septic, especially in the summer. To make matters worse, the church graveyard, dangerously overcrowded, was located at the top of a slope. Rainwater would run down the slope, through the corpses, and deposit on the town's supply system. This hygiene nightmare was one of the main causes of the catastrophic mortality rate: half of the children born in the village would not live beyond the age of six, and the average life expectancy was only about thirty years old. It was a town of poorly educated and humble weavers and labourers, and Mrs Gaskell (p.15) stated the Haworthians' "accost was curt, their accent and tone of speech blunt and harsh".⁵ They were eerie of newcomers, particularly those with higher social and political status from places beyond the Yorkshire region, as it was the case of the Brontës (and Lockwood, in *Wuthering Heights*).

One may say, even though their imagination had led them to establish their plays while lying in their shared beds, the Brontës' literary career began in the evening of June 5th, 1826, when Patrick Brontë arrived home from Leeds with a wrapped box for Branwell. Inside were twelve toy soldiers, which were quickly adopted by each of the children and given names: Charlotte's was the Duke of Wellington (and, later on, his imaginary family, which consisted of

⁵ One cannot avoid thinking of the servant Joseph in *Wuthering Heights*, with his thick Yorkshire dialect, which Emily Brontë meticulously captures in its speech patterns, almost phonetic spelling and non-standard grammar. Understanding this dialect poses a high challenge to Lockwood, thus reflecting the isolation of the rural setting and creating an added sense of uneasiness both in the character and the readers who need to untangle the transcription of his lines of dialogue. William M. Sale, in the "Textual Commentary" to the Third Edition of *Wuthering Heights* (the one adopted in this work), states that, two years after the death of Emily, when Charlotte Brontë was preparing the second and revised edition of the novel, she wrote to her publisher saying: "It seems to me advisable to modify the orthography of the old servant's Joseph; for though as it stands, it exactly renders the Yorkshire dialect to a Yorkshire ear, yet I am sure Southerners must find it unintelligible; and thus one of the most graphic characters in the book is lost on them" (p. 262)

two sons, one of them the wicked Duke of Zamorna), Branwell's Napoleon (before creating his hero Alexander Percy, the Rogue, Lord Ellrington and the Duke of Northangerland), which provides further evidence that politics and warfare were common themes in the Brontë household. Emily and Anne set politics aside and chose the two Arctic explorers, Captain Edward Parry and Captain John Ross, respectively. The two youngest Brontë sisters seemed to admire the daringness and courage of the explorer more than the cunningness of the politician or the aggressiveness of the soldier. After embarking the four heroes on a long journey down the West Coast of Africa, where they conquered and colonised the territory, it was then divided into four kingdoms, the Great Glass Town Confederacy, where its capital Glasstown (later Verdopolis) was founded.

The Brontë children had begun building their literary empire. What followed was hundreds of historical records, maps, lists, poems, snippets of tales, accounts of tyrannical power, conflict and bloodshed, and deep emotional bonds, all eternalised in tiny booklets only to be gazed upon by the eyes of the children and whose pages could be turned by their own small hands alone.

After the Cowan Bridge tragedy in the 1820s, in 1835, Emily, now 17, is a student at Roe Head. Again, she does not adjust to the daily routine of the boarding school. Extremely homesick, she became silent and withdrawn, barely ate and grew thinner, languid, and unresponsive. Fearing for her life, her father sent for her to return. Emily returned home and Anne took her place. Charlotte (Gaskell, 2009, p. 141) wrote later:

Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils; without it, she perished. The change from her own home to a school and from her own very noiseless, very secluded but unrestricted and unartificial mode of life, to one of disciplined routine (though under the kindest auspices), was what she failed in enduring. Her nature proved here too strong for her fortitude. Every morning, when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her. Nobody knew what ailed her but me. I knew only too well. In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength, threatened rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die, if she did not go home, and with this conviction obtained her recall. She had only been three months at school; and it was some years before the experiment of sending her from home was again ventured on.

For Emily, fasting became both a manner of personal expression and a weapon: to get her way, Emily would stop eating. There were many instances in her adult life, namely in her

time as a teacher at Law Hill and her stay in Brussels: feeling she was being kept away from Haworth against her will, Emily would stop eating and speaking, grow pale and weak, and refuse to function.⁶ Likewise, fasting, hunger and starvation are also weaponised in *Wuthering Heights*. Both Catherine and Heathcliff use food deprivation (together with reclusion and silence) as a means to an end and seem to cause each other's famine, as Catherine begins her streak of fasting the moment Heathcliff appears at the grange:

She took her post before the urn; and Miss Isabella came, summoned by the bell; then, having handed their chairs forward, I left the room. The meal hardly endured ten minutes. Catherine's cup was never filled: she could neither eat nor drink. Edgar had made a slop in his saucer, and scarcely swallowed a mouthful. Their guest did not protract his stay that evening above an hour longer. (p. 75).

And then, when the tension between her husband and Heathcliff comes to a breaking point, Catherine locks herself in her room for days, refusing to eat or drink:

I did, to her chamber-door: she hindered me from going further by securing it against me. As she never offered to descend to breakfast next morning, I went to ask whether she would have some carried up. 'No!' she replied, peremptorily. The same question was repeated at dinner and tea; and again on the morrow after, and received the same answer. (p. 92)

Heathcliff ceases to eat when the image (hallucination) of Catherine finally appears to him eighteen years after her death. His self-imposed starvation can be seen as a form of self-destruction, driven by a desire to transcend life and rejoin Catherine in the afterlife, thus reflecting his emotional exhaustion and progressive alienation. Starvation is, then, a manifestation of his inner torment and a decisive step towards the ultimate goal: their togetherness in death.

Although there is a lingering belief that the Brontës lived in complete isolation, lost in the wastelands of the moors, surrounded by rocks and mud puddles, this idea holds truth only to some extent. Indeed, the Brontë children were largely homeschooled, with the exception of Charlotte's and Emily's brief time at the Pensionnat in Belgium when they were in their early twenties. All attempts to provide the children with institutional education, both at Cowan Bridge and Roe Head had been traumatic experiences, to say the least. Despite their sheltered

⁶ Even though this manipulation mechanism was more evident and frequent in Emily, hunger strikes were common to the three sisters at one point or another. Frank (1993, p. 109) tells of an episode in 1836 when Tabby fell on ice and broke her leg. Upon Aunt Elizabeth's refusal to care for the injured servant, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne went on a hunger strike until their father and aunt acquiesced to keep Tabby at the parsonage. When all else failed, self-starvation would settle the matter.

upbringing, the Brontë siblings did maintain contact with the villagers of Haworth. Charlotte and Anne taught Sunday school, Branwell was a frequent visit to the local pub, and even Emily, the most recluse of the four siblings, would accompany the family servants into town⁷ and, occasionally, albeit quite reluctantly, her sisters on social calls.

Despite its economic growth, Yorkshire's, and by extension, England's, society remained deeply rooted in social inequality. The industrial capitalist class, composed of factory owners, businessmen, and investors, often from wealthy merchant families, provided the capital necessary to establish and expand industrial enterprises. These capitalists amassed wealth and power, while the working class faced low wages, long hours, and borderline inhumane working conditions. The gap between the privileged and the poor was visibly amplified during this period, which also reflects on the cultural and literary landscape of the time. In *Oliver Twist*, the titular character, an orphan child, dares to ask for a second helping of gruel in the workhouse where he is mistreated and malnourished, "Please, sir, I want some more." (Dickens, 2011, p.48), only to be met with hostility and violence, which encapsulates the vulnerability and exploitation of the marginalised.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the concepts of capitalism and social mobility also permeated the lines of the narrative tissue, as Heathcliff, once a foundling starving in the streets of Liverpool, with no family and no connections, rises the ranks of society by his own means (the honesty and morality of those means is debatable). From the moment he disappears in that stormy night at the Heights, as a flogged semi-illiterate servant, until the evening he reappears smartly dressed, with the manners of a gentleman,⁸ and gradually and cunningly amasses even more wealth at the expense of those who had wronged him (first Hindley Earnshaw, then Edgar Linton), Heathcliff's ascension to power reflects a societal shift in the late 18th century, where wealth no longer relies solely on name or inheritance. Despite his unknown origins and lack of family name (note that he was never given the name of his adoptive family, Earnshaw), his ability to acquire significant wealth signals the growing influence of self-made wealth in a

⁷ In 1839, Emily Brontë intervened to break up a dog fight in which her bullmastiff, Keeper, was involved amid a crowd in Church Lane in Haworth. Emily was sitting, as usual, in the kitchen, heard the commotion and ran out of the house, down the street, and, with her bare hands, separated the dogs by applying pepper to their noses and eyes.

⁸ The absence of information about Heathcliff's life during his three-year disappearance creates a significant gap in the narrative, generating a sense of uncertainty and tension for the characters and the reader. The ambiguity surrounding his sudden wealth hints at unsettling events, leaving the reader with the uncomfortable notion that perhaps we are better off not knowing the full extent of what transpired during that period. This narrative void can be interpreted through the lens of the Sublime, as it evokes uneasiness and apprehension.

changing economic landscape. This development highlights the declining importance of traditional class structures and the emerging possibility of social mobility through means other than inheritance.

At the beginning of the narrative, Heathcliff's arrival, the dark, mysterious orphan, reveals the fragility of class structure. The privileged Earnshaw family sees the orphan as dirty and disgraceful, causing tension over whether or not they should "keep" him.

We crowded round, and over Miss Cathy's head I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child (...) it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand. I was frightened, and Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors: she 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? What he meant to do with it, and whether he were mad? (p.29).

After the fight between Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw over the arrival of Heathcliff, the Earnshaw children, Hindley and Catherine, are given the opportunity to form opinions of the orphan. Almost immediately, Catherine spits on Heathcliff when she finds her present has been lost. Young Catherine's spitting on Heathcliff further demonstrates that the class divide is strong and enforced even among children. Even though Heathcliff is the same age as her, Catherine realises she is of higher standing and immediately sees Heathcliff as lesser. The children continue their mistreatment of Heathcliff by not allowing him to sleep with them and having Nelly "put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow" (p. 29). That night, not only do the children treat Heathcliff like an animal, but Nelly also sees him in this light. Despite being a servant of a similar lower social standing, the class system was so normalised and accepted at the time that even she wished Heathcliff would leave and quite anaphorically referred to him as "it", in a passage that proves Emily's mastery of free indirect speech:

The master tried to explain the matter ... all that I could make out, amongst her scolding, was a tale of his seeing *it* starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool, where he picked *it* up and inquired for *its* owner. Not a soul knew to whom *it* belonged, he said; and his money and time being both limited, he thought it better to take *it* home with him at once, than run into vain expenses there: because he was determined he would not leave *it* as he found *it*. Well, the conclusion was, that my mistress grumbled herself calm; and Mr. Earnshaw told me to wash *it*, and give *it* clean things, and let *it* sleep with the children.⁹ (p. 29)

⁹ Our italics.

At this point, Heathcliff has no name, place, or even a little humanity. Notice how he is objectified from the onset by being called a “gift” and put down as a dumb being with no “owner”. He is then left by Ellen on the landing of the stairs in the hope he might just wander off like an animal. Moreover, even as a child, we see other hints of humanity being denied to Heathcliff, as he is given the name of a dead son, and it is merely a single name, both Christian and surname, much like what people do with pets.

Throughout the rest of the timeline, class division can also be seen through the servant characters and how they are treated by those of higher standing. The servants are seen as lower beings, not to be given the same amenities and respect as the Earnshaws and the Lintons. Even though, halfway through the novel, Heathcliff reappears as a wealthy man who only becomes exponentially wealthier with a large amount of land to his name, he can never truly shake the sense of insecurity regarding his social status.

Emily Brontë herself was no stranger to capital ventures and investments. The railway surge, which comprised the decades of the 1830s and 1840s, a dramatic and transformational change in how communication, travel¹⁰ and technology were perceived, caught her eye. With lines and stations being opened at a furious pace and the subsequent rise in the number of passengers and goods transported year upon year, there were large potential profits to be made.¹¹ Even though the Brontës were not a particularly wealthy family, in 1842, their monetary position changed considerably. While Charlotte and Emily were studying French and German in Brussels¹² at the Pensionnat Heger, they were called home for death had, once more, knocked on the parsonage door. Aunt Elizabeth Branwell died after a short illness, and

¹⁰ In addition, Yorkshire's industrial development involved expanding the railway infrastructure as well as canals and roads. Canals such as the Aire and Calder Navigation and the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, both within a radius of 25 miles to the east and west, respectively, of Haworth, facilitated the transport of raw materials and finished goods, while railways connected Yorkshire's industrial towns to markets across England.

¹¹ It is also interesting to note that, at some point or another, the four Brontë siblings were associated with the railway, not only in the form of capital investment but also with employment, as Branwell took the position of “clerk in charge” at Luddendenfoot railway station in West Yorkshire in 1841. However, he was shortly after dismissed due to a deficit in the accounts and overall incompetence.

¹² The trip to Brussels was Emily's first contact with the sea and Frank (1990, p.159) points out that, during the 14-hour crossing from London Bridge wharf Ostend, “she remained on deck, transfixed by the turbulent waters, undisturbed by the cold mist and dousing of sprays when waves crashed against the boat's side.”. Perhaps not as much as in Charlotte's (who accompanied Emily in these crossings) or Annes's (who spent some time visiting friends near the shore) writings, we may also perceive the impact of the sea imagery, namely in “EW to A.G.A. How few, of all the hearts that loved”, dated March 1844, which depicts Lord Eldred's lament for the death of A.G.A, and which Charlotte retitled “The Wanderer from the Fold” and added the subtitle “On a life perverted” for the 1850 edition. The 10-stanza poem includes many references to the sea and seafaring, namely in stanzas 5-9: “O, fairly spread thy early sail // Why did the *pilot*, too confiding / Dream o'er that *Ocean's* foam? / (...) / To bring his *vessel* home? // What *rocks* and *shelves* and *sands* lay round / Between his *port* and him – // An anxious gazer from the *shore*, / I marked the whitening *wave*” (our italics)

Anne, Emily, and Charlotte (along with their Penzance cousin Elizabeth Kingston) were each left around £350, the equivalent of around six years' wages for a governess. Branwell was left nothing but a Japanese dressing box in his Aunt's will, as she, at the time of preparation of such will (1833), still had high hopes for her nephew and felt that it would be more urgent to secure her nieces' futures, which, she, as a spinster, knew all too well to be dim and limited. Later on, as Aunt Branwell most certainly disapproved of his lifestyle of excess and indolence, despite him having been once a favourite and indeed bearing her family name, Branwell, she opted not to change it.

With a comfortable cash flow, the sisters had to decide how to save or invest it. The decision was made to let Emily manage their joint funds, and she invested it in the then-booming railway stock of George Hudson's companies, whose prices were soaring. It was a risk, but risk-taking was in character for Emily. In April 1845, Charlotte (1995a, p. 390) wrote:

Emily has made herself mistress of the necessary degree of knowledge for conducting the matter, by dint of carefully reading every paragraph and every advertisement in the newspapers that related to rail-roads and, as we have abstained from all gambling, all mere speculative buying-in and selling-out, we have got on very decently.

The three sisters made enough money to eventually help pay for the publication of their joint poetry book in 1846 and their novels in 1847.

However, the massive transformations in 19th-century Yorkshire extended far beyond shifts in wealth distribution or the mechanisation of everyday life. The political and social fabric was also undergoing significant changes due to various political reforms. One of those reforms was The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, also known as the Roman Catholic Relief Act, which marked a turning point in British social-political atmosphere by granting Catholics the right to participate fully in public life. Before this act, Catholics faced legal restrictions that limited their civil rights, including prohibitions on holding public office, sitting in Parliament, and attending the most reputed universities. These restrictions had been enforced for centuries, thus reflecting the deep-seated anti-Catholic sentiment amongst British society. The Act passed after intense political pressure, particularly from Irish Catholics, despite opposition from King George IV and segments of the Protestant establishment.

The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829 impacted the Brontë household tremendously. Even though the children were relatively young at this time, Reverend Brontë never shied away from exposing them to philosophical and political thought, which they would follow, besides the ever-present *Blackwood's Magazine*, in the *Leeds Intelligencer* and *John Bull*, Tory newspapers, and the *Leeds Mercury*, a Whig paper. The fact that Patrick was a member of the Anglican church, despite his Irish Catholic origins by the circumstance of his mother, Elinor Alice (née McClory), added an extra layer of complexity to the matter. Being 13, 12, 11, and 9 years old at the time, the Brontë siblings would experience first-hand the conflicts brewing on their doorstep. Despite their Tory allegiances, they strongly supported the Duke of Wellington (The Prime Minister) and Robert Peel (Home Secretary). Charlotte writes (Alexander, 1983, as cited in Frank, 1992):

I remember the day when the intelligence extraordinary came with Mr Peel's speech in it containing the terms on which the Catholics were to be left in. With what eagerness Papa tore off the cover, and we all gathered around him, and with what breathless anxiety we listened as one by one they were disclosed and explained. (p. 67)

As to Emily, despite being the daughter of a clergyman, was the only Brontë exempt from attending church or teaching Sunday school regularly (her dislike for children or any other sort of company besides her own close circle of family, a couple of servants and her pets was widely acknowledged and respected). And although not openly critical, she remained somewhat immune to conventional religious doctrine, which impacts the world-building and characterisation of the main characters in her poetic and narrative work. These often steer away from conventional religious imagery or doctrine, and aspire very little to ascend to a conventional heaven: Catherine Earnshaw is happily expelled from Heaven in her dream, Heathcliff cares nothing of/ about religion and is intrinsically bound to the abyss of Catherine's absence and the earth that conceals her coffin. And even little Cathy Linton, in her argument with Linton Heathcliff, in chapter XXIX, depicts an idea of heaven that contrasts with the harp-playing angels and trumpet-playing cherubs of the biblical heaven:

That was his most perfect idea of heaven's happiness: mine was rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright white clouds flitting rapidly above; and not only larks, but throstles, and blackbirds, and linnets, and cuckoos pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance, broken into cool dusky dells; but close by great swells of long grass undulating in waves to the breeze; and woods and sounding water, and the whole world awake

and wild with joy. He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee. (p. 188)

In fact, religion does not fare well at all in *Wuthering Heights*. The old servant Joseph is a repulsive caricature of the uneducated religious zealot, and Reverend Branderham, in Lockwood's dream, is ridiculed for his sermon. At the closing of the novel, even the church of Gimmerton is in ruins, and no one seems bothered enough to rehabilitate it. On another level, while not explicitly about Catholicism, the theme of exclusion and marginalisation in *Wuthering Heights* resonates with these struggles faced by Catholics in early 19th-century Britain. Heathcliff's treatment and the discrimination he faces reflect the societal prejudices of the time.

The imagery of the religious building in ruins is also frequent in Emily's poetry, both in her own voice and within the Gondal saga.¹³ In the composition "The old church tower and garden wall" (October 1837), the poet contemplates the decline of a familiar landscape, depicting not just the decay of the built and natural environment but also how it conveys their own internal melancholy, by highlighting the gradual passage from light and joy to darkness and desolation (the "glad and glorious day" is overtaken by evening, and "a deeper gloom"). The church is "old", and the "garden wall" is described as "black with autumn rain," a dramatic image symbolising the deterioration and ageing of once sacred or beautiful structures. Autumn, often associated with the decline of life and the approach of winter, sets the scene for this decay, as the elements, such as rain and the "dreary winds," wear away at the physical world. Another example of this decay in religious buildings may be found in "A sudden chasm of ghastly light", where the speaker, thought by Guimarães (2002, p. 415) to be the victorious Julius Brenzaida, describes the devastation the war brought not only in terms of casualties but to buildings religious or otherwise: while line 13 reads "In plundered churches piled with the

¹³ Gondal is Emily's and Anne's island-kingdom in the North Pacific, after seceding from Glasstown in 1835. It had the same climate and landscape as Yorkshire: extremely cold and windy winters, mild springs and blue-skied summers. Gondal was a female-dominated royalist world, and strong-willed woman sovereigns ruled tyrannically in Gondal. They would take and dispose of lovers and inevitably died violently at the hands of mercenaries in the desolate landscape of moors, covered in heath and bluebells. Its head of state, a beautiful, ruthless Queen named Augusta Geraldine Almeda (A.G.A.) may have been inspired by Princess Victoria, who was less than a year younger than Emily and destined soon to be Queen. Indeed, Augusta was one of the names put forward to christen the child but was dropped on the instructions of the Prince Regent. The Princess ended up receiving the name of Alexandrina Victoria.

dead”, line 25 tells of a “ruined Hall”, and the poem concludes with a “great cathedral discrowned.”¹⁴

The Brontë household shook again a couple of years later with the passing of the Reform Bill of 1831, also known as the Great Reform Act. This piece of legislation aimed to address widespread demands for political reform, as it sought to correct the unequal representation in Parliament by redistributing seats from “rotten boroughs” (areas with very few voters, prone to a feudalistic mindset, fraud and bribery) to more populous industrial towns and cities. It also expanded the electorate by lowering property requirements for voting, allowing a larger portion of the middle class, especially the rich bourgeoisie with no title (bestowed or purchased), to participate in elections. Though it did not grant universal suffrage, the Reform Bill was definitely a step towards a more democratic expression and representation in the Parliament. Frank (1990, p. 77) describes how this clash of forces was experienced in the parsonage:

Patrick Brontë supported the reform bill but for pragmatic reasons: reform had been long time brewing and had to be contained and curbed since it was clear it could not be suppressed altogether. He endorsed the bill as a moderate concession to the public clamour for political change because he thought it would forestall more extreme measures and avert revolution.

The French Revolution, the resulting years of terror, and the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars were still very present in everyone’s minds. The children, in their teens at the time, took sides and even intertwined real-life events with their poetic creations. Even though both Charlotte and Emily shared a conservative upbringing, the latter was somewhat more progressive. Emily sympathised with the oppressed and often placed them at the forefront of her work. While Charlotte opposed the reform, Emily supported it, which aligns with the poet's

¹⁴ The “discrowning” of the cathedral is significant to the Gondal narrative as it dialogues with another poem “The wide cathedral Aisles are lone” (March 1838), which reads “The wide cathedral Isles are lone, / The vast crowds vanished every one; / There can be naught beneath that dome / But the cold tenants of the tomb.” This piece describes how Julius Brenzaida enters into a treacherous pact with his fellow kinsman, Gerald Exina (the de facto king of Gondal), to become co-rulers (“Gondal’s monarchs”). This ceremony takes place at the altar of the cathedral and is witnessed by a large, silent crowd. However, this event is tainted by the perfidious nature of Brenzaida, as he plans to usurp the crown to himself alone: “Take in heavens sight their awful vow / And never dying Union swear / King Julius lifts his impious eye / From the dark marble to the sky / Blasts with that Oath his perjured soul” (lines 13-17). The poem “A sudden chasm of ghastly light” describes the aftermath of the resulting civil war between the two factions and the “discrowned cathedral” is a metaphor for the discrowned Exina. Emily seems to keep her spirituality and faith, yet takes a very dim view of the human element within the church: while, in the first poem, the church and tower decay with the passage of time and neglect of the parishioners, in the Gondal poems, the Cathedral is destroyed through human action: first, conceptually, by the perjury of men, then later, physically, through the war waged for land and power.

tendency to favour revolutionaries, outsiders, and the marginalised—a bias that is evident throughout her writing. An example of such favouritism is the preeminence given to the character of Augusta Geraldine Almeda, a fiercely independent woman ruler who subverts conventional expectations of femininity.

Though Initially presented as the archetypal heroine, she embodies the themes of love and mourning for Alexander E., Lord of Elbë, her first love and husband, by tenaciously holding onto his soul so that it does not escape his earthly body and fly into a spiritual plane. Augusta speaks to him encouragingly in “A Death-Scene ‘O day! he cannot die’” (1844): “It is not Death, but pain / That struggles in thy breast; / Nay, rally, Elbë, rouse again, / I cannot let thee rest!” (l.25-28). Her macabre exclamation resonates closely with Heathcliff’s intentional desecration of Catherine’s grave. In Chapter XXIX, he confesses to having unearthed Catherine’s coffin twice: the first time, on the night of her burial (“Being alone, and conscious two yards of loose earth was the sole barrier between us, I said to myself - 'I'll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills ME; and if she be motionless, it is sleep. I got a spade from the tool-house, and began to delve with all my might - it scraped the coffin.” (p.219), and, a second time, when he took the opportunity to open her coffin after Edgar’s funeral (“I got the sexton, who was digging Linton's grave, to remove the earth off her coffin lid, and I opened it. I thought, once, I would have stayed there: when I saw her face again - it is hers yet!” (p. 218). In the poem “There shines the moon, at noon of night” (1837), recounting years later Alexander’s death, Augusta describes his end by Lake Elnor in pure Gothic terms: “His red blood dyed a deeper hue, / Shuddering to feel the ghostly gloom / That coming Death around him threw— / Sickening to think one hour would sever / The sweet, sweet world and him for ever” (l.30-34). The tone is both melancholic and grim, with the chilling imagery of the stream of blood and imminent Death, who is here personified as a dark figure that throws a cloak of “ghostly gloom” over the soon-to-be corpse.

However, her character transcends the archetypal traits, evolving into a more complex representation of female power and emotional depth, characteristic of the Sublime. In “Here with my knee upon thy stone” (1838), Augusta decides not to be buried alive in her grief now that Alexander is long gone. The poem, a quatrain, reads: “Here, with my knee upon thy stone, / I bid adieu to feelings gone; / I leave with thee my tears and pain, / And rush into the world again”. According to Till (1989, p.133), “Augusta is a vibrantly active character existing within

the framework of Gothic atmosphere but outside of the passively receptive characterisation of the stereotypical heroine.”. A.G.A. is cast in a favourable light as a leader and queen, unbound by societal constraints, having lovers and children out of wedlock, and even driving men to suicide. Her tumultuous life culminates in a violent and shocking death at the hands of Douglas, who conspired against her with her best friend, Angelica, thus emphasising both the betrayal she suffered and the tragic consequences of her defiance and strength. A.G.A is portrayed as a resolutely independent female ruler who challenges traditional expectations of femininity, thereby offering herself as a compelling early example of the "feminine sublime".

In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff is far from the moustache-twirling, degenerate villain of the gothic novel. Despite his cruelty and vengefulness, he is portrayed somewhat sympathetically in the novel, mostly by offsetting his villainous acts with moments of high vulnerability and emotional suffering, much in the guise of a tragic hero, whose harshness is often understood in the context of the deep void he experiences, making him a figure of both fear and pity. Ellen Dean does not shy away from narrating Lockwood Heathcliff's early life of rejection, abuse, and marginalisation. While she is critical of his actions, she also shows moments of compassion and understanding, especially in recounting his early years. Hindley Earnshaw, in particular, dehumanises and brutalises Heathcliff, treating him as a servant and flogging him on occasion, in addition to psychologically torturing him with death threats. This abuse elicits sympathy for Heathcliff and explains (but does not justify) his later vengeful behaviour. His all-consuming love for Catherine is construed as deeply tragic. Catherine chooses to marry Edgar Linton, not because she loves him more than Heathcliff, but because she wants to elevate her social standing. This rejection and isolation are a continual reminder of his status as an outcast.

Even though 19th-century Yorkshire was geographically and about 40 years chronologically distant from the French Revolution, most of the narrative in the first part of *Wuthering Heights* predates and overlaps not only the Revolution but also the American Declaration of Independence (despite the first chronological reference being 1801, the narrative is told in analepsis to the year 1771 when Mr Earnshaw returns from Liverpool with Heathcliff). The repercussions of both events were still felt across England, where the echoes of the Revolution and the ongoing Napoleonic Wars fuelled fears of social unrest, rebellion, and collapse. The revolutionists' ideas and principles, such as liberty, equality, and fraternity,

resonated with reform-minded individuals and groups in the shire. The revolution inspired political radicals and reformers who sought to challenge the existing social and political order in English territory and advocate for impactful reforms, including universal suffrage and parliamentary restructuring.

Areas like Huddersfield and Bradford became hot spots for radicalism and political dissent and breeding grounds for groups such as the Luddites, Chartists, and other reform movements. These movements advocated for workers' rights, political reform, and social justice, and often organised protests, strikes, and demonstrations to advance their causes, thus raising the public's awareness towards matters such as poverty, inequality, living and working conditions, education, sanitation, and healthcare. However, authorities in Yorkshire often responded to protests and demonstrations with force, leading to violent confrontations, arrests, and subsequent trials and convictions. The Peterloo Massacre of 1819, a year after Emily was born not that far away, in which protestors, who sought to address the lack of political representation and economic hardships faced by the working class, were met with a violent charge by government forces in St. Peter's Field, Manchester, was seen as an example of this repression.

The French Revolution, and the turbulent beginnings of the 19th century, also had a cultural and literary impact on artists and other intellectuals; namely, with the development of aesthetic theories such as the concept of the Sublime, theorised at the time by Edmund Burke (drawing from Longinus's treaty) and Immanuel Kant, which will be the object of Chapter II of this work. The chaos and violence of the Revolution, especially the Reign of Terror, evoked a sense of the Sublime. The enormity of social change, the collapse of centuries-old institutions, and the sheer unpredictability of events created a feeling that transcended human understanding and threatened one's sense of safety. Also, the iconic and written language of the Sublime became a powerful rhetorical tool for mobilising support for the revolution and inspiring collective action. Many other aesthetic concepts also found some of their fundamentals in the Sublime.

The Grotesque, for instance, is an aesthetic concept closely associated with the Sublime. However, the grotesque blends the dramatic and the horrifying, often involving distortions of reality that evoke both disgust and fascination. The revolution's violence,

particularly the public executions and mob justice, provided fertile ground for grotesque imagery. In Mary Shelley's¹⁵ work *Frankenstein* (1818), the novel's central figure, the nameless creature, is an iconic example of the grotesque, as it is grotesque not only in its physical appearance—described as a patchwork of human body parts with a hideous, unnatural form—but also in the way it embodies both humanity and monstrosity. Despite being intelligent and capable of emotion, the creature is rejected and feared by society due to its appearance, which leads to its growing resentment and violent actions. This duality reflects the grotesque's ability to merge the terrifying with the tragic, evoking both horror and sympathy from the reader. It uses the grotesque to explore themes of creation, alienation, and the dangers of unchecked ambition by combining hope and terror, freedom and violence, which were also the contradictory principles of the Revolution.

One may find hints of the grotesque in *Wuthering Heights*, quite textually in the beginning of the novel, when Lockwood describes the frontispiece of the house:

Before passing the threshold, I paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door; above which, among a wilderness of crumbling griffins and shameless little boys, I detected the date '1500,' and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw'. I would have made a few comments, and requested a short history of the place from the surly owner; but his attitude at the door appeared to demand my speedy entrance, or complete departure, and I had no desire to aggravate his impatience previous to inspecting the penetralium. (p. 4)

This passage alone gives us a lot about the historical and cultural landscape of the time. Lockwood takes a moment to inspect the carved figures above the threshold, who appear in the shape of decaying gargoyles and lewd human figures. Griffins are, in Greek mythology, hybrid creatures, often depicted with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle, primarily representing the combination of the strength and courage of the lion with the swiftness and vision of the eagle¹⁶, thus making them symbols of duality and power. In addition to being figures of guardianship and protection, both physically and symbolically, they are also seen as elements of duality and balance, as they synthesise the union of the earth (the lion)

¹⁵ Mary Shelley's parents, Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin, were also prominent figures in the artistic and literary landscape and head figures in the radical writings of the time. With works such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) and *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), which highlighted the urgency of social reform, democracy, gender equality and human rights, their discourse was mainly focused on the active resistance to oppression and tyranny.

¹⁶ Curiously, the lion has been seen as the symbol of England and the eagle as the symbol of France, two countries that clashed in the Napoleonic Wars (1803–1815).

and sky (eagle), and, metaphorically, body and spirit, or strength and wisdom. In this sense, griffins, as symbols of the soul's journey to a higher state, can be seen as mediators between two realms, embodying the duality of the human condition or the union of physical and spiritual qualities.

As we will see in Emily Brontë's poetry and novel, the Sublime thresholds are also located in the fine line which divides earth and heaven, highlighting the duality of the house itself: it stands as a massive tomb but with living people in it. It is also the optimum spot for encounters with the supernatural, as in Lockwood's dream and Heathcliff's hallucinations towards the end of the novel. The crossing of the threshold at the entrance of Wuthering Heights can be interpreted, within the context of the grotesque, as a two-way transgression: Lockwood insists on entering an entirely new reality ("I will get in"), which does not abide by conventional social norms, despite being warned by the carvings. Lockwood, however, pays no heed to these warnings. Even the date, 1500, the turn of the century, considered by historians to be the year that marks the end of medieval times, 300 years before the later events of the novel, evokes the atemporality and displacement of this microcosmos in relation to Lockwood's reality. The fact that the name Hareton Earnshaw is written next to the date, makes it quite similar to Heathcliff's grave (which only bears the name and the date of his death). One is left wondering whether 1500 was the date of Hareton's birth, death or the construction of the house-tomb. In fact, from this perspective, the entire façade of Wuthering Heights can be seen as a massive tombstone for a dismembered, hateful and chaotic family at constant war with each other.

The choice of the year 1500 is also noteworthy, as it is generally considered a pivotal moment of cultural, political, and intellectual transformation, i.e., it also stands for a revolution. It is often considered a significant turning point in history due to several key events and developments that marked the transition from the Middle Ages to the early modern period. For example, as perhaps quite meaningful to the understanding of the Brontës' works, the late 15th century saw major explorations that reshaped global trade and interactions.¹⁷ England's early claims to North American territories paved the way for later English exploration

¹⁷ Christopher Columbus had already reached the Americas (1492), and, by 1500, the era of European exploration was in full swing, with figures like Vasco da Gama reaching India in 1498 and John Cabot (Giovanni Caboto), the Italian explorer sailing under the English flag of King Henry VII, who made the first recorded English-commissioned voyage to North America. He landed on the coast of what is believed to be Newfoundland, in 1497, claiming it for England.

and colonisation, such as Saint Kitts, England's first colony in the Caribbean and Jamaica, seized from the Spanish in 1655, turning it into the largest sugar-producing colony and fuelling British involvement in the transatlantic slave trade.

The themes of expansion and colonisation would echo in the lines of both Charlotte's and Emily's juvenilia and novels, mainly in the characters of Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife, locked in the attic of Thornfield Hall due to her mental illness. She is described as being of Creole descent, born in Jamaica to a wealthy family, which ties her origins to the British West Indies; and Heathcliff, whose origin is unknown but is described as a dark skin and gipsy-like boy. Ellen, in Chapter VII, while trying to groom him in front of a mirror, mentions that he was

...fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England. Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer! (p. 44)

Many studies have been published trying to determine the true ethnicity of Heathcliff,¹⁸ nonetheless, as Emily Brontë did not leave any indication of his origin, the mystery remains. What could be said towards this discussion is that the author may have drawn Heathcliff's description story, not only from an amalgamation of the physical traits of the peoples from these newly found and reached lands but also from her family mythology, as her great-grandfather, Welsh Brunty's origin was also enwrapped in a veil of mystery and secrecy. The tale of a man called Welsh Brunty and the story of how he came to the Brunty family is told to us by Pinion (1975, p. 383):

Hugh's grandfather [Emily's great-great-grandfather] had a farm near the banks of the Boyne. He was a cattle-dealer and often crosses the Irish Sea from Drogheda to sell cattle in Liverpool. On one of his return voyages, a strange child was found in the hold. It proved to be a very young boy – dark, dirty and almost naked. There was no doctor on the vessel, and only one woman, Mrs Brunty. As nobody would take care of him, and there was no foundling hospital nearer than Dublin, she decided to adopt him. From his gipsyish complexion, the boy was thought to

¹⁸ Some critics in their reading believe Heathcliff to be the love child of Mr Earnshaw and an unknown woman in Liverpool, but the evidence to support this claim seems to be thin and misplaced within the timeline. Even if it were confirmed to be true, that would make Heathcliff a mixed-race illegitimate child, which does not improve his situation in any way. As Emily Brontë did not provide further information on the matter either within the text or in any other notes, thus leaving Heathcliff's origins unknown, his condition as a foundling stands.

be Welsh, and called 'Welsh' by the Bruntys. He grew up to be sullen, envious, and cunning, and attached himself to Mr Brundy who took him, instead of his own sons, to fairs and markets to listen to farmers' conversations and gain the information needed to drive hard bargains.

Welsh, much like Heathcliff, was found in Liverpool abandoned, malnourished, and is described as having a dark complexion. It is also interesting that nobody would touch the stowaway, perhaps afraid he may have come from the devil. Likewise, in Chapter IV, Mr Earnshaw, after revealing Heathcliff to the other members of the household states: "See here, wife! I was never so beaten with anything in my life: but you must e'en take it as a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil." (p. 28) It was through the intervention of a patron, Mrs Brundy / Mr Earnshaw, who pitied him, that he was allowed to live a full life. They gave him the name "Welsh" due to this dark complexion, a very common stereotype among British sailors and merchants who would brand anyone with a different, darker complexion as "Irish" and "Welsh", or "Gipsy", any other person whose physiognomy was somewhat different from theirs. It also lends some credit to Ellen's description of Heathcliff as a potential descendant of the Emperor of China or an Indian queen.

Similarly to Heathcliff, who is often described as a cuckoo and a usurper,¹⁹ Welsh was also seen by Mr Brundy's other children as an "interloper", as he was their father's favourite and having gained almost complete management in business matters. He is also reported to have developed a rather unconventional relationship with his adopted sister, Mary, vowing to marry her one way or another after being summarily rejected, which he did after a scandalous encounter. After seeing a large part of his fortune consumed by flames, the childless Welsh offers to adopt one his many nephews. He then takes the young Hugh from his original family, whom he treats harshly and forces to work in the fields. In this, we can see a clear precursor of the mysterious foundling Heathcliff and his treatment of his "adoptive" Hareton. Also, in Emily Brontë's poetry, we can see the figure of the usurper²⁰ in Julius Brenzaida, who seized

¹⁹ Heathcliff is portrayed as a cuckoo and a usurper of both affections and property. Hindley considers him a usurper of his father's affections: "the young master had learned to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges" (p. 30); and Ellen and Joseph clearly state what Heathcliff stole the Earnshaw property: "so at present he laid the whole burden of Hareton's faults on the shoulders of the usurper of his property". (p. 151)

²⁰ The figure of the usurper is one of the Gothic archetypes of transgression, as the ultimate disruptor of the social, economic and political order. Some examples include Manfred, in *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), who, being the grandson of the man who usurped Otranto from its rightful rulers, goes on a rampage of violence and deceit to legitimise his position; and Montoni, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), who seeks to control and manipulate first his wife, Madame Cheron, and then the protagonist, Emily St. Aubert. He forcibly seizes her family's property and attempts to compel her into marriage for financial gain, thus embodying the Gothic trope of the villainous, power-hungry nobleman.

the throne of Gondal after a false and treacherous alliance with Gerald Exina. The tyrant ends up being assassinated by Arthur Gleneden, who, in “Gleneden’s Dream” (1838, also known for its first line “Tell me, whacher, is it winter?”) describes how his beloved Gondal suffered in the hands of Brenzaida: “I saw my country bleeding, / Dying for a Tyrant’s will” (lines 35-36) and justifies the killing of the usurper as the liberation of Gondal. In his words, he is “a glad Avenger / Thy eternal Justice found!” (lines 51-52).

The year 1500 holds significance for 19th-century artists, writers, and poets due to two major historical developments. First, the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-15th century revolutionised communication, making books widely available and fostering literacy. By 1500, printed materials enabled rapid knowledge dissemination, providing broader access to ideas. The year 1500 also symbolised the onset of the Renaissance, a period of classical revival that emphasised beauty, nature, and human emotion. The Renaissance inspired Romantic ideals of personal expression and creativity, with figures like Dante and Shakespeare celebrated as groundbreaking geniuses who pushed artistic boundaries. The Pre-Raphaelites, for instance, admired this period’s artistic and moral values, viewing it as an era of craftsmanship and harmony with nature, contrasting with their own industrialised society.

Additionally, the early 16th century marked a religious shift, foreshadowing the Protestant Reformation. In 1517, Martin Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* challenged the Catholic Church, leading to major conflicts like the Thirty Years' War. England saw its own upheaval during the English Civil War, where royalist and parliamentary forces clashed, ultimately resulting in King Charles I's execution and the temporary establishment of a republic under Oliver Cromwell²¹. The Reformation of the Church would appeal to 19th-century intellectuals as it laid the groundwork for later movements advocating religious freedom and individual rights. Moreover, it fostered the rise of nationalism, as many princes and states adopted Protestantism for political gain or to assert independence from the Catholic Church.

The end of the 18th century also marked the inception of new literary movements. One such movement became known as Romanticism. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity

²¹ The English Civil War (1642 to 1651) might have been one of the sources of inspiration for Emily Brontë's Gondal later conflicts, which opposed factions such as the “Royalists” and the “Republicans”, headed by the Gleneden family.

resonated deeply with the Romantic movement, which emphasised emotion, individualism, and the Sublime, which became a central motif in Romantic literature and art, representing the awe-inspiring power of nature, the imagination, and the human spirit. Artists and writers of the time sought to capture the overwhelming power and magnitude of revolutionary events, often employing the imagery of the Sublime to evoke the same feelings of awe, fear, and exhilaration, by exploring themes of personal freedom, nature, and the power of human imagination. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Percy Shelley, and Lord Byron were heavily inspired by the revolutionary spirit and saw the revolution's opposition to established authority as a celebration of the individual's rights, as it embodied the Romantic rebellion against rigid social and artistic norms.

Shelley's (1893, p. 622) quatrain XXXVIII of *The Masque of Anarchy* depicts such Sublime imagery:

Rise like Lions after slumber
In unvanquishable number—
Shake your chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep had fallen on you—
And, in its final line: Ye are many—they are few.

Shelley uses powerful imagery to evoke the sublime, urging the oppressed masses to rise up against their oppressors. The image of lions awakening from their sleep and releasing themselves from their chains conveys a sense of awe-inspiring strength and resilience, while the contrast between the "many" and the "few" in the very last line of the poem emphasises the magnitude of the revolutionary spirit. The poem calls for a radical transformation of society, thus reflecting the revolutionary fervour of the time and the belief in the possibility of profound social change. Through its evocative language and visionary imagery, and the personification of Murder, Hypocrisy, and Fraud, bearing the faces of "tyrants" in Lord Liverpool's governmental cabinet, Shelley's poem evokes the ideals of the French Revolution and captures the Sublime aspirations of the "many" (the impoverished people) who dare to stand against the "few" (the privileged classes).

However, the Romantic poets, who initially celebrated the revolution for its ideals, later became disillusioned with its violent excesses. William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1850), while primarily an autobiographical poem chronicling the author's own growth and

development as a poet, also reflects broader themes and events of his time. In Book 10 (2022, p.236), Wordsworth reflects on his initial enthusiasm for the French Revolution and his subsequent disillusionment with its violent excesses. He describes how the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity initially inspired him, but as the revolution unfolded and descended into chaos, he became increasingly disheartened. Wordsworth's depiction of the revolution reflects his own personal journey from idealism to disillusionment as he grapples with the contradictions and complexities of political upheaval:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
But to be young was very heaven!—Oh! times,
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways
Of custom, law, and statute, took at once
The attraction of a country in romance!

In these lines, Wordsworth recalls the euphoria and excitement of the early days of the revolution, when hopes were high and the potential was enormous. However, he goes on to lament how those initial hopes were dashed by the violence and bloodshed that followed, as the revolution descended into tyranny and oppression (p. 238):

But when events
Brought less encouragement, and unto these
The immediate proof of principles no more
Could be entrusted, while the events themselves,
Worn out in greatness, and in novelty,
Less occupied the mind, and sentiments
Could through my understanding's natural growth
No longer justify themselves through faith maintained
Of inward consciousness, and hope that laid
Her hand upon its object, evidence
Safer, of universal application, such
As could not be impeach'd, was sought elsewhere.
But now, become oppressors in their turn,
Frenchmen had changed a war of self-defence
For one of conquest, losing sight of all.

His reflections on the French Revolution served as a cautionary tale, reminding readers of the dangers of unchecked idealism and the importance of tempering lofty aspirations with practical wisdom.

William Wordsworth repeatedly emphasises the importance of nature to an individual's intellectual and spiritual development. A solid relationship with nature helps individuals connect to both the spiritual and the social worlds, as the love of nature can lead to a love of humankind. In the poem "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey" (1798), the speaker reflects on how nature has shaped their emotional and spiritual growth. They speak of how nature brings "tranquil restoration" (l. 31) and has guided them from the wild passions of youth to a more mature understanding of the world. They emphasise nature's role in offering peace and understanding, describing it as a "serene and blessed mood." (l. 38). Likewise, "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" (1802) captures Wordsworth's sense of joy and connection to nature. The sight of a field of daffodils by a lake deeply moves him, and the memory of this scene provides him with comfort in later moments of solitude: "They flash upon that inward eye / Which is the bliss of solitude / And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils."²² (l.21-24). Both in her narrative and poetry, Emily seems not only to share Wordsworth's deep connection with nature but also his idea of a "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (2014, p.21).

From Shelley, Emily assimilated the philosophical inquiries into the human condition, life, and death. For instance, Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1818) meditates on the impermanence of human power and glory as compared with the sublime boundlessness of the desert sands. The poem (1893, p. 1068) tells the story of a ruined statue in the desert, a once-great king's attempt to immortalise himself through a monument. However, time has eroded both the statue and the memory of the ruler, as depicted in the last three lines of the poem: "No thing beside remains. Round the decay / Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare / The lone and level sands stretch far away" (l.12-14). Emily also explores the vanity of human pride and the ephemeris of human conquest and fortune in her poem "The Old Stoic": "Riches I hold in light esteem / And Love I laugh to scorn / And lust of Fame was but a dream / That vanished with the morn." (l.1-4) (1841). Likewise, Shelley's (1893, p. 1136) "Ode to the West Wind" (1819) reflects on the cycles of life, death, and rebirth, with the wind symbolising both destruction

²² On a side note, one can also notice the poet's influence on Emily Brontë not only in the themes covered and the construing of natural and emotional elements but also in the metrics. This poem is written in iambic tetrameters, a meter of choice in many of her poems, such as "There was a time when my cheek burned" ("There was a time when my cheek burned / To give such scornful fiends the lie;" (1839) and "Faith and Despondency" (The winter wind is loud and wild, / Come close to me, my darling child" l.1-2).

and regeneration. The wind stands as a metaphor for the poet's desires for transformation and renewal:

Make me thy Lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one! (l.57-62)

In this passage (from the fifth section of the poem), the poet asks the West Wind to make them like the forest, with falling leaves symbolising death or decline. However, the speaker also sees this destruction as part of a natural cycle that can lead to renewal, with the "mighty harmonies" (l.59) of the wind bringing both destruction and rebirth. Further, in the closing lines of the poem, the poet addresses the Wind, inquiring about the potential of renewal: "O Wind / If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" (l.69-70).

As we shall see in Chapter III of this work, the wind plays a central role in evoking both the sublime power of nature and the cyclical processes of life, death, and rebirth. In Brontë's works, the wind often mirrors the turbulent forces that shape human destiny, serving as a metaphor for the primal forces of life that both create and destroy. The wind's presence highlights nature's raw power, reflecting inner turmoil, spiritual longing, and the inevitable return to nature after death. In the poem "The wind was rough which tore" (1839), the poet uses the wind as a symbol of the powerful, often destructive forces of fate and time, as well as a metaphor for death. The wind is portrayed as violent, marking the inevitable passage from life to death, but it also hints at a kind of release and transition, aligning with the broader theme of rebirth: "The wind was rough which tore / That leaf from its parent tree / The fate was cruel which bore / The withering corpse to me." (l.1-4). The wind's destructive power tears the leaf (a symbol of life) from its life source. However, the leaf's detachment from the tree can also suggest a transition from one state to another—death leading to another stage in the natural cycle, echoing the theme of rebirth in nature after destruction. In "Often rebuked, yet always back returning"²³ (n/d), the poet views the wind in a more empowering light, as a

²³ First published in 1850, no manuscript has ever been found for this poem, which raises some doubts as to its authorship. Nonetheless, Gezari (1992, p. 290) quotes Chitham, who argues for Emily's authorship on the grounds that the "general content of the poem is quite characteristic of Emily in certain ways" and that "some of its language resembles that of other poems written by her". However, the editor of the 1992 edition adds: "Emily Brontë composed only six poems in iambic pentameter, while a significant proportion of Charlotte Brontë's poetic output is in this metre." There is no doubt that

natural force that reflects the speaker's strength to weather life's storms. In this sense, the wind symbolises not just death or destruction but endurance and the ongoing presence of life, despite the existential challenges. The poem reflects Brontë's belief in self-reliance and the inevitability of death, but also the importance of living fully, without fear: "I'll walk, where my own nature would be leading: / It vexes me to choose another guide: / Where the grey flocks in ferny glens are feeding; / Where the wild wind blows on the mountain side." (l. 13-16).

In this passage, the wind is wild and free, embodying the speaker's desire to live according to their own nature, unaffected by societal pressures or external constraints. The wind, blowing on the mountainside, suggests a powerful, untamed force that mirrors the speaker's resilience and autonomy. It aligns with the theme of life's cycles in that it evokes the wind as a constant, ongoing force, one that cannot be controlled but must be faced with strength and acceptance.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the wind is a key symbol throughout the novel as it shapes the lives of its characters. The very name "Wuthering Heights" refers to the violent weather characteristic of the moorland setting, and the wind is frequently described as both oppressive and liberating. One of the earliest but also most evocative moments involving the wind occurs after Lockwood wakes up from the nightmarish apparition of Catherine and Heathcliff is left alone in the panelled chamber:

He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. 'Come in! come in!' he sobbed. 'Cathy, do come. Oh, do - ONCE more! Oh! my heart's darling! hear me THIS time, Catherine, at last!' The spectre showed a spectre's ordinary caprice: it gave no sign of being; but the snow and wind whirled wildly through, even reaching my station, and blowing out the light. (p. 23)

Heathcliff, in a fit of grief, expresses his yearning for Catherine to haunt him. The wind crosses the threshold of the window, invades the room, dances in circles and teases the supplicant by snuffing the candle, blurring the threshold between life and death.

There are other influences in the works of Emily Brontë. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's influence, particularly through *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), can be perceived

Charlotte, to a greater or lesser extent, edited the poem as she did others in preparation for the 1850 edition, but it is believed that she would never pass her work as her sister's. Guimarães (2002, p. 513) agrees with and quotes Juliet Barker who says: "...the poem seems typical of her work, exploring ideas which recur in other poems."

mainly in the exploration of the themes of isolation, nature's devastating power, and elements of the supernatural. Coleridge's blending of the natural and the mystical resonates to some extent with Brontë's poetry, which often delves into the Sublime, where human emotion meets the overwhelming forces of nature. Both writers portray characters in extreme emotional and physical states, wrestling with guilt, suffering, or awe, and there is a shared fascination with the metaphysical or otherworldly.

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the idea of a cursed figure bound to wander in isolation finds echoes in Emily's depictions of solitary figures and haunting landscapes. Moreover, Coleridge's Romantic vision of nature as both beautiful and terrifying parallels the poet's own portrayal of wild, untamed settings that reflect inner emotional turmoil. For instance, Coleridge writes (2015, p. 14): "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide, wide sea! / And never a saint took pity on / My soul in agony." (Part IV, l.9-12). The lines depict the intense isolation of the mariner, cut off from both human and divine connection, by the use of the epizeuxis "alone" and the religious imagery of the saint (a figure who, by definition, would and should show compassion on all beings) not taking pity on his soul. This theme of isolation resonates deeply with Emily Brontë's poetry, where solitary figures frequently experience profound alienation, whether from society or nature. In Brontë's poem "Fair sinks the summer evening now" (1839), for example, the speaker expresses profound loneliness and difficulty in coping with the silence surrounding them: "Then why is all so sad and lone? / No merry footstep on the stair, / No laugh, no heart-awaking tone, / But voiceless silence everywhere." (l. 13-16). Again, in Coleridge's lines "And I had done a hellish thing, / And it would work 'em woe: / For all averred, I had killed the bird / That made the breeze to blow." (Part II, l.9-12), one may perceive the mariner's guilt for killing the albatross, an act that brings upon him a curse. This theme of unintended consequences and moral guilt echoes in Brontë's "Were they shepherds, who sat all day" (1844), where the speaker contemplates the consequences of their actions: "The guiltless blood upon my hands / Will shut me out from heaven, / And here, and even in foreign lands, / I cannot find a haven." (Stanza 10). Both authors examine the weight of moral choices and the way guilt or defiance shapes one's relationship to a larger, often hostile, natural and spiritual world.

We may also point out a strong connection between Coleridge's work and *Wuthering Heights*, as both explore wild, uncontrollable emotions, the supernatural, and nature's power.

Lines 59-62 of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* read: "The ice was here, the ice was there, / The ice was all around: / It cracked and growled, and roared and howled, / Like noises in a swound!" (Part I). This vivid description of a wild, hostile natural environment mirrors the untamed atmosphere of the moors in *Wuthering Heights*:

About midnight, while we still sat up, the storm came rattling over the Heights in full fury. There was a violent wind, as well as thunder, and either one or the other split a tree off at the corner of the building. (p. 66).

Here, the violent storm outside the house mirrors the tempestuous emotions inside, particularly Heathcliff's passionate, untamed nature and his devastating decision to leave the Heights. Much like in Coleridge's poem, the natural world in Brontë's novel is an active, almost metaphysical force.

Another influence on Emily Brontë, both thematically and in character building, is the archetype of the Byronic hero. This figure is typically portrayed as a dark, brooding, and rebellious individual, often in conflict with societal norms or authority. He is introspective and harbours a sense of inner torment or guilt stemming from a mysterious or tragic past. This character is frequently marked by a combination of arrogance, intelligence, and emotional depth, which sets them apart from others and makes them both alluring and dangerous. The Byronic hero often remains isolated, unable to fully integrate into society due to their defiance of conventions and their disillusionment with the world.

Manfred (1817) is one of Lord Byron's most notable works and depicts the Byronic hero through the character of its eponymous protagonist. In this three-act dramatic poem, Manfred is a tormented nobleman who seeks escape from his guilt and suffering through supernatural means. The poem begins with Manfred summoning supernatural spirits to erase the memory of his past, particularly the guilt over the death of a mysterious woman, Astarte, who may have been his lover or sister. However, the spirits are unable to grant him this wish, and Manfred rejects their offers of power or solace. Throughout the poem, Manfred roams the Alps, reflecting on life, death, and his sense of isolation. He encounters various supernatural beings, including a witch and the spirits of the dead, but he refuses to submit to any higher powers, maintaining his independence even in the face of death. In the end, as death approaches, he confronts his fate on his own terms, refusing salvation or damnation, and dies unrepentant,

asserting his defiance to the very end. The work is a meditation on guilt, free will, and the limits of human power.

Heathcliff and Manfred share several key traits, thus allowing for an echo of Byron's work in Emily Brontë's narrative. Both are tormented by past guilt and are haunted by their pasts. Manfred is consumed by remorse over Astarte's death, while Heathcliff's torment stems from his obsessive love for Catherine and the pain of her rejection and subsequent death. They are driven by inner turmoil and seem incapable of finding peace or redemption. The two characters are also connected by their inclination to isolation and defiance of societal norms and authority. Manfred refuses to bow to supernatural powers or seek absolution, even as he confronts death. Similarly, Heathcliff stands outside conventional morality and social structures, acting on his own desires and engaging in vengeful behaviour without regard for societal or moral constraints.

Like Heathcliff at the conclusion of his vengeful annihilation, Manfred appears to be in a position of apparent dominance over everything. He summons spirits ("By the strong curse which is upon my soul, / The thought which is within me and around me, / I do compel ye to my will. Appear!" (I.i 49-50), but the only outcome he desires is death on his own terms, unrepentant and free, just as Heathcliff harbours no hope of a peaceful death: "I have neither a fear, nor a presentiment, nor a hope of death" (p. 246). Manfred's desire for death is obscurely and inevitably linked to his contact with Astarte, just as Heathcliff's mental torment is intertwined with his urge for contact with Catherine after her death. Manfred feels that if he touches her, he will attain happiness, much like Heathcliff attempts to grasp Catherine's spirit when he exhumes her body. His deliriums condemn him to be his own Hell:

Come and sit by me!
My solitude is solitude no more,
But peopled with the Furies;—I have gnashed
My teeth in darkness till returning morn,
Then cursed myself till sunset;—I have prayed
For madness as a blessing. (II.ii 138-143).

This parallels Heathcliff's behaviour by Catherine's deathbed: "'Don't torture me till I'm as mad as yourself,' cried he, wrenching his head free, and grinding his teeth" (p. 123).

In both storylines, we find a forbidden and desperate love marked by a fatal sin ("To torture thus each other, though it were / The deadliest sin to love as we have loved." II.iv 141-142), hinting at incest—a theme also raised in the relationship between the two protagonists of *Wuthering Heights*. Astarte was, for Manfred, his only companion in his wanderings ("The sole companion of his wanderings / And watchings—her, whom of all earthly things / That lived, the only thing he seemed to love." III.iii 51-53) and he begs the Witch to wake the dead or make him one of them: "Must wake the dead, or lay me low with them. / Do so—in any shape—in any hour— / With any torture—so it be the last." (II.ii 153-155). Similarly, Heathcliff implores Catherine to haunt him: "Be with me always - take any form - drive me mad! only DO not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you!" (p. 129). Before he dies, Heathcliff makes a ghoulish arrangement with the sexton to leave the adjoining sides of his and Catherine's coffins open so that in death they may finally achieve the consummation of their love - a perfect and irrevocable union, which had tormented and eluded them while they were alive.

Manfred's proclamation of guilt, blaming himself for Astarte's death, saying he broke her heart ("Her faults were mine—her virtues were her own— / I loved her, and destroyed her!" (II.ii 123-124)), resonates with Catherine's words on her deathbed: "You and Edgar have broken my heart" (134). Both Manfred and Heathcliff choose a place of retreat: Manfred's tower, where he keeps his lonely vigils, and Heathcliff's panelled room, where he often sought refuge with Catherine. Just as Manfred meets his end in his tower, Heathcliff is found dead in the room, with the window wide open: "Having succeeded in obtaining entrance with another key, I ran to uncloset the panels, for the chamber was vacant; quickly pushing them aside, I peeped in. Mr. Heathcliff was there—laid on his back" (p. 254).

The aftermath of the French Revolution also saw the rise of Gothic Literature, in its grotesque, mysterious, and supernatural events, which reflected the chaos and terror of the revolutionary period. With its violence and instability, it was a source of horror that found expression in Gothic novels such as those by Horace Walpole (*The Castle of Otranto*, 1764), Ann Radcliffe (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794), and Matthew Lewis (*The Monk*, 1796), which incorporated existential and revolutionary anxieties into their work. The Gothic atmosphere is frequently transmitted through the setting of an "antiquated or seemingly antiquated space," such as castles or mansions in faraway countries, and through "raging storms, dark nights, tyranny, incarceration, and torture" (Morris, p 301).

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is densely populated with elements of the Gothic. From the inception of the narrative, the reader is drawn into the dark, hostile, and isolated world of the Yorkshire moors by the first narrator, Mr Lockwood, through whom the sublime atmosphere of the Gothic is firstly conveyed. Through his eyes, the reader will witness the repugnance and brutality of the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights and feel the terror in his encounter with the supernatural, when the ghostly, bloody apparition of Catherine appears at his window. Heathcliff, the tragic central character of the novel, is in many ways an archetypal Gothic character. He is shown as a mysterious, dark and exceedingly dangerous character. He is wholly bent on revenge for perceived past wrongs and his passion is all-consuming. Heathcliff's love and fury leads him to destroy the woman he desires by playing a part in her mental and physical torture. He also shows no mercy in destroying people for whom he does not care, however undeserving. Isabella Linton falls in love with Heathcliff and is abused so viciously that she is forced to leave him, a social taboo for the period. He shows no remorse and does nothing to make her return. Their son Linton is denied medical care as he has fulfilled his purpose in usurping Thrushcross Grange for Heathcliff. Heathcliff's acts of violence against defenceless victims show his utter disregard for human suffering and it manifests itself in his use of torture and imprisonment. When he imprisons young Cathy at Wuthering Heights he does so to emotionally torture Edgar Linton, the man who took Catherine from him, but it is equally tortuous to poor Cathy. Heathcliff's use of cold-blooded emotional and psychological torture elevates him beyond the mere scorned man of passion to the disturbed and cruel monster that he becomes. Ultimately, there is also the hint of necrophilia in Heathcliff's viewings of Catherine's corpse and his plans to be buried next to her.

Regarding her poetry, Emily's "On the Fall of Zalona" (February 1843), which describes the destruction of the city of Zalona at the hands of Julius Brenzaida, provides us with Gothic imagery: "And hungry dogs with wolflike cry / Unburied corpses tear, / While their gaunt masters gaze and sigh / And scarce the feast forbear." (l.37-40). In these verses, the imagery is stark and brutal, invoking the visceral horrors often associated with Gothic literature. The "hungry dogs with wolflike cry" evoke wild, predatory creatures, emphasising the breakdown of the natural order, where domesticated animals turn feral and even necrophiliac under the strain of hunger. The tearing of "unburied corpses" introduces a macabre element, blending the imagery of death and decay with grotesque feeding—a key Gothic theme that blurs the

line between life and death, in this case, the actual consumption of the dead. The "gaunt masters" who "gaze and sigh" embody a psychological torment, haunted by both the physical devastation around them and their inner struggle to resist their own monstrosity.

The Revolution also inspired a surge in historical fiction, with writers revisiting the revolution and other historical events to explore the human consequences of political upheaval. Sir Walter Scott is credited with popularising the historical novel with works like *Waverley* (1814). Later, Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) portrays the revolution's impact on individuals by blending fictional characters with real historical events. As to non-fictional/commentary works, one could highlight Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) where, from a clear conservative standpoint, he condemns the excessive violence and chaos brought about by the revolutionaries.

The manner in which the events in the late 18th century-early 19th century directly and/or indirectly impacted the Brontës may be analysed from different perspectives. Even though none of the four siblings had even been born yet (of the four, Charlotte is the oldest, being born in 1816) and their father was a teen at the time of the Reign of Terror, its ideology, principles and actions made their way indirectly into the Brontë household. Historically speaking, Patrick Brontë, who was 12 years old in 1789, may not have seen the French Revolution. What he may have witnessed or at least been directly impacted by was the Irish Rebellion of 1798 (the year that, aged 21, Patrick, after working menial jobs, took on a teaching position), which, albeit at a smaller scale, resembled what had occurred in France.

The 1798 Rebellion was a major uprising against British rule in Ireland. The main organising force was the Society of United Irishmen, a republican revolutionary group influenced by the ideas of the American and French revolutions: originally formed by Presbyterian radicals angry at being shut out of power by the Anglican establishment, they were joined by many from the majority Catholic population. The rebellion aimed to establish an independent Irish republic and unite Irish Catholics and Protestants in the fight against British control. It began in May 1798 and was marked by several violent clashes between poorly armed Irish rebels and British forces. Although the rebels achieved relative successes in some regions, they were ultimately crushed by the well-prepared and well-garnished British military, aided by loyalist militias. This defeat had long-lasting consequences, leading to the

1801 Act of Union, which merged Ireland with Great Britain, effectively ending Ireland's legislative independence. In the aftermath, Patrick Brontë, still "Brunty", moved to England in 1802, having earned a scholarship to study theology at Cambridge, changing his name to Brontë and never to see Ireland again.

The principles of the French Revolution, perhaps in their most abstract form, reached the Brontë siblings from a very early age. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity resonated not only with the Brontë patriarch, Patrick, but also with the children. By 1829, the Brontës were already well established in Haworth, in a household which also included their Aunt Elizabeth Branwell. There was an undeniable intellectual environment at home, where the patriarch of the family fostered an eclectic educational curriculum, which included grammar, mathematics, philosophy, art and literature. There was also a passion for foreign languages: Branwell learnt Greek, Charlotte was fluent in French, and Emily was keen on German.

One of the most striking reflexes of these ideals may be found in the challenge posed to traditional social hierarchies and gender roles. Despite coming from a rather conservative household, none of the Brontë sisters set marriage or child-rearing as their primary goal. They also frowned upon class distinction, and Tabitha, the house cook, was always seen more of a family member than a servant. This taste for the unconventional was inevitably reflected in the sister's novels, namely in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *The Tenant of The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which depict characters who rebel against societal norms and challenge the authority of the landed gentry, the three of them women (Jane Eyre, Catherine Earnshaw, and Helen Graham, respectively), which in itself, can be considered subversive.

On the one hand, Jane Eyre's quest for independence and self-determination can be viewed as a reflection of the revolutionary spirit of the time, which challenged traditional hierarchies and advocated for individual rights and freedoms: "I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will." (Brontë, 2015, p. 372). By releasing herself from Rochester's embrace, Jane rejects the idea of being passive or submissive in any kind of relationship, either personal or professional, declaring herself to be a free individual with agency and freedom of choice. On the other hand, Catherine Earnshaw's

character embodies personal defiance against social norms and expectations. Her passionate nature and relationships with Heathcliff and Edgar Linton reflect the struggle for individual autonomy within the constraints of societal expectations. In her most acknowledged proclamation (and even celebrated as the epitome of romantic love), she declares: "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." (p. 64). The physical transcendence of her connection with Heathcliff conflicts with conventional societal expectations and norms, as Catherine refuses to suppress her feelings, boldly asserting her identity in the being of a man who is not her husband-to-be and finding it absurd and impracticable to be separated from Heathcliff despite marrying Edgar.

In fact, much like religion and other 19th-century societal institutions, marriage does not thrive in Emily's works: both in her poetry and in *Wuthering Heights*, love is dissociated from marriage. The characters are tormented, violent lovers, and rarely do we hear wedding bells at the end. Catherine and Heathcliff both marry other people, but their connection remains unchanged. Catherine Earnshaw's character challenges traditional gender roles, as her strong will and emotional independence defy the expectations placed on women in Victorian society. Additionally, by contrasting Catherine and her sister-in-law, Isabella Linton, one can also perceive the subversion of the tropes associated with a woman's role at the time: while on the surface there's a play with the concepts of the fallen/virtuous woman, Catherine taking on the role of the amoral woman and Isabella as the naïve romantic damsel, easy prey to Heathcliff's deceitful machinations, neither are bi-dimensional. There is an undeniable innocence in Catherine's feelings and reasoning (she is convinced that marrying Edgar would somehow take Heathcliff out of his servitude and that both suitors would peacefully accept the arrangement) and Isabella, despite her marriage and early pregnancy, abandons the marital home and escapes to London. Similarly, Helen Graham, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, challenges the restrictive Victorian social conventions when she leaves her abusive husband and devotes herself to her art. At a time when divorce was extremely difficult and carried great social stigma, particularly for women, Helen's departure from her alcoholic husband was seen as subversive. The rejection of patriarchal control was groundbreaking for female characters in literature:

December 20th, 1826.—The fifth anniversary of my wedding day, and I trust, the last I shall spend under this roof. My resolution is formed, my plan concocted, and already partly put in execution. My conscience does not blame me, but while the purpose ripens, let me beguile a few of these long winter evenings in stating the case for my own satisfaction—dreary amusement enough, but having the air of a useful occupation, and being pursued as a task, it will suit me better than a lighter one. (Brontë, 2008, p. 410)

These subversive elements in the novels of the Brontës, particularly their challenges to social conventions and rigid gender roles, did not go unnoticed by early critics. Their varied and often polarised responses reflect the controversial nature of the sisters' works to their contemporaries, which provoked a wide range of critical interpretations.

Emily Brontë's poetry, published under the pseudonym Ellis Bell in 1846, in an anthology together with her sisters Charlotte (Currer) and Anne (Acton), received quiet but rather positive reactions. Alexander's *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës* (2006) lists some of these reviews:

On 4 July 1846 the *Critic* welcomed the volume's unconventional, 'genuine poetry' as a ray of sunshine in 'this utilitarian age', and the *Athenaeum* recognized the 'instinct of song' in 'the three brothers' though 'in very unequal proportions': Acton's poems required 'the indulgences of affection', but Ellis had 'a fine quaint spirit' and 'an evident power of wing that may reach heights not here attempted'.

An anonymous reviewer in *The Athenaeum* (1846) praised her "strong original mind, full of poetry and passion," noting her potential for even greater achievements. However, her poetic voice was often confused and sometimes overshadowed by her siblings at the time of publication. Many thought the three sisters were the same person, and if so, there were notorious disarrangements and inconsistencies in the poetry. The first edition of the collection sold only two copies. In later years, Emily's poetry gained greater recognition. Charlotte Brontë (1995a, p. 742) herself, in the 1850 preface to *Wuthering Heights*, defended her sister's intense and introspective nature, describing her as possessing a "peculiar music – wild, melancholy and elevating." Emily's poems "are short, but they are very genuine: they stirred my heart like a trumpet, when I read them alone and in secret" (p. 119).

While *Wuthering Heights* may currently be considered a classic of English literature, at the time of its release, the novel was not accepted as a respectable work. The novel was seen as offensive to the public as it challenged strict Victorian ideals involving religious hypocrisy,

morality, social class, and gender inequality. Early reviews of *Wuthering Heights* were particularly critical of its raw emotional power and unorthodox narrative style. For instance, an anonymous reviewer for *The Examiner* in 1848 harshly declared, "This is a strange book. It is not without evidences of considerable power: but, as a whole, it is wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable; and the people who make up the drama are savages." (Brontë, 1990, p. 302). The novel's perceived extremity and moral ambiguity led many Victorian reviewers, such as *The Quarterly Review* (Watson, 1949, p. 245) to label it as morally suspect, as "too odiously and abominably pagan to be palatable even to the most vitiated class of English reader". An anonymous *Atlas* review, dated January 1848, considered the novel to fall short of its potential, despite recognising the spark of talent and being intrigued by the author of the novel: "Wuthering Heights is a strange, inartistic story. There is evidence in every chapter of a sort of rugged power – an unconscious strength – which the possessor seems never to think of turning to the best advantage. The general effect is inexpressibly painful. (...) The work of Currer Bell is a great performance; that of Ellis Bell is only a promise, but is a colossal one." (p. 300).

Despite these negative reviews, some critics acknowledged the novel's impact, and, while initial reactions to Emily Brontë's work were frequently negative, focused on its harshness and emotional rawness, later critics began to recognise her poetic depth and passionate vision, cementing her status as at least a unique voice within the literary scenario of her time. David Cecil's comments on *Wuthering Heights* make one of the early examples of an academic recognising the novel's worth. According to Cecil (1934, p. 148), *Wuthering Heights* had not been appreciated as it deserved because it had been judged as a Victorian novel and compared to Dickens or Thackeray. Cecil argues that Brontë never meant it to be anything like them, thus putting forward the novel's "atemporality": "She writes about different subjects in a different manner and from a different point of view. She stands outside the main current of nineteenth-century fiction as markedly as Blake stands outside the main current of eighteenth-century poetry."

As the field of literary criticism expanded, new perspectives emerged. Marxist interpretations, notably those of critic Terry Eagleton, examine class struggle and social dynamics within Brontë's narratives, revealing the economic undercurrents that influence character motivations and relationships. These analyses underscore the ways in which Brontë's exploration of the lives of her characters reflects the broader socio-economic context of her

time. Eagleton (2005, p. 100) begins by saying that *Wuthering Heights* differs from Charlotte Brontë's novels, which seek to reconcile conflicts:

Wuthering Heights, on the other hand, confronts the tragic truth that the passion and society it presents are not fundamentally reconcilable - that there remains at the deepest level an ineradicable contradiction between them which refuses to be unlocked, which obtrudes itself as the very stuff and secret of experience.

He then highlights that the choice between Heathcliff and Edgar is the linchpin event of the novel, which is decisive in bringing about the tragedy: "In a crucial act of self-betrayal and bad faith, Catherine rejects Heathcliff as a suitor because he is socially inferior to Linton; and it is from this that the chain of destruction follows." (p. 101). Eagleton then focuses on Heathcliff's lack of a defined place within the social and economic structure of *Wuthering Heights*, which makes him Catherine's natural companion since she, as the daughter, is not expected to inherit and is the least economically integral person in the family. After his 3-year absence, Heathcliff possesses "gentility" to turn the capitalists' weapons against themselves and dominate them by their own means. However, the power he thus gains is ultimately self-defeating, as his systematic revenge steadily "drains him of blood, impels and possesses him as an external force" (2005, 105). Eagleton implies that society's dominating weapons destroy Heathcliff, whether he is their victim or wields them, and this accounts for his self-destructive decline at the end of the novel.

Feminist criticism has further enriched the understanding of Brontë's works, with influential scholars such as Gilbert and Gubar, who argue in *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (1979) that Brontë's portrayal of strong female characters, like Catherine Earnshaw and Nelly Dean, challenges the norms of her time. This perspective emphasises Brontë's exploration of female autonomy, gender roles, and the limitations imposed by a patriarchal society, offering a nuanced insight into women's inner lives and desires. Gilbert argues that the novel possesses a "visionary" quality. In her discussion of the novel's "visionary" element, she complains that most critics looking at Catherine's complaint of the 'shattered prison' and her 'wearying to escape into that glorious

world' draw the conclusion that the novel proposes a "Romantic *Liebestod*"²⁴. Gilbert points out that Brontë had a more radical vision,

... the sum of this novel's visionary parts is an almost shocking revisionary whole. Heaven (or its rejection), hell, Satan, a fall, mystical politics, metaphysical romance, orphanhood, and the question of origins - disparate as some of these matters may seem, they all cohere in a rebelliously topsy-turvy retelling of Milton's and Western culture's central tale of the fall of woman and her shadow self, Satan. This fall, says Brontë, is not a fall *into* hell. It is a fall *from* 'hell' into 'heaven', not a fall from grace (in the religious sense) but a fall into grace (in the cultural sense). Moreover, for the heroine who falls, it is the loss of Satan rather than the loss of God that signals the painful passage from innocence to experience. (p.255).

Postcolonial critiques, particularly Susan Meyer's *Imperialism at Home: Race and Victorian Women's Fiction* (1996), apply a postcolonial lens to *Wuthering Heights*, examining how the novel reflects 19th-century anxieties about race, class, and colonialism. Meyer argues that Heathcliff's ambiguous origins and dark complexion invite a reading of his character as representing the racial "Other." She suggests that Heathcliff's outsider status and the brutal treatment he receives from the Earnshaw and Linton families parallel the marginalisation and exploitation of colonised peoples during the British Empire's expansion. Moreover, his mysterious origins and outsider status contribute to his portrayal as an exotic and enigmatic figure, embodying the fears and prejudices of the dominant white society:

Pulled under the chandelier, scrutinized through spectacles, and pronounced upon as if he were a specimen of some strange animal species, Heathcliff is subjected to the potent gaze of a racial arrogance deriving from British imperialism. In Heathcliff's dark face, the Lintons read his nature and his destiny, and they find in it a license to punish him for crimes of property putatively committed by others of similar appearance. Isabella first describes Heathcliff as a gypsy, giving him the generic designation for a dark-complexioned alien in England which is attributed to him throughout the novel. But in a moment Mr. Linton's gaze becomes more historically specific, as he recognizes in Heathcliff "that strange acquisition my late neighbour made, in his journey to Liverpool—a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway". (p. 97)

This portrayal reflects colonial attitudes towards non-European peoples and cultures during the 19th century. Heathcliff's experiences of racism, classism, and economic exploitation intersect to shape his identity and experiences within the novel. His marginalised status as an orphan and his perceived racial otherness contribute to his social and economic

²⁴ When used as a literary term, "*Liebestod*" (from German *Liebe*, love, and *Tod*, death) refers to the theme of erotic death or "love death," meaning the two lovers' consummation of their love in death or after death. Examples include Pyramus and Thisbe from Greek mythology and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

marginalisation, exacerbating his feelings of alienation and resentment towards those who have oppressed him.

The novel, according to Meyer (1996, p. 118), subtly critiques the racial and imperial ideologies of the time by portraying Heathcliff's revenge against those who oppress him, hinting at the broader tensions of imperial power and the subjugation of the "Other" even within England's domestic borders:

When Heathcliff acquires power, in his years away from Wuthering Heights, however, he threatens to make the attempted racial metamorphosis work in the opposite direction, as he proposes to take his revenge on the white skin and blue eyes that have tyrannized over him. He tells Catherine: "You'd hear of odd things, if I lived alone with that mawkish, waxen face; the most ordinary would be painting on its white the colours of the rainbow, and turning the blue eyes black, every day or two; they detestably resemble Linton's" (p. 83). When Heathcliff, now "master" at the Heights, describes Isabella as an animal—"a mean-minded brach"—and terms her "slavish" (p. 117), the reversal is accomplished and his imperialist power over her is complete.

Emily Brontë's literary environment was deeply entwined with the political and philosophical currents of her time, particularly through the influence of the Romantic movement. This connection reflects the spirit of rebellion and introspection in her works, while also revealing her preoccupation with the notion of thresholds—moments or spaces where boundaries are crossed, whether between life and death, the natural and the supernatural, or the human and the infinite. The concept of "threshold" constitutes a powerful image for Brontë's work, especially when discussing the presence of the Sublime in her writings.

As we move into the next chapter, this focus on thresholds becomes crucial in understanding Brontë's engagement with the aesthetic concept of the Sublime, where the experience of crossing into the void, the unknown or the overwhelming often serves as the key to unlocking the vast inner and outer landscapes of her writings.

Chapter II

On the Meaning and Different Concepts (and Applications) of the Sublime

Science is not enough, religion is not enough, art is not enough, politics and economics are not enough, nor is love, nor is duty, nor is action however disinterested, nor, however sublime, is contemplation. Nothing short of everything will really do.

Aldous Huxley, *Island*, Chapter IX

Nowadays, one tends to refer to something as being *sublime* as a synonym for 'excellent', 'magnificent', or 'superb', that is, as an adjective to qualify a referent and highlight its high quality, uniqueness, or beauty. We commonly hear phrases such as "Mozart's piano concertos are sublime", "Dior's haute couture winter collection is sublime", or even "The gourmet hamburger you ordered at the pub was sublime". The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'Sublime' as an adjective with three meanings:

a) lofty, grand, or exalted in thought, expression, or manner; b) of outstanding spiritual, intellectual, or moral worth; and c) tending to inspire awe usually because of elevated quality (as of beauty, nobility, or grandeur) or transcendent excellence. ('Sublime,' n.d.)

However, the word 'Sublime' has not only suffered a long process of evolution, but it has also acquired several meanings throughout the centuries. Etymologically speaking, we can trace its origin to the Latin *sublimen*, as a word derived by a prepositional prefix *sub-*, here with the meaning of 'up to' or 'close to', and *limen*, which could be loosely translated into English as 'limit', 'threshold', or 'lintel/sill' of an opening such as a doorway or a window. Thus, the word *sublimen* would stand as 'up to the limit' or 'close to the threshold'.

The word evolved throughout the Late Middle Ages up to the 16th century, into the Latin verb *sublimare* (to place in an elevated position) and via *moyen français* (middle French) to *sublimier*, meaning "to give a more elevated character to". In fact, the verb 'to sublimate' was jargon for alchemists who wished to describe the process by which a solid element or substance would turn to a gas when subjected to heat or pressure, thus purifying it and transmuting both alchemist and element/substance into a higher plane of existence. The term 'sublimation' is still used today in modern chemistry to describe the same transition, albeit without the spiritual component given by alchemists.

2.1 Longinus's *Peri Hupsos*

The word 'Sublime' began to acquire its modern meaning in the 17th century when it appeared in the translation of a fragmentary and epistolary text by the Greek rhetorician Dionysius Longinus, of whom we have very few biographical details. *Peri Hupsos*, then thought to be written in the 3rd century A.D.²⁵, is addressed to a Roman figure whose name was Posthumius Terentianus, a cultured Roman and public figure, though little has remained of his life or the nature of the relationship between the two.

The first part of the text stands as an Introduction. Longinus begins by defining the Sublime and moves on to discuss whether the Sublime is innate to an individual, in the sense that one may be born a genius, and naturally know how to write masterpieces, or whether one can acquire rules and techniques through a learning process and artistic practice. Then, Longinus devotes a few sections to discussing what is not Sublime, in an attempt to circumscribe his definition by stating what it is not, such as artifices like "Affectation, Bombast, False Sentiment, Frigid Conceits", which come across as sounding very impressive but, in Longinus's opinion, are meaningless, empty, and just gratuitous exaggerations.

It is in Part 4 that Longinus covers the five different features of the Sublime: grand thoughts, passionate language, figures, noble diction, and harmonious sentence structure. Most of what follows in the essay is his labouring and expanding on these five aspects. Section A deals with the "grandeur of thought" as the natural outcome of nobility of the soul. Section B, focusing on the power of moving the passions, is unfortunately absent from the manuscript. Section C, entitled "Figures of Speech", is where Longinus reflects on the need for passion and the effect it has on literary production. He states that, when one feels passion, one tends to ignore certain formalities in grammar, combine multiple poetic figures, and somewhat lose one's sense of proportion. Passion is what allows the artist to reach and impact his audience. Nonetheless, the formation and use of figures of speech maximise the elevated expression if they are masterfully used. Such figures should be used naturally and only as per the demands of the contextual environment.

²⁵ There is some doubt as to the real authorship of the work, and it is now generally accepted that the text is actually from the 1st century A.D..

Longinus lists the type of figures of speech that would be most conducive to the experience of the Sublime: the rhetorical question, which immediately appeals to the emotions; the apostrophe, the direct interpellation of a person, object or abstraction; the asyndeton, in which the omission of conjunctions gives a quick movement of feelings and emotions or, on the other hand, the polysyndeton, in which the repetition of conjunctions provides rhythm to the speech. Longinus also mentions the hyperbaton, the intentional inversion of words for emphasis. Other figures are also mentioned, such as the anaphora, the periphrasis, the metaphor, comparisons and similes, and the hyperbole, which contribute to the graceful expression of the artist. In short, the use of figures of speech must be intimately associated with the writer's thoughts and emotions. Section D deals with diction and the power of specific words, and Section E, on the elevation in the arrangement of words, contains some remarks on the vices in the creation of style and rhythm. In the last part, Part 5, the author traces the causes of the death of great literature in his own day.

Longinus conveys the idea of height and elevation by stating that "Sublime, wherever it occurs, consists in a certain loftiness and excellence of language" (Roberts, 1907, p.16). As to where we may find the sublime, he provides several sources: through boldness and grandeur of thoughts ("forming great conceptions"), through the raising of passions ("vehement and inspired passion"), which he considers innate to the human being, but also through what he calls the "product of art", i.e., the skilful application of both feeling and language in writing ("The due formation of figures deals with two sorts of figures, first those of thought and secondly those of expression"), through the use of graceful expression ("noble diction"); and, finally, through a dignified and grand composition of sentences ("dignified and elevated composition") (p. 18). In other words, his primary focus is on language and writing, and not so much on other forms of art such as painting and sculpture.

The first translation of this work, *Du Sublime* (1674) (English translation: *On the Sublime*), by Neoclassical critic and poet Nicolas Boileau, signalled a new interest in the impact of intense emotional effects on artistic creation. Longinus, despite placing emotion as the second of five sources of sublimity, considered it to be the most productive and placed passion at the centre of artistic creation: "For I would confidently pronounce that nothing is so conducive to sublimity as an appropriate display of genuine passion, which bursts out with a

kind of 'fine madness' and divine inspiration, and falls on our ears like the voice of a god." (p. 40).

When describing "Some Marks of True Sublimity", Longinus states that the feeling of "joy and pride" is a mark of sublimity, and that which "always please[s] and please[s] all readers" is another way to categorise what is "truly sublime" (p. 31). In other words, no matter how technically correct or savvy the writer is, should they lack passion and not be willing to take risks, their work will never see a glimpse of sublimity. To Longinus, great authors write with emotion and inspiration, and despite making mistakes, their creative whole is much more than its parts.

As an example of the use of powerful emotion, Longinus draws upon Sappho's description of love. He applauds her use of complex emotions: "she freezes, she burns, she raves, she reasons, and all at the same instant. And this description is designed to show that she is assailed, not by any particular emotion, but by a tumult of different emotions." (p. 42). He is most interested in how she uses details to exemplify these emotions, and the combination leads to, in Longinus' opinion, sublimity. He also commends Homer for being able to incite fear and awe through verse: "[Homer] always picks out the most terrific circumstances.". Longinus goes on to point out the linguistic artifices Homer uses to produce the desired effect:

[He]gives us a vivid picture of men a thousand times on the brink of destruction, every wave threatening them with instant death. Moreover, by his bold and forcible combination of prepositions of opposite meaning he tortures his language to imitate the agony of the scene, the constraint which is put on the words accurately reflecting the anxiety of the sailors' minds, and the diction being stamped, as it were, with the peculiar terror of the situation. (p. 43)

This is an interesting point, as it seems that Longinus is less interested in the emotion of fear than in the appropriate selection of words that produce such emotion in a particular scene.

Longinus writes, "passion requires a certain disorder of language, imitating the agitation and commotion of the soul" and puts forward as one of the main effects of the literary sublime the power to provoke "ecstasy" in the reader, as the ultimate goal of a writer: "Great writing does not persuade; it takes the reader out of himself" (p. 62). In this concept, we are not paradigmatically discussing artifices of persuasion or argumentation, we are

appealing to a level of comprehension that sits beyond itself, beyond Cicero's *Docere, Delectare, Movere* ("To Teach, To Delight, To Move"), as these are all in the domain of artifice and rational thought. Here, the goal of the writer is to trigger a sense of *ekstasis*, which, translated directly from the Greek, means "to stand outside of" or "to transcend [oneself]".

When Longinus discusses the Sublime, he often compares it to a lightning bolt in order to stress the uniqueness of the experience. It is a moment where an extraordinary piece of writing hits both the speaker and the reader, evoking a deeply passionate emotion that uncontrollably manifests, akin to being struck by a lightning bolt. In Longinus's words,

[T]he Sublime, acting with an imperious and irresistible force, sways every reader whether he will or no. Skill in invention, lucid arrangement and disposition of facts, are appreciated not by one passage, or by two, but gradually manifest themselves in the general structure of a work; but a sublime thought, if happily timed, illumines an entire subject with the vividness of a lightning-flash, and exhibits the whole power of the orator in a moment of time. (p. 23)

Therefore, the successful infusion of the sublime in language, thought, and literature endows texts with "an imperious and irresistible force" that "sways every reader" (p. 23), thus shifting listeners from their individual feelings to a collective and shared awe for the literary work being assimilated. The Sublime is, then, supposed to be so powerful in its thoughts, passion, and product of art, that it transcends rationality, elevates the audience to another level, and leaves them overwhelmed and in awe of a literary experience that falls outside the realm of description.

Longinus often describes the Sublime as opposed to rhetoric, as in the art of speaking and writing eloquently and persuasively. Even though the languages of rhetoric and the sublime often overlap, by using the same artistic styles, techniques, and poetic figures, they differ because, first of all, rhetoric is often premeditated. There is an underlying plan and intention to persuade somebody, and, as a result, it lacks spontaneity: it gradually builds up as a slow crescendo, and Longinus compares this to a slow-moving and predictable fire when comparing the works of Demosthenes, whom he considers Sublime, to Cicero's:

Demosthenes is vehement, rapid, vigorous, terrible; he burns and sweeps away all before him; and hence we may liken him to a whirlwind or a thunderbolt: Cicero is like a widespread conflagration, which rolls over and feeds on all around it, whose fire is extensive and burns long, breaking out successively in different places, and finding its fuel now here, now there. (p. 46)

Another critical aspect of Longinus' definition of the Sublime is its compatibility with the concept of Beauty. As only the most gifted and ingenious artists and thinkers were able to produce sublime art, their works would be simultaneously considered beautiful. The Sublime and the Beautiful, then, walk hand in hand, almost interchangeably, with the experience of the Sublime being, at the same time, an experience of the Beautiful, which exceeds the rational limitations of reasoning and emotion. Such compatibility takes us to the works developed by Edmund Burke in the 18th century, which both expand on Longinus's work and break down some of his conceptual framework.

2.1.1 Longinus's Sublime and Sappho

Longinus, despite not delving on matters of sex or gender, mentions Sappho²⁶ as a writer of the Sublime, under the heading "Five Sources of the Sublime (how Sublimity is related to Passion): (i.) Grandeur of Thought", subsection "b. Choice of the most striking circumstances. Sappho's Ode", by stating that Sappho's Sublime resides in her observation of impactful instances of human emotion and experience and then how she masterfully blends them into a unified whole which results in a manifestation of the Sublime. Longinus points out that Sappho's "peculiar excellence lies in the felicity with which she chooses and unites together the most striking and powerful features." (p. 41).

Longinus also highlights how Sappho, in "Ode to Anactoria" (Fragment 31), makes use of imagery and figures of speech such as the metaphor, the synaesthesia and the hyperbole, especially along these lines:

Vain my stricken tongue would a whisper fashion,
Subtly under my skin runs fire ecstatic;
Straightway mists surge dim to my eyes and leave them
Reft of their vision;

Echoes ring in my ears; a trembling seizes
All my body bathed in soft perspiration;
Pale as grass I grow in my passion's madness,
Like one insensate;²⁷

²⁶ Sappho was an ancient Greek poet from the island of Lesbos, born around 630 BCE. The themes in Sappho's poems were mostly about unrequited love, unfulfilled desire, and personal connections, as is the case above, and they meant to be sung with a lyre. Although much of her work has been lost, surviving fragments show a clear and emotionally intense style. Longinus places Sappho at the level of Homer in poetic mastery and depiction of the Sublime.

²⁷ "Ode to Anactoria", 1910 translation by the American poet John Myers O'Hara (Sappho, 2013)

In addition to the metaphor in “Vain my stricken tongue would a whisper fashion”, Longinus points out the different emotions conveyed by the synesthetic imagery of auditory and tactile sensations with the fire on the skin, the echoes in the ears, and the shivering body, which converge in passionate madness akin to standing on a threshold between life and death (“Like one insensate”). Longinus highlights the significance of the antithesis by prompting the reader to “Observe too how her sensations contradict one another—she freezes, she burns, she raves, she reasons, and all at the same instant. And this description is designed to show that she is assailed, not by any particular emotion, but by a tumult of different emotions.” (p. 43) It is in the synthesis of these different emotions crystallised in a moment in time that, to Longinus, resides the Sublime.

Under the premise of this work, comparing Sappho and Emily Brontë would be a compelling exercise, as both, despite coming from vastly different times, cultures, and poetic traditions, are admired for their emotionally intense and deeply personal, often fragmentary, writings. As Sappho’s poems are imbued with passionate, rampant emotions, often focusing on love and longing experienced in solitude, Emily’s poetry is similarly filled with intense emotional outpourings.²⁸ Likewise, the theme of solitude and isolation is common to both poets, as Sappho often depicts social events, such as feasts and festivals, but conveys a sense of permanent isolation and abandonment. The same theme can be seen in Brontë, for instance, in her poem “I am the only being whose doom” (1839), where the speaker seems condemned to doom and exile.²⁹ In addition, Sappho and Emily Brontë come together in their depiction of nature, as they both resort to imagery from the natural world to express emotion and instances of human experience. For example, in Fragment 91, Sappho expresses how “On the hills the shepherds trample the flower underfoot and it lies on the group, darkening in decay”³⁰, thus using nature to reflect the ephemeral and delicate beauty of joy and the permanence of loss. Similarly, both in Emily’s poetic voice and in *Wuthering Heights*, nature seems to be the catalyst to every pivotal moment in the speaker’s/character’s narratives, bringing about life, death and rebirth.

²⁸ For instance, in “No Coward Soul is Mine” (1846), the speaker’s voice in Emily’s poem passionately affirms the strength and constancy of their inner self: “No coward soul is mine / No trembler in the world’s storm-troubled sphere / I see Heaven’s glories shine / And Faith shines equal, arming me from Fear.”

²⁹ The lines “As friendless after eighteen years / As lone as on my natal day” reflect this sense of profound isolation and disconnection from others.

³⁰ “Fragment 91”, in the 2011 dual-text translation by Peter Russell (Sappho, 2013)

2.2 Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757)

In the mid-18th century, the word 'sublime' acquired a new meaning as a new cultural movement was on the rise: the Romantic Movement (1798- 1824)³¹, which began questioning the nature and limitations of the self, and led both artists and philosophers to focus on intense experiences that challenged conscious control and blurred the lines of individual autonomy. Thus, the Sublime became a synonym of defiance to traditional (= neoclassical) systems of thought, which were grounded on traditional and outmoded principles and rhetoric, mostly of the religious and spiritual kind, which were then deemed as unable to convey or translate instants of human experience.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke not only explores the origins of the Sublime and the Beautiful but also separates each into their own respective rational categories. For Burke, the Beautiful is that which is balanced and aesthetically pleasing, while the Sublime (which Burke positions as being the trigger for the strongest of emotions one is capable of feeling) is related to the power to compel and annihilate. It is evident early on in the treatise that Burke elevates the Sublime over the Beautiful, preference that can also be regarded as a sign of the transition from the Neoclassical to the Romantic era. In other words, the Sublime ceased to be seen as subsequent to or another form of beauty, as in Longinus's work, and was gradually gaining its own space as a separate category of aesthetic experience, with features and traits somewhat divergent from those of the Beautiful.

Indeed, Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry* not only examines in depth the differences between the categories of the Sublime and the Beautiful, which are anticipated in the title itself as two distinct concepts, but also goes beyond a mere separation by establishing how and how much they differ, or, even further, oppose each other.

³¹ The Romantic Movement is often considered to have started around 1798, with the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* by William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, a seminal work that marked a shift in English poetry, as it is seen as the manifesto of the Romantic ideals, shedding new light on theoretical and practical concepts such as emotion, nature, and the individual experience over the rationalism of the Enlightenment. As for the end date, 1824 is used as an endpoint, the same year Lord Byron died. Nonetheless, its influence persisted well into the mid-to-late 19th century, as seen in the works of Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights* (1847) echoes many Romantic themes, such as the celebration of nature, the focus on intense emotions, and the exploration of the Sublime, positioning Emily as a literary figure shaped by the Romantic legacy.

Burke positions all thoughts of the Sublime and the Beautiful as being understood by means of their causal structures, as postulated by Aristotle. There are four causal structures: the material (the raw materials used to produce the concept), the formal (the structural principles that govern the concept), the efficient (the process undertaken to materialise the concept), and the final cause (the purpose of the concept).

Focusing mainly on the efficient cause in the process of literary creation, it is relevant to discuss what separates the Sublime and the Beautiful. Edmund Burke was, first and foremost, an empiricist, following the steps of Hume and Locke. Thus, for Burke, the origin of both the Sublime and the Beautiful lies in our senses, arguing for a mechanistic understanding of how our human passions operate, and their purpose. One experiences both pain and pleasure, and that leads to concrete physical reactions, manifested in one's body, at the nerve and muscular levels. The reactions can be divided into two categories: tension and contraction, on the one hand, relaxation and decompression, on the other. Accordingly, Burke then argues that it is in the moment of tension that one is more likely to experience the sublime and, conversely, it is when one experiences relaxation that one is more likely to experience the beautiful.

Burke further differentiates the aesthetic experiences of the Sublime and the Beautiful by stating that both the Sublime and the Beautiful have the ability to move, but the Sublime is more profound in its bearing. Beautiful objects tend to be smooth and delicate, while Sublime ones are vast, gloomy, dark, and threatening. Beautiful scenarios depict well-kept gardens and colourful sunsets, but Sublime scenes portray thunderstorms and mountaintops, which are overwhelming. Paradoxically, however, while peaking over a mountaintop, one can find delight in terror, and the sheer power is exhilarating. The Sublime is tied to the possibility of pain, which consequently triggers the instinct of self-preservation and links to the Romantic idea of nature as an untainted power.

The role of self-preservation is eminent in Burke's formulation of the sublime and the beautiful. In an excerpt from Section II of Part II of the treatise, entitled "Terror", Burke (2015) notes that passions, which concern self-preservation, turn mostly on pain and danger, which he classified as the most powerful of all passions.

No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear, being an apprehension of pain or death, operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too ... Indeed terror is in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime. (p.73)

In the same section of this text, Burke highlights that among such instants of human experience, some provide moments of perverse pleasure by blending both fear and delight. He shifts the discussion on the Sublime from languages or artifices of language to focus on the experience generated by aspects of the natural world, which, due to their overpowering immensity or obscurity, would not fall in the category of the Beautiful, but would rather be associated with some degree of horror: “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment: and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.” (p.73).

Burke then lists the type of images and features that populate the sublime. Concepts of darkness, obscurity, vastness, height, dread, and deformity are combined with images of mountains, oceans, the supernatural, the absolute (tyrannical) power of God, war, wildfire, ruins, and disfigured characters, to illustrate how these produce with the reader an effect of the sublime due to the fear and terror they arouse:

To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes. Every one will be sensible of this, who considers how greatly night adds to our dread, in all cases of danger, and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds which give credit to the popular tales concerning such sorts of beings. (p. 75)

However, Burke’s task went beyond a listing of the kinds of artistic objects that configured the “Sublime” or the “Beautiful”, or the feelings they evoke. He set out to unveil the bio-physiological basis for such feelings and focused his endeavour on the transformation of the self when faced with what seemed to threaten one’s survival. This highlights a shift from Longinus’s work, by changing the focus from the object to the individual experience.

When Burke (2015) examines the physiological expression of those exposed to the sublime, as in the state of overwhelming awe, he associates such expression with a sort of

relief from terror. This emotion is, then, a “negative” pleasure³² because it represents a return to the balance of a neutral state (which had been threatened), as opposed to a movement from the emotional neutral balance to a state of pleasure. In his words, a “delight”: “As I make use of the word delight to express the sensation that accompanies the removal of pain or danger, so, when I speak of positive pleasure, I shall for the most part call it simply pleasure.” (p. 44).

Burke goes on to state that, at the basis of terror, i.e., of the Sublime, is one’s sense of mortality and the potential of an object to cause the feeling of threat or pain. As Burke puts it:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. (p. 47).

He then argues that the Sublime is “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling”, thus stressing that the aesthetic category of the Sublime is superior to the Beautiful.

To further the separation between the Sublime and the Beautiful, Burke proposes two sets of pleasurable phenomena: the experience of beauty as a positive pleasure geared towards sociability and the shared experience of an individual, as opposed to the pain and fear (or the fear of pain) of the Sublime as an expression of an individual experience on the self. As cited above, the word “astonishment” derives from the Latin *attonitus*, which originally meant “thunderstruck”, a reference also made by Longinus, thus establishing a connection between the “passion” of the Sublime, shock, and fear.

Perhaps a novelty in his study of the Sublime is that Burke adds an urban component to the images that had been canonical of nature and natural phenomena, in his definition of the Sublime: among the many scenarios that portray the Sublime, Burke lists events and locations that may also be found in the city, such as theatres and public executions of criminals, street preaching, fireworks, and urban architecture. These references are clear evidence of the

³² E. Burke does not actually use the term “negative pleasure”. We only use it here as opposed to the “positive pleasure” associated with Burke’s concept of Beauty. The expression “negative pleasure” features in Kant’s work *The Critique of Judgment*, p. 139.

effects of urbanisation in artistic categories such as rhetoric and literary aestheticism and integrate Edmund Burke into a culture of emerging capitalism, industrialism, and mercantilism.

The Irish-born philosopher is well-known not only for his political endeavours in the defence of traditional institutions but also for his scepticism of rapid political change and a belief in the organic nature of society. Although Burke was wary of the very notion of revolution as he saw it as a manifestation of chaos and disorder, he saw the American Revolution as a defence of traditional rights and liberties, as he considered the British government's policies towards the colonies unjust and imprudent ("...leave America, if she has taxable matter in her, to tax herself." (Burke & Magnus, 1948, p. 28).

However, despite supporting the rights of American colonists, Burke did not favour revolution as a principle, as he vehemently condemned the French Revolution. In his work *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke critiques the French Revolution and articulates his broader views on Western politics, emphasising the importance of tradition and continuity in society, arguing that institutions and customs that have evolved over time embody the collective wisdom of past generations. For him, abrupt political change or societal upheaval, like those in France, disregard this accumulated wisdom and risk causing civilisational collapse. "People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors." (Burke, 2012, p.43). Burke also advocated for gradual and cautious governmental reform, combining, synthesising, and harmonising the complexities inherent to human societies. He was sceptical of abstract and absolute political ideals, such as those pursued by the French revolutionaries, thus favouring a more concrete and pragmatic approach grounded in the realities of human nature, historical experience, and societal agreement.

Taking these two major historical events, we may associate them with Burke's concept of the Sublime. Burke saw the American Revolution as a defence of long-established rights and traditions grounded in reason and stability. In his view, the struggle for liberty definitely carried elements of the Sublime, such as awe and power. It did not, however, terrify or evoke chaos. Instead, Burke viewed it as a principled resistance to injustice, tied to the preservation of the familiar. It inspired admiration rather than fear. For Burke, the sublime in the American Revolution was connected more with the colonists seeking to preserve what they valued rather

than destroy or annihilate the existing social order. In contrast, Burke saw the French Revolution as embodying the destructive and chaotic side of the Sublime. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke described the revolution as a violent, destructive power that abandoned tradition, respect for authority, and social order. It was an uncontrollable force that instilled nothing more than dread, with its radical ideas and mob-driven violence evoking the Sublime in its most fearsome and bleak form. Burke underlined the revolution's power to destroy rather than elevate, and he saw it as a threat to the very foundations of civilisation: "But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever." (p.97).

2.2.1 Edmund Burke and the (a)gendered debate on the Sublime – Mary Wollstonecraft

For the purposes of our discussion, and as we endeavour to analyse the poetic and narrative works of Emily Brontë, a woman writer in the first half of the 19th century, within the scope of the Sublime, we cannot mention Burke's Sublime without referring to his rather gendered views. Not that we intend to ascribe the writings of Emily Brontë to a specific wave of feminism (the first wave of feminism only took place in the late 19th century and it is unlikely that Emily Brontë was even familiar with its onset) or imply that she was willingly and actively part of any social-political movement, but by analysing the works of a female writer under such aesthetic concept, we cannot ignore her weight as a female artist of the Sublime. We may not even need such labelling of "female and/or male writings" since Emily Brontë proved to be masterful in assuming the voices of both sexes, as the Gondal poems and *Wuthering Heights* demonstrate.

Notwithstanding, it seems relevant to mention that Burke's views on traditional male and female roles sparked a debate with Mary Wollstonecraft in the last decade of the 18th century. Both prominent figures of the literary and political worlds at that time, Burke's almost propagandistic views emphasised the importance of preserving established institutions, respecting tradition, and maintaining a balance between order and progress. He also strongly advocated for private property rights, which he saw as a source of stability and individual growth towards the betterment of society. Concerned about the dangers of secularism and atheism, Burke opposed radicalism, namely that associated with the adulteration, or even inversion, of traditional social structures, thus advocating for a stratified patriarchal society.

Wollstonecraft's political views, on the other hand, were more progressive and radical, being also closely tied to her beliefs on gender equality and individual rights.³³ She took a very dim view of the prevailing societal norms that relegated women to a domestic sphere and denied them opportunities for education and personal growth, such as access to education and participation in public life.

It was in this intersection between politics and the arts that Wollstonecraft challenged Burke's political doctrine while establishing a connection to his aesthetic views as well, namely in the conceptualisation of the Sublime, aiming at a vision of gender inclusivity in both arts and society. Burke's conservatism and emphasis on tradition clashed with Wollstonecraft's progressive ideas about equality and universal individual rights. He viewed the Sublime as a more masculine and powerful experience than beauty, which he perceived as being feminine, and, therefore, more fragile and superficial. However, Wollstonecraft, as a women's rights advocate, argued against this perspective and its depiction of women as inherently weak and passive. For her, the Sublime dealt with the self, regardless of sex or gender, and their subjective views of society and the natural world.

In *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, dated 1790, a long exercise on counter-argumentation, Wollstonecraft accuses Burke of frivolity and hedonism when discussing a woman's role [or lack thereof] in the Sublime. He writes in his *A Philosophical Enquiry...:*

Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness, the softness, the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix, or whither it is carried. (p. 152)

By describing a woman in such an aloof and sensuous fashion, Burke, despite detaching his concept of beauty from the Neoclassic archetype of beauty and virtue, is placing the woman as a passive object of beauty, affection, and admiration, hence outside the concept of Sublime. While Burke clearly includes the figure of the woman in the Beautiful, by stressing her

³³ On a biographical note, Wollstonecraft was the wife of William Godwin, a radical philosopher and writer. His work, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, dated 1793, criticises governmental and societal structures, advocating for the abolition of institutional power and the pursuit of individual liberty through reason and cooperation: "Whenever government assumes to deliver us from the trouble of thinking for ourselves, the only consequences it produces are those of torpor and imbecility." (Godwin, 2022, p.4486). His belief that human behaviour could be guided by rationality rather than coercion challenged the need for government control. Wollstonecraft shared Godwin's belief in reason and individual liberty, as it resonated with her arguments for gender equality and women's education.

weakness and femininity, he elevates to the Sublime the strength and masculinity of the male presence.

Wollstonecraft challenges these gendered views in her *Vindication of the Rights of Men*, by stating that "...truth, in morals, has ever appeared to me the essence of the sublime; and, in taste, simplicity the only criterion of the beautiful" (Wollstonecraft, 2016, p. 509). The use of the terms "sublime" and "beautiful" is a clear reference to Burke's earlier work. According to Burke, the "Beautiful" that can be observed in women is also defined by some sort of dependence and fragile mental agility when he states that "The beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality of mind analogous to it." (Burke, 2015, p.153) Wollstonecraft, again, confronts Burke and his "prejudiced" views, by exposing the social canon of only the woman who presents herself as "little" and "weak" may be deemed beautiful:

You may have convinced that littleness and weakness are the very essence of beauty; and that the Supreme Being, in giving women beauty in the most supereminent degree, seemed to command them, by the powerful voice of Nature, not to cultivate the moral virtues that might chance to excite respect, and interfere with the pleasing sensations they were created to inspire. (p. 564)

As we have already discussed, E. Burke separated the Sublime, a powerful, awe-inspiring force of a masculine nature, from the Beautiful, a lesser power, subordinate and delicate. Wollstonecraft, in the preface to her novella *Mary*, first published in 1788, which she leads with an "Advertisement", more in the tone of a warning rather than a contextualisation prefacing the narrative that is to follow, criticised the emotional heroine that had, up to that point, dominated fiction and, as Gary Kelly (1992) writes, "represents woman constructed for man: the heroic feminine victim of the courtly rake and gallant, the virtuous feminine companion of the ideal professionalised gentleman, and the intellectually and erotically subservient companion of the ideal bourgeois man" (p.42). Wollstonecraft states in the initial Advertisement:

This woman is not a Clarissa, a Lady G – nor a Sophie³⁴. (...) These chosen few, wish to speak for themselves, and not to be an echo—even of the sweetest sounds—or the reflector of the

³⁴ It is our interpretation that Wollstonecraft is referring to Samuel Richardson's sentimental heroine Clarissa, Lady Guinevere (from the Arthurian Legend), seen by the author as part of an oppressive upper-class, and Sophie, the Rousseauian ideal woman in *Emile*.

most sublime beams. The paradise they ramble in, must be of their own creating—or the prospect soon grows insipid, and not varied by a vivifying principle, fades and dies. (...) Without arguing physically about possibilities—in a fiction, such a being may be allowed to exist; whose grandeur is derived from the operations of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion; but drawn by the individual from the original source. (p. 3)

By stating that “The paradise (...) must be of their own creating” and “whose grandeur is derived from the operations of its own faculties, not subjugated to opinion”, Wollstonecraft implies that Romantic heroines, in a very Burckian fashion, are never truly autonomous, as their character, presence, and actions are seen through the lens of the male-tainted Sublime of their male author. Wollstonecraft, then, claims Sublimity for women as well, and contests the traditional association between women and feebleness of body and mind, by presenting a woman with complex interior psychology, through introspection and interior monologue in her titular character, Mary.

In her *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*, dated 1792, Chapter 4, titled “Observations on The State of Degradation to Which Woman Is Reduced by Various Causes”, and curiously enough, Wollstonecraft (2016, p. 1024) mentions Sappho as one of the privileged women who were able to affirm themselves due to receiving a “masculine education”:

Whether this arises from a physical or accidental weakness of faculties, time alone can determine; for I shall not lay any great stress upon the example of a few women (Sappho, Eloisa, Mrs. Macaulay, the Empress of Russia, Madame d’Eon, etc. These, and many more, may be reckoned exceptions; and, are not all heroes, as well as heroines, exceptions to general rules? I wish to see women neither heroines nor brutes; but reasonable creatures.) who, from having received a masculine education, have acquired courage and resolution; I only contend that the men who have been placed in similar situations have acquired a similar character, I speak of bodies of men, and that men of genius and talents have started out of a class, in which women have never yet been placed.

Wollstonecraft hesitates to blame women's supposed lack of courage and determination on a fundamental weakness and instead suggests that women have not had the same opportunities as men to develop these traits. The reference to a “masculine education” implies that if women were given the same educational and societal opportunities as men, they might develop similar qualities, as genius and talent are not exclusive to men, but a product of circumstances and opportunities, which women have historically been denied.

In Emily Brontë’s particular case, both her poetry and narrative depict instances of the Sublime, interestingly whether included in a female, male or ungendered atmosphere. Her

Gondal poems assume several narrators, both male³⁵ and female³⁶, and ungendered 3rd person narration³⁷; and *Wuthering Heights* has as two main characters who synthesise the Sublime: a male figure, Heathcliff, and a female figure, Catherine. The narration also reaches the reader mainly through a male voice (Mr Lockwood) and a female voice (Ellen Dean). Had she lived to see the works of the Brontës, Wollstonecraft would have been delighted with Emily's mastery, as she was able to depict the Sublime regardless of gender. It is clear that Emily, due to both her personal history³⁸ and artistic prowess, would have earned her place among the likes of Sappho and the other remarkable women on Wollstonecraft's list. Much like the connection between Sappho's and Emily Brontë's writings, Mary Wollstonecraft's claim of Sublimity for women offers compelling avenues for further research insofar as the author challenges the traditional association of women with physical fragility and mental vulnerability, primarily through her portrayal of women with complex inner psychological and emotional landscapes. It also opens up a meaningful discussion on how proto-feminist literature engaged with the Sublime and contested gendered limitations.

2.3 Immanuel Kant's "Analytic of the Sublime" (1790)

German philosopher Immanuel Kant was born in Königsberg, then Prussia, in 1724. One of Kant's most important works on aesthetics, *The Critique of Judgement* (1790), begins with a section entitled "Critique of the Aesthetical Judgement", divided into several other parts. Our focus will fall on the First and Second Books, but mainly on the Second Book, which bears the title "Analytic of the Sublime".

Burke's change in emphasis, from Longinus's language to the individual experience, was sustained and expanded by Kant, who argued that the sublime was more of a subjective conception—something that takes place in the mind—than a formal characteristic of any

³⁵ As is the case of Julius Brenzaida/Angora in "Song by Julius Angora 'Awake! awake! how loud the stormy morning'" (December 1837), Fernando de Samara in "O God of heaven! The dream of horror" (August 1837), and Alfred Sidonia in "At Castle Wood 'The day is done — the winter sun'" (February 1844).

³⁶ As is the case of Augusta Geraldine Almeda in "A.G.A. to A.E. 'Lord of Elbë, on Elbë Hill'" (August 1837), and Rosina in "Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee!" (March 1845)

³⁷ As is the case of "On the fall of Zalona 'All blue and bright, in glorious light'" (February 1843) and "Why ask to know the date — the clime?" (September 1846).

³⁸ Emily did not receive a "masculine education" per se, as that was reserved for her brother Branwell. However, her father, Patrick Brontë, was committed to providing his daughters with the best education he could afford, at home and in school. He even accompanied Charlotte and Emily to Brussels, where they fully immersed themselves in their studies at The Pensionnat of Madame Heger. One of their teachers, Constantin Heger, struck by Emily's intellect and strength of character, later told Elizabeth Gaskell that Emily had "a head for logic, and a capability of argument, unusual in a man, and rare indeed in a woman". Heger added, "She should have been a man—a great navigator" (Gaskell, 2009, p. 177).

scientific reality. According to Kant, aesthetic evaluations would lead to either Sublime or Beautiful experiences. He distinguishes between the Beautiful and the Sublime by first noting that beauty “is connected with the form of the object, that is to say, possessing “boundaries”, while the sublime “can be found in a formless object, insofar as we present unboundedness” (p.139). This “unboundedness” sets the difference from the Beautiful, which is a “bounded” form with formal properties. We hence see also that true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the subject judging, not in the natural object the judgment upon which occasions this state. “Who would call Sublime, e.g., shapeless mountain masses piled in wild disorder upon one another with their pyramids of ice, or the gloomy, raging sea?” (p. 154). Therefore, the “unboundedness” of a raging sea is not, *per se*, sublime; it serves as an opportunity to experience the Sublime within the subject themselves. Kant draws attention to the fact that many mistakenly believe that the Sublime resides in something external rather than internal (he calls this misconception “subreption” (p. 155).

Kant defines the Beautiful as *Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*, “purposiveness without purpose” (p. 115). One tends to appreciate a principle of organisation and reason in the case of the Beautiful as one feels that imagination and understanding are prepared and adjusted to the form it enjoys. Knowing that an object is useful represents this pattern of “purposiveness”. However, something is Beautiful rather than merely useful when it possesses characteristics that might be associated with usefulness, but the object itself is, in fact, useless. One of the most common examples given is the rose: a rose is Beautiful because we recognise its patterns, its symmetry, and its colours as organisational and useful characteristics, and this pleases the observer, but the flower itself is fundamentally useless, so we call it Beautiful. In contrast to the “purposiveness without purpose” of beauty, the property of at least appearing to have been manufactured or designed, the Sublime is a principle of disorder. It is the phenomenon of reason encountering an object that cannot be quantified, imitated, or contained. The Sublime is limitless and pushes the imagination to infinite boundaries. Therefore, it represents disorganisation. As organised and organising beings who find beauty in organised objects, this disorganisation threatens one’s conception of oneself.

Encountering the Sublime, as Kant says, in the same section of his text, “does violence to the imagination” (p.139). As such, the Beautiful is regarded as the “exhibition of an indeterminate concept of the Understanding”, while the Sublime is regarded as “the exhibition

of an indeterminate concept of Reason” (p.139), as it challenges one’s sense of reason, in contrast to how beauty challenges one’s sense of understanding.

The following is how Kant contrasts the Sublime and the Beautiful:

We must seek a ground external to ourselves for the Beautiful of nature; but seek it for the Sublime merely in ourselves and in our attitude of thought which introduces sublimity into the representation of nature. This is a very needful preliminary remark, which quite separates the Ideas of the sublime from that of a purposiveness of nature and makes the theory of the sublime a mere appendix to the aesthetical judging of that purposiveness; because by means of it no particular form is represented in nature, but there is only developed a purposive use which the Imagination makes of its representation. (p.140)

In terms of aesthetic experience, the Sublime, according to Kant, is secondary to beauty since the latter is more comprehensive and points outward towards the purposiveness of nature, while the former only does so towards our own interior purposefulness: “Hence, we see that the concept of the Sublime is not nearly so important or rich in consequences as the concept of the Beautiful” (p. 140). This makes the sublime secondary to beauty apparently because the experience of beauty is expansive, pointing outward to the purposiveness of nature, while the sublime simply points us back into our own inner purposiveness, a phenomenon that Kant seems to regard as inherently less interesting.

However, while Kant regards this “inner purposiveness” as inherently less interesting, this phenomenon is infinitely more intriguing to the analysis of the texts we propose here. The sublime forces one to engage reason and shield oneself from danger by reflecting, reframing, and reassessing the situation. After this internal analysis, the subsequent feeling is one of relief and satisfaction. It is an experiential Sublime that stands in the finale of an inner philosophical search for self-knowledge. While Kant viewed the sublime as secondary to the Beautiful, one can also argue that the sublime actually exists in reverse to the Beautiful. It overlaps the Beautiful in terms of aesthetic experience while expanding inward on the human mind in the opposite direction of the outward expansion of beauty toward nature. It is when the aesthetic experience of beauty begins a self-reflection that the contemplation of the Beautiful moves toward an experience of the Sublime. As one searches for the purposiveness in the Beautiful, one also searches for the purposiveness of oneself. This search becomes a philosophical exploration into one’s place in the world, ending with an experience of the Sublime when the fear subsides, replaced not with a feeling of light-hearted delight, but with something like

“truth”, the truth about oneself and their place in the inner workings of a vast and complex world.

While Sublime experiences ultimately offer joy, they first cause pain and even terror when one discovers how inadequately one is able to represent and/or oppose nature. The subject perceives a separation between their faculties and nature, which triggers an estrangement from their surroundings. The pleasure that derives from the Sublime, Kant refers to as "negative pleasure" (p. 139). It is an indirect pleasure that comes not from the sublime itself, but from the relief one feels when one realises that this external disorder does not really threaten one's internal order:

The feeling of the Sublime is therefore a feeling of pain, arising from the want of accordance between the aesthetical estimation of magnitude formed by the Imagination and the estimation of the same formed by Reason. There is at the same time a pleasure thus excited, arising from the correspondence with rational Ideas of this very judgement of the inadequacy of our greatest faculty of Sense. (p.155)

In other words, by becoming aware and integrating an inaccessible form of excess, one is able to understand one's limits and thus transform the negative feeling of insufficiency into positive gain.

The Sublime, then, in Kant's philosophy, much like in Burke's, refers to an aesthetic quality that inspires a sense of awe or wonder in individuals. Nonetheless, Kant expands on this concept by creating a dichotomy, distinguishing between two types of sublime experiences: the Mathematical Sublime and the Dynamic Sublime.

The first, the Mathematical Sublime, is associated with the vastness and grandeur of natural objects. It occurs when the subject becomes aware that they are observing a phenomenon that approaches the infinite—not just a larger quantity of an already-known experience, but an object that is qualitatively different due to its magnitude or limitlessness, such as the ocean, the mountains, and the night sky. He states:

But because there is in our Imagination a striving towards infinite progress, and in our Reason a claim for absolute totality, regarded as a real Idea, therefore this very inadequateness for that Idea in our faculty for estimating the magnitude of things of sense, excites in us the feeling of a supersensible faculty. (p.145).

The subject experiences the Mathematical Sublime when they realise the size and scale of such objects, which transcend the ability to fully comprehend them. When the subject is confronted with something so absolutely large (Kant, p.145), it overwhelms the subject's imagination's capacity to comprehend it. In this situation, the imagination, while "striving towards infinite progress", fails to comprehend the object in accordance with reason's demand for "absolute totality". This inability to fully grasp the vastness or power of the sublime object leads to a feeling of inadequacy, which by questioning the limits of human understanding, can also inspire a sense of humility and a recognition of one's condition when placed to the scale of one's reality.

In other words, the Mathematical Sublime occurs when a subject witnesses or observes an object that is so vast that it approaches the infinite—an object that is beyond the subject's ability to imagine. When imagination is surpassed, the subject is forced to use functions of reason in order to comprehend the event. For instance, if the subject compares a cat to a tiger, they will quickly realise that a tiger is, biologically, a larger and more ferocious version of the familiar pet—different in size, but still understandable. However, one begins to ascertain the Mathematical Sublime when one calculates the magnitude of the sun—which is enormous, yet finite—and then begins to contemplate the seemingly infinite vastness of all the stars in all the galaxies in the entire universe. Kant defines the Mathematical Sublime as the feeling of exhilaration that one experiences when one realises that the highest reference point within their experience is actually minuscule beyond true comprehension when compared to this new experience—as in the case of the almost infinite number of giant suns scattered across unimaginable distances. The subject must then rely on reason, logic, or scientific calculation in order to come to any kind of understanding.

The second type of Sublime, according to Kant, is the Dynamic Sublime. The Dynamic Sublime relates to the forces of nature, such as storms, waterfalls, and typhoons. It occurs when a subject experiences pleasure while observing the power of awe-inspiring and destructive forces in nature but does so with the knowledge that these forces will not harm them. This membrane of safety can take many forms, but the feeling that these awesome forces of nature have "no dominion over us" (Kant, 2017, p. 159) is a critical part of the dynamically sublime experience. Kant says:

So also the irresistibility of its might, while making us recognise our own physical impotence, considered as beings of nature, discloses to us a faculty of judging independently of, and a superiority over, nature; on which is based a kind of self-preservation, entirely different from that which can be attacked and brought into danger by external nature. Thus, humanity in our person remains unhumiliated, though the individual might have to submit to this dominion. (p.161).

Here, Kant outlines the two conditions for the Dynamic Sublime to occur: first, the subject must experience the irresistible power of nature, and second, the subject must realise that they are safe from destruction. It is important to stress the idea that, in order for an experience to be considered Sublime, one must not experience mindless fear, because that would negate the subject's ability to pass judgment about the appropriateness of being afraid, and, since the experience of the Sublime is a function of reason, the subject's ability to make an assessment about their safety is of paramount importance. Kant explains the distinction between abject fear and the type of fear associated with Dynamically Sublime experiences by contrasting the idea of fearing God to the idea of being afraid of God:

But we can regard an object as fearful, without being afraid of it; viz. if we judge of it in such a way that we merely think a case in which we would wish to resist it, and yet in which all resistance would be altogether vain. Thus the virtuous man fears God without being afraid of Him; because to wish to resist Him and His commandments, he thinks is a case as to which he need not be anxious. But in every such case that he thinks as not impossible, he cognises Him as fearful. (p.160)

Kant posits that virtuous people have a fear of God, but they have no reason to be afraid of Him unless they intend to rebel against God's will. In Kant's example, the subject recognises the absolute power of God, but the subject's righteousness acts as a barrier between themselves and God's wrath—rendering abject fear unnecessary. In the same way, in order for a subject to experience the Dynamic Sublime, they must recognise the irresistible force being observed—while all the while also understanding that they are protected from the consequences of the phenomenon being witnessed.

As opposed to the Mathematical Sublime, the Dynamic Sublime is not just about the formal properties of the natural phenomena or elements but also about the power and intensity of these phenomena or elements, which makes the experience of the Sublime highly subjective. It depends on the subject's ability to reason and comprehend the objects presented by nature. The Dynamic Sublime evokes a sense of fear and awe in the face of nature's overwhelming power. It appears when we experience nature as fearful, even though we might

be in a position of safety and, therefore, have no reason to be afraid when gazing at the aurora boreal, a hurricane, or an active volcano (at a distance).

2.4 Main Echoes and Types of the Sublime in Emily Brontë's Work

What we suggest from this point onwards is an analysis of Emily Brontë's poetry and only novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), intertwining them with these concepts of the Sublime, which are transversal to all the categories of both her poetic and narrative structures. We shall adapt Longinus's five sources of the Sublime – the imagination of a great creative genius, her vehement and inspired passion, the poetic use of language, her choice and arrangement of words, and her dignified elevation of structures – while juxtaposing Burke's distinction between the Sublime and the Beautiful, and highlighting the change in the discussion from the technical and rational manoeuvres of language to the experience of elements of the natural world. Due to their vastness or obscurity, these are associated in Emily with the sense of mortality, fear, terror, but also with the relief from such terror, a "delight". We shall point out the Burkian scenarios of darkness, dread, and deformity in Emily Brontë's work and how they induce an experience of the Sublime in the reader. In terms of Kant's theory of the Sublime, we shall analyse both the Mathematical Sublime and the Dynamic Sublime in Brontë's poetry and novel, and how these complement each other in the depiction of the vastness of nature and its overwhelming power over the subject's imagination.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the expansive and desolate moors are a recurring representation of the Mathematical Sublime. Characters such as Heathcliff and Catherine express an awe-inspiring connection with the wildness and boundlessness of the moors, which transcend the limits of human comprehension, thus evoking a sense of the infinite. The wide, open landscape surrounding the Heights serves as a physical and symbolic manifestation of the Mathematical Sublime, with its limitless horizons suggesting the vastness of nature that can only be grasped through reason, not through direct experience. The bond that Heathcliff and Catherine share may also be interpreted as a manifestation of the Mathematical Sublime, as they perceive themselves as the same person; that is, it is impossible to pinpoint where one begins and the other ends as they reflect on each other as an endless kaleidoscopic mirror. On Catherine's part, we realise the fluidity of her being poured into Heathcliff when she affirms, "He's more myself than I am" (p.64) and, on Heathcliff's monologue after he learns of her death: "I

CANNOT live without my life! I CANNOT live without my soul!" (p.129). There is a sense of infinity between the two characters, as they live in a unified existence. In Catherine's words, their love "resembles the eternal rocks beneath" and any separation "is impracticable".

Similarly, Brontë's poetry often depicts instances of the Mathematical Sublime. In her poem "Ah! why, because the dazzling sun" (April 1845), stanza four reads: "Thought followed thought, star followed star, / Through boundless regions, on; / While one sweet influence, near and far, / Thrilled through, and proved us one!". The parallel rhythm of "Thought followed thought, star followed star" evokes an imagery of subjective introspection where thoughts and natural elements expand and repeat themselves to infinity ("Through boundless regions"). The vastness of the night sky and the stars beyond the reach of human perception reflect this sublime experience. The speaker is confronted with the immensity of the universe, feeling a sense of awe in the face of celestial vastness, which challenges human understanding but is conceptualised through the mind's reason, elevating the human spirit.

On the other hand, the Dynamic Sublime involves an experience of nature's overwhelming power. This form of the Sublime occurs when individuals encounter forces in nature that they are physically unable to control, such as storms or natural disasters. In *Wuthering Heights*, the Dynamic Sublime is embodied in the ruthless storms that often accompany moments of violence, emotional outbursts, or conflict between characters. One significant example occurs the night Catherine dies, during a tempest that mirrors Heathcliff's uncontrollable grief and rage. The storm's intensity reflects the overwhelming force of nature, which parallels Heathcliff's own turbulent emotions. Despite the physical danger posed by the storm, the characters' reason and inner strength allow them to transcend fear, aligning with Kant's notion that the sublime experience affirms the subject's moral freedom and capacity for endurance.

In Brontë's poetry, the Dynamic Sublime is notably present in ""In summer's mellow midnight" (September 1840). Here, the speaker is confronted by the powerful force of the wind, which overwhelms yet captivates them. The wind becomes an almost personified force of nature, embodying the uncontrollable and sublime power that evokes both fear and awe. The speaker's interaction with the wind reflects the tension between submission to and transcendence of nature's forces, a key element of the Dynamic Sublime in Kantian terms.

There are also writings in Brontë's work that combine both the Mathematical and the Dynamic Sublime. In "No Coward Soul is Mine" (January 1846), the speaker faces the immense forces of life and death with a defiant inner strength (stated immediately in the litotes and hyperbaton – much to Longinus taste – in line 1: "No coward soul is mine". The affirmative expressed by the negative and the inversion of the standard order of words may translate to "My soul is brave"). The poem embodies both the Mathematical and Dynamic Sublime, as the subject confronts the vastness of eternity and the powerful forces of existence with moral and spiritual fortitude ("I see Heaven's glories shine, And faith shines equal, arming me from fear."), thus affirming Kant's idea that reason allows individuals to rise above nature's might.

In this work, we will primarily see Emily Brontë's writings as a constant search and exploration into the place of the self in the inner and outer infinite cosmos, culminating with an experience of the Sublime when all the pain, terror, and fear subside. After experiencing, both directly and indirectly, nature's wild whims, cataclysmic weather, the unrestrained rage and hunger in Heathcliff and Catherine's overwhelming emotional outbursts, and the fear and awe inspired by the infinite expanse of the moors, we may find ourselves on the threshold of the Mathematical Sublime, where the intensity of passion, love, anger, and violence stretches beyond the limits of human comprehension, transcending the subject's ability to imagine or grasp them fully. Alternatively, we may, as in the Dynamic Sublime, after the manifestation of such powers and dangers, feel a sense of transcendence supported by our inner strength and, like Mr Lockwood, take comfort in the re-establishment of rational order and wonder "how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (p. 256).

Chapter III

The Sublime in Emily Brontë's Poetry and *Wuthering Heights*

Poetry is more a threshold than a path, one constantly approached and constantly departed from, at which reader and writer undergo in their different ways the experience of being at the same time summoned and released.

Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue*

Having explored the concept of the Sublime in a previous chapter, this section now turns to the detailed analysis of Emily Brontë's poetry and narrative prose through the lens of this aesthetic. Central to this undertaking is the theme of thresholds, which plays a pivotal role in the creation and experience of the Sublime in her work. Thresholds, both literal and metaphorical, signify the boundaries between opposing realms—such as internal and external, nature and civilisation, past and present – and are crucial in understanding how Emily Brontë, in her own voice and in her characters and landscapes, evokes a sense of awe, terror, and ultimate transcendence.

By delving into these liminal spaces, this chapter aims to showcase the depth of Brontë's engagement with the Sublime and her depiction of thresholds serves to heighten the Sublime experience. Through the analysis of key texts, we shall shed light on how these threshold moments are crucial to the creation of the Sublime effect, thus offering a new perspective on Brontë's profound engagement with this aesthetic tradition.

The word “threshold” is believed to be related to the Old English word *threscan*, from which we get the verb “to thresh”, meaning “to separate seed from (a harvested plant) using a machine or tool” (“Threshold,” 2024). That is to say, in a way, that a threshold is a place of separation and transition. In Emily Brontë's poetry and narrative, we shall experience these thresholds in moments of permanent duality: inside and outside, dream and reality, human and supernatural, freedom and confinement, self and other, light and darkness, heaven and earth, life and death – each of these “thresholds” are represented in the author's work and play an essential role in unveiling new meanings. Nevertheless, a threshold, being a point of entrance or the line at which a phenomenon begins to produce an effect, also implies the urge to overstep it, and the purpose of this chapter is to show how the decision to walk its line and how this transition takes place translates into the poet's writings.

Many authors have explored this concept of the threshold and the existence of being in-between states, sometimes opting to move forward and others just lingering on the boundary.

In Christina Rossetti's dramatic monologue, "The Convent Threshold" (1862), the speaker, a "fallen" woman in repentance, describes the reasons underlying her decision to join a convent to fulfil her spiritual decision to repent ("You sinned with me a pleasant sin: / Repent with me, for I repent." l.51-52). She feels her body is stained ("My lily feet are soiled with mud, / With scarlet mud which tells a tale / Of hope that was, of guilt that was, / Of love that shall not yet avail" l.7-10) and wishes for the purification of her soul ("To wash the spot, to burn the snare" l.14). She keeps reminding her interlocutor that while their eyes "look earthward, mine look up" (l.17), towards heaven. Thus, the poem's speaker stands at a threshold: physically between the outside and the inside of the building, metaphorically between a physical life and a spiritual life. The latter, however, implies the death of the former (a "social death" as joining a convent entails seclusion and isolation from society), so there is a solid antithetical sense of life and death in her decision.

Likewise, in Amy Levy's "On the Threshold" (1889), the speaker describes their feelings of loss and helplessness after dreaming of the death of their loved one. The speaker is standing at the doorway of the room ("in the doorway watched you from afar" l.6) where the corpse lies and dares not enter the private space as they do not feel their relationship warrants such intimacy ("I had no part nor lot in you" l.8). The poem alludes to many "thresholds", both physical and metaphorical: the speaker is physically standing on the sill of the door, i.e., in a liminal space which is neither in nor out of the room; psychologically we have the two states of being asleep and then awake ("I dreamed that you were dead" l.1); there is also the duality between the physical and the platonic and the presence of language (verbal) and the absence of language (silence) ("Of your misprision and my impotence." l.11); finally, the duality between life and death, as the speaker is alive but the addressee of the poem is dead.

Despite Emily Brontë's vast work, which, in addition to her novel, *Wuthering Heights*, accounts for more than two hundred poems, this work aims to depict, by using a selection of five poems, how Emily Brontë integrates and intertwines the Sublime and the theme of thresholds in her poetry, and how these particular poems find echo in her 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights*, subsequently discussing the relevance of these 'Sublime thresholds',

which populate this particular work as well. While this analysis delves into just five poems, these serve as a foundational basis, intricately woven with references to numerous others. These five, in our opinion, represent the Sublime and theme of thresholds in Emily Brontë's work and provide a framework for exploring broader connections across the poet's work through shared thematic and stylistic elements.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Sublime involves experiences that evoke awe, terror, and admiration through encounters with nature's vastness or power. And Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant provide the basic framework used in this dissertation for analysing Brontë's literary engagement with the Sublime and the theme of the threshold.

Even though Edmund Burke does not explicitly mention "thresholds" or "liminal spaces" as concepts directly associated with the Sublime, his framework for the Sublime can be interpreted as often involving "liminal moments"—those spaces where human beings are brought to a moment where they need to confront something above and beyond their limitations. The Sublime arises from moments of astonishment:

In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the Sublime, that, far from being produced by them, it anticipates our reasonings, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the Sublime in its highest degree. (p.72)

Thresholds, in this sense, are points of transition or boundaries where the Sublime might be felt most intensely, as in the crescendo of a music composition. The threshold or liminal space can be a metaphorical "entrance" into the Sublime:

The tension of the part thus increasing at every blow, by the united forces of the stroke itself, the expectation and the surprise, it is worked up to such a pitch as to be capable of the sublime; it is brought just to the verge of pain. Even when the cause has ceased, the organs of hearing being often successively struck in a similar manner, continue to vibrate in that manner for some time longer; this is an additional help to the greatness of the effect. (p.186)

Immanuel Kant's approach to the Sublime is related to Burke's but differs in its philosophical foundations. While Kant also does not directly speak of "thresholds" or "liminal spaces" as such, the idea of crossing boundaries between the empirical/sensible/comprehensible and the transcendent/supersensible/incomprehensible is deeply embedded in his theory of the Sublime. For Kant, the Sublime occurs when we stand

at the threshold between one and the other. It is the point where human faculties—specifically the imagination and reason—meet their limits. For instance, the imagination cannot fully comprehend the vastness of the mathematical sublime or the destructive power of the dynamical sublime, but reason steps in to make sense of the immensity or power. In this way, Kant's concept of the Sublime contains an inherent liminality that lies in confronting something that challenges our faculties, forcing us to transcend the limits of our understanding:

But because there is in our Imagination a striving towards infinite progress, and in our Reason a claim for absolute totality, regarded as a real Idea, therefore this very inadequateness for that Idea in our faculty for estimating the magnitude of things of sense, excites in us the feeling of a supersensible faculty. And it is not the object of sense, but the use which the Judgement naturally makes of certain objects on behalf of this latter feeling, that is absolutely great. Consequently, it is the state of mind produced by a certain representation with which the reflective Judgement is occupied, and not the Object, that is to be called sublime. (p. 146)

While Burke focuses mostly on sensory experiences (pain, fear, terror) and emphasises an emotional response to these liminal spaces, emerging directly from the senses and external world, Kant, on the other hand, focuses on the dialogue between reason and transcendence. In Kant, the Sublime emerges more from internal processes, with thresholds marking the boundaries of cognitive faculties rather than purely external sensory experiences: “We may therefore append to the preceding formulas explaining the sublime this other: *the sublime is that, the mere ability to think which, shows a faculty of the mind surpassing every standard of Sense.*” (p. 147)

In Brontë's work, when one examines thresholds, one can apply both Burke's and Kant's ideas of the sublime to these thresholds (i.e., transitional moments), where characters and readers alike confront limitless emotions or experiences that transcend reason. On one level, these scenes offer Burke's pain, fear, and terror, and on the other, the crossing of a threshold mirrors Kant's description of the Sublime, where reason grapples with its limitations.

The selection of the poems was based on four basic criteria: firstly, it was our intent to select poems from different moments of her (short) life: the teenage years, the early twenties and the late twenties, respectively; this in order to assess whether there was some progression in how Emily Brontë approached the topic of the Sublime and thresholds; secondly, the ones that could find echo in *Wuthering Heights*, especially in the first generation “love triangle” relationship, not, as many would expect, between Catherine, Heathcliff and Edgar, but

between Catherine, Heathcliff and nature itself; the third was to select, among her work, those poems which would represent the clearest examples of the use of Sublime thresholds, in all their manifestations (natural, spiritual, metaphorical, psychological and physical); and, finally, as the fourth criterion, the poems discussed should be selected both from her Gondal production, in which she lends her voice to different characters and narrators, poems whose placement within her work are still topic of debate, and poems where the poetic voice is her own voice.

As a result, the poems analysed in this section are as follows: “High waveing heather ‘neath stormy blasts bending”, dated December 13th, 1836, chronologically one of her first poems and categorised as a non-Gondal poem; “The night is darkening round me” (also titled “Spellbound”, and first published in 1902), with narrative elements in common with the Gondal saga, but with no textual reference to any anthroponym or toponym of the saga, and “Sleep brings no joy to me”, considered a Gondal poem as it bears the initials A.G.A at the top of the manuscript, both dated November 1837; “In summer’s mellow midnight”, also known as the “Night-Wind”, dated September 11th, 1840, which was object of rewriting in its first publication in 1850 by Emily’s sister Charlotte, who also provides us with a short biographical note, as Gezari (1993, p. 270), in the notes to the poem transcribes Charlotte’s introductory words: “Here again is the same mind in converse with a like abstraction. The Night-Wind, breathing through an open window, has visited an ear which discerned language in its whispers”. Roper (1995, p. 249) adds that on that same day (September 11th, 1840) “Emily could have seen a full moon from the parlour, or dining room, of the parsonage; the day had been warm, with a moderate wind and a little rain”; and, the last one, “R. Alcona to J. Brenzaida ‘Cold in the earth’” (also known as “Remembrance”, due to the need to erase references to the Gondal Saga for the 1846 publication of the three Brontë sisters’ poetry book, under the pennames of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell), dated 1845.

All in all, this section is devoted to the following: a poem written in her own voice when Emily was in her late teens, two poems written when Emily was in her early 20s, the latter belonging to the Gondal Saga and the former with implied but not explicit connections with events narrated in the Gondal manuscript; a fourth dated two years later, when Emily was 22 years old; and a later one, almost immediately preceding the inception of *Wuthering Heights* and one of the ten last dated poems to be written about Gondal’s rise and fall.

This chapter, then, adopts a methodology that analyses her poems in chronological sequence, rather than thematically, to provide insight into the evolution of the Sublime in Brontë's work, while striving to build a chronological tandem to the events in *Wuthering Heights*. This is, however, an extremely difficult task, as the narration in the novel itself is non-linear. Nonetheless, this approach facilitates the understanding of how Brontë's depiction of sublimity and thresholds progresses over the years and how her early poetic works inform her later novel. By doing so, this chapter aims to shed a new light on Emily Brontë's literary exploration of the Sublime.

3. 1 A Comparative Analysis of the Sublime in Emily Brontë's Poems and *Wuthering Heights*³⁹

3.1.1 "High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending"

The poem, dated December 13th, 1836, while an 18-year-old Emily Brontë was at her family home at Haworth, a year after a traumatic stay in Roe Head school, from where Emily had to be removed due to severe homesickness, is written in a lyrical, overflowing style. Its meter tends to be the dactylic tetrameter, which is a line consisting of four dactylic feet, in which each foot has a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables, as in "High wa/ving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" (note the catalexis in the last foot, lacking a syllable), with some variations, which is characteristic of many of Brontë's poems. The dactyl foot is quite common in classical poetry like the *Odyssey*, a work that the Brontës were surely quite familiar with, as copies of this and other classic works populated their family library at the parsonage. This rhythmic structure provides a steady, paced flow, though it is not strictly uniform throughout the verse. The poem uses a regular rhyme scheme for the three 6-line stanzas, following an ABAAAB pattern. This consistent rhyme adds to the musical quality of the poem, thus creating a melodious and harmonious balance despite the tumultuous and rhythmic syllabic description of the natural imagery. Another element that greatly contributes to the fast pacing is the use of enjambment, where lines flow into each other without a pause, thus enhancing the sense of movement and continuity, primarily with the use of the gerund in the A rhyme lines. This technique mirrors the natural and continuous flow of the natural elements depicted in the poem.

³⁹ The complete version of the poems can be found in Annex I. All page references to *Wuthering Heights* in this dissertation correspond to Brontë, E. (1990). *Wuthering Heights: Authoritative Text, Backgrounds, Criticism* (3rd ed.). W. W. Norton & Company.

In the first stanza, there is the personification of the heather, which is “waving” and “bending” (l.1), endowing it with human-like qualities of movement as a response to external forces. This personification enhances the reader’s connection to the natural imagery as it depicts powerful scenes of “stormy blasts” and “high waving heather”. This imagery also helps convey the intensity of the sublime experience through the use of hyperbole in the description of the heather bending under the storm while exaggerating the power of nature and emphasising its overwhelming force. The metaphorical embodiment of the “high waving heather” gives the reader a representation of the natural world in its raw, unrestrained state. The heather bending beneath stormy blasts can be seen as a metaphor for the human spirit while it endures the constant strain of the forces of life and time. The polysyndeton with the repetition of the conjunction “and” (l.2) provides not only an enumeration of natural elements (midnight, moonlight and stars) but also assists this fast-paced account of natural elements. An antithesis follows by the use of “darkness” and “glory” in line 3; however, this antithesis is merely apparent for these two concepts blend together in line 4 with “Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending”, thus blurring the lines between earth and heaven, and intertwining both earthy and heavenly planes at the privileged threshold for the passage of time: “midnight”, the “zero” moment in existence which opens the door to another day. This moment of juxtaposition between earth and heaven is the place where “Man’s spirit” (l.5) breaks away from the physical, emotional and spiritual bounds in the metaphorical “dungeon” by “bursting the fetters and breaking the bars” in line 6. The self is released from the chains of imprisonment and obedience, which are spiritually and creatively oppressive. The alliteration in /b/ is extremely powerful as it conveys the phonetic memory of the bilabial bellicose /b/: the poet is at the epicentre, i.e., threshold, of a conflict of existence in which the forces of earth and heaven collide.

Stanza two begins by reinforcing the pivotal role of the wind, which becomes almost a character in itself, not only by the string of metaphors but also personifications, as it is described in line 8 as the “life-giving wind”⁴⁰, with an all-powerful “mighty voice” close to the one of a deity. From here, the poet focuses on the rivers, whose beds are “wider and deeper, their waters extending” (l.11), devastating the soil and leaving behind a “desolate desert”

⁴⁰ The presence of the wind as a “life-giver” but also as a “life-taker” shall be discussed further when we establish the parallel of this poem with other compositions and *Wuthering Heights*.

(l.12). The tautology in the “desolate desert” amplifies the image of bareness that is left behind once that specific moment in time is gone. As the waters move forward at full speed, nothing is left in the past but bare, inhospitable land.

The third stanza opens with another polysyndeton, this time focusing on the gerund forms of action verbs such as shining, lowering, swelling, and dying, in a perpetual movement, a gradient that begins by radiating, slowly declines, and dies, only to circle back to the rebirth of a forever-changing nature that follows the passage of time “from midnight to noon” (l.14), from one threshold to another, from dark to light. This fluidity is, nonetheless, disrupted when, in line 15, both the poem and the reader are faced with an element of caesura, somewhat of a dramatic pause, marked by the pause after the second foot (“Roaring like thunder / like soft music sighing”). There is a sudden stall in the line, which not only causes a moment of interruption in the flow but also highlights the antithesis between the roaring thunder and the soft music (l.15) and brings the two concepts together in a sort of quasi-chaotic harmony. The double simile, with the repetition of “like” also contributes to this turmoil as “Roaring” is compared both and in equal parts to “thunder” and “soft music sighing”. Verse 16, “Shadows on shadows advancing and flying”, returns to the imagery of juxtaposition of light and darkness by describing overlapping shadows that “advance and fly”, only opposed by defiant flashes of light (l.17). The poem closes with the reaffirmation of the fast ever-continuous passage of time: “coming as swiftly and fading as soon.” (l.18).

“High waving heather ‘neath stormy blasts bending” is a poem which may be directly associated with the concept of the Sublime as it depicts all-powerful natural images that, due to their vastness and grandeur, trigger a sense of awe or terror. From the “stormy blasts” in line 1 to the lightning-bright flashes in line 17, what is seen here is nature’s power in full force. The blending of darkness and glory, the bursting of fetters, the breaking of bars, the release from the physical and spiritual dungeon, together with the life-giving wind, the animalistic roaring of the thunder and the defiant lightning flashes that co-exist at a particular threshold of converging forces in time and space create a sense of the Sublime. It is nature in its most primal and rawest manifestations, which render the individual in awe when faced with such grandness.

In addition to the theme of the threshold between several levels of physical, emotional, and spiritual existence, at this point, one cannot help diving a little deeper into the recurring

image of the dungeon as a physical, emotional, and spiritual place of confinement transversal to Emily Brontë's poetic and prose works. We find this motif in poems like "A Little While A Little While", dated December 4th, 1838, at a time Emily was at Law Hill, where, in the words of her sister Charlotte (Brontë, 1995, p.182), in a letter to her good friend Ellen Nussey, dated October 2nd, 1838,

My sister Emily is gone into a situation as teacher in a large school of near forty pupils, near Halifax. I have had one letter from her since her departure—it gives an appalling account of her duties. Hard labour from six in the morning until near eleven at night, with only one half-hour of exercise between. This is slavery. I fear she will never stand it.

Charlotte was right. Much like earlier and later instances of long periods away from the parsonage, Emily felt extremely homesick both from Haworth ("The house is old, the trees are bare / And moonless bends the misty dome / But what on earth is half so dear - / So longed for as the hearth of home?" l.13-16) and Gondal ("Shall I go there? or shall I seek / Another clime, another sky," l.21-22). Emily returned home only six months after taking her tenancy at Law Hill.

A poem that also features the image of the dungeon is "The Prisoner (A Fragment)", a 64-line poem⁴¹ dated October 9th, 1845, which begins by telling the tale of a warden and his superior (he shouts orders to the jailor⁴²: "In the dungeon-crypts, idly did I stray, / Reckless of the lives wasting there away; / "Draw the ponderous bars! open, Warder stern! / He dared not say me nay—the hinges harshly turn." l.1-4), who encounter a captive in the dungeon. They walk along the corridors of a dungeon, pointing out its cold, dirty, and overwhelmingly unpleasant features and discussing how their "guests" (prisoners) are kept isolated in the darkness ("Our guests are darkly lodged," l.5). As this situation is narrated in flashback, in stanza three the speaker expresses some regret for their acts, asking God for forgiveness. They

⁴¹ The version published in the 1846 volume of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell's poetry is thought to have been curated by Emily herself for publication as it only accounts for sixteen quatrains; the Gondal manuscript, however, displays a longer version of this poem titled "Silent is the House – All are laid asleep", adding up to 152 lines. According to Gezari (1992, p.238), this version only became available to the general reader in 1938, when it appeared in the Shakespeare Head volume titled *Gondal Poems*.

⁴² The poem may be contextualised within the Gondal saga, as, in the original manuscript, it appears intertwined with another composition titled "Julian M. and A. G. Rochelle 'Silent is the House – All are laid asleep'", in which Julian M. saves A. G. Rochelle from captivity. The 1846 publication omits any reference to Gondal – much like in other poems, such as "R. Alcona to J. Brenzaida 'Cold in the earth'", which became "Remembrance" upon publication in 1846 –, the first three stanzas, and then stanzas 12-17 of the longer poem. Stanza nine in "The Prisoner (A Fragment)" is new, probably written by Emily to provide the poem with a logical and harmonious thread for publication, and stanza 24 (which corresponds to the final stanza in the "Fragment") has the same first verse, but the following three lines of the quatrain are changed. The longer version of the poem continues for 14 stanzas.

then ask the warden if it is really necessary to confine the prisoners behind “three walls” (the hyperbole stresses the sense not only of isolation but claustrophobia⁴³). The poem also shares some imagery with “High waveing heather” as it refers to the fetters that bind the prisoners: “That we must bind thee down and clench thy fetters here?” (l.12).

Stanza four introduces the third character/speaker in the poem, the “captive” (l.13), who is being kept against her will, innocent of any crime and resembling a “sculpt[ed] marble saint.” Despite the grim conditions and all their suffering, the captive finds solace in the “messenger of Hope” (l.35), who visits “every night” and offers her “eternal liberty” for a life cut short. In other words, the captive sees their sacrifice as a means to a greater good as they will be rewarded in Heaven. In the tenth stanza, the speaker states that this messenger comes to her with the “western winds,” thus evoking the imagery of the natural element as life-giver, life-taker and mediator between earthly suffering and heavenly bliss. Also, in “In dungeons dark I cannot sing,” s/d, considered by critics a Gondal poem due to the marginal reference to Arthur Ex (Arthur Exina, a victim of Julius Brenzaida’s political machinations in Gondal, who also appears in Anne Brontë’s writings, as Roper (1995) mentions: “A male ‘A.E.’ appears in three poems by AB written between October 1845 and August 1846”) and whose experience closely resembles that of Catherine Linton while imprisoned at *Wuthering Heights* (“The thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I’m tired of being enclosed here” p.124). Indeed, one can see in Arthur’s plight, “What bird can soar with broken wing?” (l.3), the same pain as in Catherine Earnshaw’s suffocating words to Ellen Dean: “Open the window again wide: fasten it open!” (p.97).

⁴³ The motif of walling up is rather recurring in Gothic literature, and it often appears in Gothic tales as a means of containing entities that challenge the boundaries between life and death, reason and madness, or civilization and savagery, such as a vampire, a monster, or any possessed creature. By sealing away these beings, the act of entombing them not only creates suspense but also emphasises themes of entrapment, oppression, life in death, and the haunting persistence and remembrance of the past. A classic example of walling up is found in Edgar Allan Poe’s short story *The Black Cat* (1843). In this narrative, the narrator, after several episodes of domestic and animal abuse, driven by madness and guilt, walls up his murdered wife in the basement to conceal his crime. However, the supernatural twist comes when the cat, which he unintentionally entombs with her, leads to his eventual downfall by crying eerily, thus exposing the murderer to the authorities. As David Punter said in a lecture on the Gothic (Richardson, 2021): “Because what they turn out to be once you are inside them is labyrinths. It is impossible to find one’s way around them. There is always darkness. There is always the threat of falling through the trap door or finding oneself on a lower level. These are scenarios where there are no real maps, unlike the conventional house, you can never tell exactly how to get out. Most times you are not even aware of exactly how you got in. So, these are scenarios of imprisonment. There are also scenarios of claustrophobia, of being unable to escape, and they contain within themselves very often the threat of being buried alive.”

Another reference to the dungeon is made in the short composition “I paused on the threshold, I turned to the sky”, n.d.⁴⁴, where the imagery of the threshold is placed at the forefront as the locus for the reflections depicted in the poem. It is described as the place of conversion between heaven and earth (“I looked to the heaven and the dark mountains round” l.2), and combines the moon, the sky (here referred to as an “Ocean”), and the wind that ominously murmurs a wild and unnerving sound. In the second stanza, the speaker chooses to cross the threshold and enter the dungeon (“dark prison-house” l.5) surrounded by massive, ever-waving, almost dream-like moors.

“High waving heather ‘neath stormy blasts bending”, in which the wild heather subsides under the force of the wind, also establishes connections with Emily Brontë's novel, *Wuthering Heights*. The first and most immediate association is evident in its title, which also stands as the name given to the Earnshaw's dwelling and farmland, “Wuthering Heights”, the central locus of the narrative. As Mr Lockwood explains in Chapter I, “Wuthering” [is] a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather.” (p.4)⁴⁵. From the very first paragraphs of the novel, the wind takes centre stage to dominate not only the landscape but also to stand as a catalyst for specific events, marking the passage of time and hovering over pivotal moments of life, death and rebirth. For instance, in Chapter V, the wind ominously anticipates Mr Earnshaw's death: “But the hour came, at last, that ended Mr. Earnshaw's troubles on earth. He died quietly in his chair one October evening, seated by the fireside. A high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney.” (p.33). Mr. Earnshaw was known for his kindness and efforts to maintain peace within his home. However, after his death and the inheritance of the estate by his son, the violence within the household becomes increasingly severe and the harm more profound. The wind is depicted as an external force that brings about a destructive event occurring within the confines of the house. While the family is initially portrayed as serene, with Catherine leaning against her father's knee and Heathcliff lying on the floor with his head in her lap, the death of Mr Earnshaw leads to chaos and disorder within the household as it

⁴⁴ Roper (1995, p. 234) suggests that this poem may have been written on November 2nd, 1838, a night with a full moon, and that the dark prison-house refers to Law Hill. It is considered the follow-up to the poem “Where were ye all? and where wert thou?”, dated October 1838, as it appears above it in the same manuscript.

⁴⁵ Etymologically speaking, “wuthering” (/ˈwʌðərɪŋ/) is an adjective of Scandinavian origin, which evolved from the late Middle English “*whither*, *wuther*” and was mostly used in Northern English dialects to mean something that produces ‘a rushing sound’.

means Hindley returning to the Heights and establishing a completely different household dynamics from the one in place, namely in debasing Heathcliff to a servitude position, subject to almost subhuman treatment with regular beatings and verbal offence.

In Chapter IX, the wind sets the tone for another death, this time metaphorical, when Heathcliff, hurt by Catherine's stance on the perspective of marrying him, abandons Wuthering Heights, disappearing for three years:

About midnight, while we still sat up, the storm came rattling over the Heights in full fury. There was a violent wind, as well as thunder, and either one or the other split a tree off at the corner of the building: a huge bough fell across the roof and knocked down a portion of the east chimney-stack, sending a clatter of stones and soot into the kitchen-fire. We thought a bolt had fallen in the middle of us. (p.66)

In addition to the wind, other elements found in the poem are also mentioned, such as the reference to the midnight threshold, signalling the starting point for another disruption in the Earnshaw's household, the rattling disruptive storm, and the visual and sound imagery of lightning and thunder.

Another example of the overlapping motifs of the poem and novel is when, in Chapter XII, Ellen Dean hints at Catherine's descent into madness:

Tossing about, she increased her feverish bewilderment to madness, and tore the pillow with her teeth; then raising herself up all burning, desired that I would open the window. We were in the middle of winter, the wind blew strong from the north-east, and I objected. (p.94).

The feeble madwoman⁴⁶'s desire to experience the wind stems from an intense, almost animalistic, urge for freedom and return to nature. The physical and emotional fever that Catherine is experiencing mirrors the speaker's rhythmic avalanche conveyed in the poem, as they depict numerous actions simultaneously occurring. The window represents another line of threshold as Catherine, confined in the "dungeon" of her own bedroom, wishes for this

⁴⁶ The term 'madwoman' is not used lightly in this context. In addition to Ellen Dean's words, Catherine's actions at this particular moment mirror one of the most tragic Shakespearean heroines: Ophelia, who, mad with grief for a dead father at the hands of her love, expresses her feelings of loss by enumerating flowers and their meaning: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, / love, remember: and there is pansies, that's for thoughts./(...)/ There's fennel for you, and columbines: there's rue / for you; and here's some for me: we may call it / herb-grace o' Sundays: O you must wear your rue with / a difference. There's a daisy: I would give you / some violets, but they withered all when my father / died: they say he made a good end,--" (Act IV, scene 5). Catherine, in Chapter XII, does something similar but with bird feathers. While pulling them from the pillows on her bed, she begins a short monologue: "That's a turkey's," she murmured to herself, 'and this is a wild duck's; and this is a pigeon's. Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows - no wonder I couldn't die! Let me take care to throw it on the floor when I lie down. And here is a moor-cock's; and this - I should know it among a thousand - it's a lapwing's." (p.95).

window, for this bar, to be broken so she can migrate to the moors: “my soul will be on that hill-top before you lay hands on me again.” (p.99). The wind, again, appears as both a life-giver and life-taker as Catherine wishes to experience the wind as her physical life deteriorates. Again, similarly to “High waving heather ‘neath stormy blasts bending” and “The Prisoner (A Fragment)”, not only does the wind give and take life, but it also preludes moments of intersection between life and death. The action of the wind catalyses Catherine’s first appearance in the novel:

This time, I remembered I was lying in the oak closet, and I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: but it annoyed me so much, that I resolved to silence it, if possible; and, I thought, I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple: a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. ‘I must stop it, nevertheless!’” (p.20)

Had the wind not insistingly knocked the fir bough against the window, “teasing” Lockwood to silence it, it would never have been broken and allowed for Catherine’s little hands to grab Lockwood’s wrist. The wind, by causing the glass on the window to shatter, allows the line between life and death to be broken.

In both the poem and the novel, Emily Brontë uses natural imagery to convey the concept of the Sublime. The wild, untamed inner and outer landscapes – whether it is the heather-covered moors or the stormy skies – become a reflection of the intense inner conflict experienced by the characters, thus illustrating the overwhelming and often destructive power of nature. This portrayal of nature as both beautiful and terrifying blurs the line that marks the threshold between awe and fear.

3.1.2 “Sleep brings no joy to me”

“Sleep brings no joy to me” dates back to 1837, the same year of “The night is darkening around me, which follows in this dissertation. “Sleeps brings no joy to me”, despite not having any in-text references to the names or places in the land of Gondal, its manuscript, which rests in the Brontë Parsonage Museum Library, bears the initials A.G.A (Augusta Geraldine Almeda) at the top, which suggests this to be a Gondal poem. Guimarães (2002, p.408) argues that this poem describes more than Augusta’s lament for the death of one of her many lovers, it depicts the haunting feeling of being observed by those whose death she

had been responsible for⁴⁷. The poem can thus be interpreted as the manifestation of a guilty conscience, wherein the speaker perceives the past victims and actions as returning to pass judgment upon her ("The shadows of the dead / They all gaze oh how scornfully").

The poem consists of six quatrains (or four-line stanzas), which gives it a regular, rather repetitive structure that somewhat mirrors the persistent and cyclical nature of the speaker's suffering. As to the rhyme, it follows an ABAB scheme, sometimes with slant rhymes, which depend mainly on the Yorkshire accent, as is the example in the last stanza, with "knit" rhyming with "forget". This alternate rhyme scheme creates a rhythmic consistency that enhances the feeling of inescapability, emphasising the speaker's feeling of entrapment in their misery⁴⁸. As to the metric, despite the regularity of the meter throughout the poem, which again reinforces the idea of a repetitive, unrelenting torment, each stanza is comprised of three different types of line metric: the first and second lines of each stanza are iambic trimeters, as in "Sleep brings no joy to me / Remembrance never dies". Note that, by beginning anaphorically the first line of each stanza with "Sleep brings no", the first line of every stanza begins with a spondee, that is, two stressed syllables "Sleep brings", followed by two iambic feet. The second line of each quatrain is a conventional iambic trimeter: "The shadows of the dead". The third line is an iambic tetrameter, "My soul is given to misery", and the last line of the quatrains is shortened to an iambic dimeter "And lives in sighs", which brings this poem very close to what is known by the common meter/measure, usually used in Christian hymns⁴⁹, with the difference of, instead of a trimeter in the last line of the stanza, there is a dimeter, which pulls the rhythm of the poem closer to a ballad, where a shorter line at the end of a stanza can be used for rhythmic or emphatic effect as a refrain.

⁴⁷ In fact, Augusta's many crimes involve being the moral or *de facto* responsible for the deaths of at least four characters in the Gondal saga: Amedeus, her first lover, who dies in exile ("The Death of A.G.A": "Where my Amedeus lies asleep, And I have long forgot to weep."), the love child, Alexandria, whom she leaves to die of exposure ("A Farewell to Alexandria": "I *might* have left thee, darling one"), Fernando de Samara, who commits suicide after being deserted by Augusta ("Light up thy halls! 'Tis closing day": "And yet, for all her *hate*, each parting glance would tell / A stronger passion breathed, burned in this *last farewell* – / Unconquered in my soul the Tyrant rules me still – / *Life bows to my control*, but, Love I cannot kill!", our italics), and Alfred Sidonia, who is abandoned by her ("This summer wind, with thee and me": "I know that I have done thee wrong").

⁴⁸ Another instance of the occurrence of the prison/dungeon motif. Instead of experiencing a release from the shackles in the threshold between heaven and earth, like in "High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" ("Man's spirit away from its drear dungeon sending / Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars"), the speaker remains in their psychological prison of recurring and unsettling thoughts, envisioning death as the only possible atonement.

⁴⁹ Emily Brontë was most certainly very familiar with Christian Hymns and the Book of Common Prayer due to her father's position within the Church and Aunt Elizabeth's feverous religious devotion.

The poem may be described as a haunting exploration of despondency and guilt, with a profound feeling of isolation and mental and emotional distress. The speaker finds no solace or redemption in sleep, which traditionally is meant to be a moment of oblivion, peace and lightness for the mind and body. Instead, in this poem, sleep brings nothing but pain (no joy), fatigue (no rest), despair (no hope), weakness (no strength), loneliness (no friend) and numbness (no wish). There is a strong desire for escapism through death, expressed in the final stanza: "My only wish is to forget / In the sleep of death."

The initial stanza introduces the main "character" of the poem: Sleep, which is then repeated at the beginning of every stanza. The personification of sleep, expressed by the capitalisation of the word, turns it into a living force that is supposed to bring joy, rest, or strength but brings nothing but anguish. The abstract concept of sleep is seen as an active agent withholding any comfort from the speaker. The repetitiveness emphasises the central relevance of sleep, which should be a moment of renewal. However, it fails to be so due to the immense sadness of the speaker, as it deprives them of what is supposed to bring: joy in the first stanza and hope, strength, company and willpower in the following. The enjambment in lines 3 and 4 stresses the miserable and mute existence of the speaker's soul as it "is given to misery / And lives in sighs." The tone is confessional, highlighted by the absence of punctuation, as if the speaker's stream of consciousness bleeds into the written lines, and the thoughts flow almost in a trance triggered by the lack of sleep.

The second stanza begins anaphorically with the exact wording as the first one: "Sleep brings no..." and then completes with another noun, this time "rest". Even though sleep is, in denotative terms, associated with rest and renewal, here it takes on an antagonistic role as it brings "The shadows of the dead, / My wakening eyes may never see, / Surround my bed.", i.e., sleep is the catalyst for the remembrance of those long departed, who lurk around and surround the speaker's resting place the moment the speaker decides to sleep. The nightmarish Gothic imagery of the shadows, the ghostly presence of the dead and the fact that these surround the speaker in a quasi-claustrophobic atmosphere emphasise the sense of unease and desolation. The third stanza reiterates the idea of the nightmare ("soundest sleep") as the speaker laments that sleep cannot, this time, bring hope. In other words, there is no comfort in resting, solely fear, because it is when the speaker is fast asleep that these ghosts ("they") approach them to deepen their despair.

In the fourth stanza, sleep brings no strength to a feeble speaker: it offers no consolation or respite as it deepens and widens the darkness around them like a monstrous wave that engulfs the speaker. The sea-related metaphors of the "wilder sea" and "darker wave" represent the tumultuous emotional state of the speaker ("I only sail a wilder sea, / A darker wave."). The sea is wild and hazardous; every wave is a heavy and painful blanket which continually torments the speaker. The imagery of water in the poem also serves to evoke the sensations of drowning and suffocation, symbolising the overwhelming feelings of pain and regret experienced by the speaker.

The fifth stanza stresses the isolation and abandonment felt by the speaker as sleep brings them "no friend". They feel desolate and forsaken, and no one, not even one of the ghosts who visit the speaker in their sleep, is there to console them or help them cope with their despair. Everyone gazes on scornfully as they are surrounded by enemies who feel nothing but contempt towards the speaker.

In the final stanza, the speaker mentions that sleep brings no other wish but to forget in a permanent sleep, the sleep of death. The notion of "sleep of death" concludes the poem and encapsulates the magnitude of the speaker's wish for release from their torment.

Even though the poem's tone is confessional, and the fixed structure provides a sense of repetitiveness, which may entertain a sense of stability and regularity, this is yet another poem in which the Sublime is quite present, both in the themes and language. The poem's last stanza establishes death as an ultimate, almost transcendent release from the anguish of life. The speaker's desire for the "sleep of death" can be viewed as an expression of the Kantian Sublime in its most terrifying form—encountering the vastness of the unknown, the infinite state of unconsciousness, and surrendering to it. This idea of infinity in the "sleep of death" reflects the principle of the mathematical sublime, as it exceeds our capacity for sensory comprehension but may be grasped by our reason: "...for the mathematical estimation of magnitude, there is, indeed, no maximum (for the power of numbers extends to infinity)." (Kant, p.147). The speaker is also face-to-face with the "shadows of the dead", an awe-provoking situation as the speaker yearns for death, not out of fear, but as a release from an existence filled with misery and sorrow. The imagery of the sea, often associated with the Sublime, is also significant as it evokes another instance of nature's vastness and uncontrollable power, as the sea is depicted as an immense force that constantly badgers the

speaker with its dark and impenetrable waves. Sleep, which should offer refuge, becomes a negative, unlimited space filled with dread, terror, and supernatural forces.

There are instances in *Wuthering Heights* that somehow echo the tone and content of this poem, mainly the sections of the novel in which the two main characters, prompted by the physical absence of the other, dive into an exacerbated emotional and physical distress and refuse to sleep. There are two passages in the text where this is rather evident: the first, in Chapter IX, when, after Heathcliff partially overhears the conversation between Ellen and Catherine, who confesses that it would “degrade” her to marry Heathcliff, and consequently disappears into the stormy night, Catherine refuses to sleep:

Coming down somewhat later than usual, I saw, by the sunbeams piercing the chinks of the shutters, Miss Catherine still seated near the fireplace. The house-door was ajar, too; light entered from its unclosed windows; Hindley had come out, and stood on the kitchen hearth, haggard and drowsy. (p. 67).

Catherine, feeling the absence of Heathcliff, cannot rest and remains in her chair, soaking wet, by the door⁵⁰ and windows she kept open in the hope he may return. Catherine navigates two distinct yet interrelated thresholds that seem to have the power to both unite and separate her from Heathcliff. By refusing to sleep, she deliberately maintains a vigilant state, driven by the fear that sleep might somehow sever her connection with him. In her efforts to ensure Heathcliff’s return, she keeps the door ajar and windows open, thus providing paths for his reappearance. The second, and perhaps the one that most closely relates to the content of the poem is when, in Chapter XXXIV Heathcliff begins his night excursions into the vastness of the moors: “One night, after the family were in bed, I heard him go downstairs, and out at the front door. I did not hear him re-enter, and in the morning I found he was still away.” (p.247). Upon returning to the Heights, Heathcliff is the face of the Sublime: “Heathcliff stood at the open door; he was pale, and he trembled: yet, certainly, he had a strange joyful glitter in his eyes, that altered the aspect of his whole face.” Heathcliff’s emotional turmoil is captured through the juxtaposition of his physical appearance and the contradictory expressions on his face. The image of Heathcliff standing at the open door is another depiction of a character about to cross a particular threshold and highlights his liminal position between

⁵⁰ The open/closed door/window motif is recurrent in Emily Brontë’s work and warrants further research, especially focusing on the role of gates, doors, and windows as physical thresholds and the antithetical relationship between what lies within and what resides beyond such boundaries.

the realms of the dead and the living. His paleness and trembling suggest intense emotional distress, perhaps fear or anxiety. However, the "strange, joyful glitter" in his eyes makes his demeanour contradictory. The "glitter" alters his entire appearance, indicating that concurrent to his apparent distress lies a deep, almost perverse ("strange") sense of joy or satisfaction. This duality reflects the complex nature of Heathcliff's character as the personification of the Sublime, where pain and pleasure are inextricably intertwined. One wonders what Heathcliff may have seen or done while roaming the moors, and the absence of a concrete answer contributes to the reader's uneasiness. Were these the ramblings of a disturbed, mal-nourished man⁵¹? Is Heathcliff answering the call from someone or something in the wild? What is he doing out there in the dark all night long? Is he experiencing some supernatural force? Is he the supernatural force? Ellen Dean's question is the reader's question: "Where were you last night?" (p. 249), to which Heathcliff answers cryptically: "Last night I was on the threshold of hell. To-day, I am within sight of my heaven." (p.249). Heathcliff is not only standing on the physical threshold of the door. He is standing on the final threshold: the one that separates hell and heaven.

Due to the lack of nourishment and sleep, Heathcliff begins to give signs of physical agitation and mental deterioration:

He returned after midnight, and, instead of going to bed, shut himself into the room beneath. I listened, and tossed about, and, finally, dressed and descended. It was too irksome to lie there, harassing my brain with a hundred idle misgivings. I distinguished Mr. Heathcliff's step, restlessly measuring the floor, and he frequently broke the silence by a deep inspiration, resembling a groan. He muttered detached words also; the only one I could catch was the name of Catherine, coupled with some wild term of endearment or suffering; and spoken as one would speak to a person present; low and earnest, and wrung from the depth of his soul. (p. 251).

Heathcliff is pacing, sighing, groaning, mumbling incoherent words (or perhaps words from the unintelligible "gibberish" he spoke when he first arrived at the Heights) of which only the name Catherine could be understood. His tone is loving but desperate, and he is addressing someone who is not physically in the room, much like the speaker in the poem who finds no

⁵¹ At this point in the novel, Ellen says that Heathcliff barely eats ("I vainly reminded him of his protracted abstinence from food: if he stirred to touch anything in compliance with my entreaties, if he stretched his hand out to get a piece of bread, his fingers clenched before they reached it, and remained on the table, forgetful of their aim." (p.251) and is gradually losing his physical integrity, acquiring ghost-like features ("The way you've passed these three last days might knock up a Titan. Do take some food, and some repose. You need only look at yourself in a glass to see how you require both. Your cheeks are hollow, and your eyes blood-shot, like a person starving with hunger and going blind with loss of sleep." (p.252)

solace in sleep but to whom the lack thereof also makes them ramble repetitively all the sorrow in their life. Of particular interest is the line "Sleep brings no friend to me", as, in *Wuthering Heights*, if, in Chapter IX, Catherine falls asleep, she fears missing her friend (Heathcliff), and Heathcliff, in Chapter XXXIV, should he fall asleep, also fears losing contact with his immaterial friend (Catherine). In *Wuthering Heights*, sleep is also seen not as a refuge but as a space to avoid.

The relevance of sleep is highlighted in the very last sentence by Lockwood:

I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine *unquiet slumbers* for the *sleepers* in that *quiet* earth."⁵² (p.256).

Lockwood takes his final stroll and observes the resting places of Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar beneath a "benign sky." The scenario is mild and pleasant, with "soft wind," "moths fluttering," and "heath and harebells," all signs of a harmonious and peaceful atmosphere. Heathcliff and Catherine are dead, and Lockwood seems to suggest that the natural order has finally been re-established. Lockwood sees this narrative as finished and Heathcliff's death marks the end of the characters' personal tragedy, as they are all finally united in the afterlife, should there be one (everyone's exact role in this dynamic is not fully described as it does not fit the "natural" societal order by which Lockwood abides: even in death, Catherine is still a woman between two men). All in all, Lockwood believes or wants to believe that now life is finally for the living, and the reason will no longer be disturbed by passions, hauntings or other transgressions.

However, at this point, the reader is aware that they cannot rely on Lockwood to interpret the events or convey correct information. From the very beginning of the novel, he repeatedly fails to identify people, places, and events. The polyptoton in "unquiet" and "quiet" draws a deliberate contrast in Lockwood's last words. Even though he seems certain of his version of reality, the reader is left with the question of whether Heathcliff and Catherine truly rest in peace or if their spirits will continue to haunt the moors. The "unquiet slumbers" suggest that, despite the apparent peace of the "quiet earth," their intense connection and unresolved issues in life may prevent them from finding complete rest. As much as Lockwood wishes to dismiss the sightings of Heathcliff and Catherine by Joseph and the little boy, as the

⁵² Our italics.

idea of the supernatural does not fit within his structures of rational thought, one is left with the impression that now, after six months, the narrator even questions himself whether the events he witnessed took place exactly how he perceived them. There is a lingering tension, a reminder that for characters as intense as Heathcliff and Catherine, peace might never come easily – even in death – and that they may only be waiting for the next storm to reappear.

In the end, Lockwood still does not understand *Wuthering Heights*, which is perhaps Emily Brontë's way of hinting that some thresholds are better left uncrossed.

3.1.3 "The night is darkening round me"

Emily Brontë's "The night is darkening round me" was written in November 1837 in Haworth, a windswept village in Yorkshire, where the author spent almost her entire life and where snowbound trees and gathering storms would have been rather frequent. Although the manuscript does not bear any of the markings usually used by Emily to signal the poems belonging to the Gondal saga, Juliet Barker, the editor of the volume *The Brontë's Selected Poems*, in 1989, suggests that this poem may be the manifestation of the speaker's "maternal emotions", related to an incident when one of the Gondal heroines, Augusta Geraldine Almeda exposes her child to die on the mountains in the depths of winter⁵³, which is also mentioned later on by Christine Alexander (2010), as this poem is the very first one included in her anthology solely dedicated to the juvenilia of the Brontë siblings.

"The night is darkening round me" is a lyric poem consisting of 12 lines, divided into three quatrains. Each stanza has a similar structure: the poet describes the inhospitable landscape in which they are trapped to reiterate then that, due to unspoken reasons, they

⁵³ To reinforce the integration of this poem in the Gondal saga, there seems to be some thematic overlap regarding instances of maternal abandonment, as Emily returns to the theme in two other poems: in 'A Farewell to Alexandria,' dated 1839, Augusta Geraldine Almeda (AGA), a somewhat unconventional queen of Gondal, allegedly (*might*) abandons her illegitimate newborn daughter (whose father is Alfred Sidonia, one of AGA's many lovers) to the harsh natural elements: "I might have laid thee down / And deemed thy sleep would gentle be / I might have left thee, darling one / And thought thy God was guarding thee!" (stanza 5), a vile act that seems particularly difficult to commit due to the extreme weather conditions: "Alas, the flakes are heavily falling; / They cover fast each guardian crest; / And chilly white their shroud is palling / Thy frozen limbs and freezing breast" (stanza 8). The last stanza of the poem makes it clear that not only is this an unwanted child but also highlights the inner conflict of the speaker: "Wakes up the storm more madly wild, / The mountain drifts are tossed on high— / Farewell, unblest, unfriended child, / I cannot bear to watch thee die!" Again, in "What winter floods, what showers of Spring," from 1839, AGA remorsefully recalls the final resting place of a well-kept secret: "And yet, beneath, that spectre ring, Unmoved and undiscovered lay // A mute remembrancer of crime, / Long lost, concealed, forgot for years, / It comes at last to cancel time, / And waken unavailing tears" (l.3-8).

"cannot go". This repetition, evoked 3 times, that they "cannot go" at the end of the last line of each stanza provides this poem with the sense of a ballad, as it acts as a refrain.

In addition to the stanza structure, built like a grim old song, "The night is darkening round me" is written in accented meter. Although the meter is inconsistent at times, it still follows the same number of stressed syllables per line (in this case, three), thus giving the poem the paced rhythm of the tales of oral tradition. The A and C lines are iambic trimeters + an unstressed syllable, "The night is darkening round + me" (l.1) and "The giant trees are bend + ing" (l.5), and the B and D lines are iambic trimeters, "The wild winds coldly blow" (l.2) and "Their bare boughs weighed with snow". The exception is the third stanza, in which the first 2 lines truncate the first unstressed syllable, "Clouds beyond clouds above + me, / Wastes beyond wastes below" (l.9-10), thus breaking the established pattern by changing the pace and anticipating the last refrain to close the ballad (similar to a nursery rhyme "Ladybird, Ladybird"⁵⁴, which also has a three-beat accentual meter). The parallel rhythm of "clouds beyond clouds" and "wastes beyond wastes" evokes an imagery of a location where skies and lands, both above and below, are equally chaotic, craggy, and ominous. No matter how much the poet might want to escape from this "drear" place, all their efforts are in vain. The return to the regularity of the last two lines, again with consistent three-feet iambs, evokes their helpless stillness: "I will not, cannot go." (l.12).

As to the rhyme scheme, this poem uses ABAB in its three quatrains, which results in a pattern of ABAB CBCB ABAB, which forms a symmetrical pattern, as the B rhymes chime with one another across the whole poem. The odd lines rhyme in pairs (me/me; bending/descending; me/me); however, the even lines, the B rhymes, always return to a /əʊ/ sound: blow, snow, below, and go in the last line of each stanza. The speaker, thus, keeps circling back to what they cannot do – "go" – making the also circular rhyme scheme mirror

⁵⁴ The line "Ladybird, ladybird, fly away home" is written in iambic trimeter + an unstressed syllable. The nursery rhyme was well known in the Brontë household. Not only were the Brontë children well acquainted with local folklore and nursery rhymes, the influence of the local servants, but there was a literary variation, written by Caroline Anne Southey, second wife of the Poet Laureate Robert Southey, which appeared in an 1827 issue of *Blackwood's Magazine*, a publication also welcomed by the Brontë household. The first stanza reads: "Lady-bird, Lady-bird, fly away home, / The field mouse is gone to her nest, / The daisies have shut up their sleepy red eyes / And the birds and the bees are at rest. The first line, "Lady-bird, Lady-bird, fly away home," also heads a poem penned by the Brontë sisters. However, its authorship has been profusely debated throughout the years. While some academics attribute the poem to Charlotte (namely in Guimarães (2002, p.383), stating it describes the final attempt at reconciliation between Zamorna and Northangerland, hence pertaining to the Angria poems), this holograph poem appears in most anthologies under the authorship of Emily. While consulting the catalogue of the manuscript in the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection of English and American Literature in The New York Public Library, "Lady-bird! lady-bird! Fly away home" is filed under the name of both sisters.

their predicament. The poem's rhymes are as paralysed as the speaker is. This paralysis is then twofold: first, physical, as, under the sway of a "tyrant spell," the speaker finds that they are unable to escape the dreadful wasteland. There is no other option but to gaze at the threatening scenery of the wilderness—the storm approaching, trees weighed down by snow—and reiterate that they are unable to move. However, it is also possible to read this paralysis as psychological or emotional, as it visually represents the speaker's inner desolation, in a symbolic representation of the immobility one feels when helplessly trapped in a morose emotional predicament. There is, however, the subtle suggestion that the speaker's own stubbornness contributes to the predicament. Throughout most of the poem, the speaker repeatedly states that they "cannot, cannot" leave the place. In the final line, though, the tone shifts slightly: they state that they "will not, cannot go." This change (from "cannot" to "will") hints that the speaker's seeming paralysis may also be a matter of will—a conscious choice to confront the fears and sufferings, a challenge they are determined to face without retreating.

The poem begins in stanza one with the description of an enveloping darkness and harsh blowing winds (v1-2). The alliteration in /w/ in line two ("The wild winds coldly blow") illustrates this "airy" mood, as the production of the /w/ sound onomatopoeically conveys the movement of the air and the round, mournful assonance in /ə/ of "coldly blow" echoes the howling of those winds, bringing the eerie scene to life. The speaker, by acknowledging the imminent nighttime and wild winds, sets the scenario for overwhelming natural forces. The introduction of a "tyrant spell" (marked by the adversative "but", as the speaker seems to be unable to change their condition) binds the speaker and introduces the theme of entrapment and immobility (l.3) due to both internal and external forces. With the metaphor "But a tyrant spell has bound me", the speaker is establishing a connection between their predicament of being under the influence of forces beyond their control to something out of the human realm, something akin to magic, a spell. It effectively conveys the speaker's sense of powerlessness in the face of an oppressive and inescapable situation. Also, the speaker refers to a 'tyrant spell', personifying the spell by endowing it with an aggressive, potentially even masculine quality. They also use the verb form 'has bound' to suggest that the spell has her marooned on the mountainside. One could argue that the spell is an intangible manifestation of their emotional stasis, i.e., the speaker is physically unable to move; or one could hint that it is the weather itself that has her trapped, i.e., the harsh night, wind, and woods block them from

carrying on their journey. By converging both these interpretations with the critic's opinion that the poem describes the inner and outer conflict of a woman leaving her child to die of exposure, it is clear that nature plays a significant role in this poem and the poet's description is laden with symbolism. The presence of the epizeuxis "I cannot, cannot go." (l.3) emphasises the speaker's helplessness and frustration. The double verb form in the negative stresses the impossibility of escape and reinforces the theme of entrapment, thus underscoring the emotional intensity of the speaker's situation. Also, by beginning the last line of the stanza with "And", besides rhythmically introducing the line of the refrain, creates a situation of enjambment between the third line and the fourth, the speaker establishes a cause-consequence relation between the idea of the tyrant spell and the entrapping of the speaker under such spell.

In the second stanza, the imagery shifts to the physical elements surrounding the speaker, by describing giant trees bending under the force of the wind and the weight of snow. A storm is "fast" descending. In lines 5 and 6, "The giant trees are bending / Their bare boughs weighed with snow.", the trees are described as "giant" and are said to be "bending" under the weight of the snow. This personification gives the trees human-like qualities, suggesting they are struggling and succumbing to the harsh conditions, which mirrors the speaker's own struggle. The giant trees twisting and yielding under the harsh weather are a metaphor for the speaker's will being under the force of the spell. The use of the adjective "giant" and the gerundive "bending" exemplifies the language of the Sublime, highlighting the immense proportions of the trees that, despite their size, are bowing under the even greater weight of the snow. This imagery underscores the formidable nature of the winter storm. By invoking the treacherous conditions associated with such storms, the line engenders a palpable sense of urgency and fear. The trees, pushed down by the snow, seem to crush and suffocate the speaker's body and spirit. The language of oppression and fear in these descriptions of nature mirrors the speaker's external and internal state of being overwhelmed and constrained. By focusing on the earthbound elements of the trees, the speaker provides an illustration of their predicament. Line 7 mentions a storm which is fast descending, somewhat recovering the idea of the poem "High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" (1836), in which the sky lowers to the earth, thus bringing heaven and earth together, intertwining both planes and blurring the lines between the above and the below. Also, similarly to the poem "High waving

heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" (1836), in the line "Their bare boughs weighed with snow;" (l.6), there's an alliteration in /b/ and /w/, which contributes to the rhythmic and musical quality of the line. It creates a sound pattern that enhances the overall sensory experience of the reader and also makes it memorable and engaging, much like the ballads and nursery rhymes of oral tradition, which are meant not to be read but memorised and chanted. The recurring line of the refrain, "And yet I cannot go" (l.8), reinforces the idea that, despite the severity of the situation, as the storm of formidable strength looms is vengefully descending, escape remains impossible. Despite the imminent danger, the speaker asserts that she "cannot go," yet she does not disclose the nature of her entrapment, the reasons behind it, or the possibility of escape. Instead, she focuses on describing the encroaching peril and her own immobilisation.

The third and final stanza deepens the theme of entrapment with a sense of ultimate resignation. The imagery used in "Clouds beyond clouds above me, / Wastes beyond wastes below." (l.9-10) creates a visual representation of the speaker's environment and emotional state. The layered description of "clouds beyond clouds" and "wastes beyond wastes" invokes a profound sense of boundless and overpowering desolation, characteristic of the Sublime. This technique amplifies the poem's theme of isolation and confinement by conveying an infinite and oppressive bleakness. The speaker reflects on the oppressive sky and the vast, desolate wastes below. The syntactic parallelism of both lines, noun-preposition-noun-preposition, repeating the first preposition, "beyond", and placing antithetical prepositions in the end "above"/"below", produces the effect of a tongue twister, in that one line echoes the other for rhythm, emphasis and musicality, also very typical of oral tradition. Verses 11-12, "But nothing drear can move me; / I will not, cannot go", signify a complete acceptance of their situation. The speaker acknowledges, by using the adversative "but", that no matter how dreary or severe the conditions, they remain bound and immovable. The poem then concludes with a resigned acceptance of the situation. The speaker acknowledges the unchangeable nature of their plight and demonstrates an unwavering resolve to remain despite the oppressive circumstances.

The final stanza also provides additional insight into the broader meaning of the "tyrant spell". The speaker describes being crushed between "clouds above" and "wastes below," creating an image of being caught between heaven and hell, or at least envisioning both

realms. Some critics suggest that the speaker is in purgatory; however, it is also plausible that they are speaking from the earthly realm. They maintain that nothing can move her, and then in the concluding line, they make a notable shift. While previously insisting that they "cannot" go anywhere, implying that some spell restricts their movement, they now declare that they "will not" go. This change in phrasing suggests that their own will might be a factor in her immobility. It implies that they choose not to move, even though they feel unable to do so. It is possible that she is referring to faith or belief in God. If the clouds symbolise heaven and the wastes symbolise hell, the speaker is expressing the inability to transition to either realm. She feels stuck in her current state, unable to shift from disbelief to belief, and thus remains vulnerable to the impending doom. The author may have been influenced by the idea that faith in God can offer salvation from hell, which could have inspired "Spellbound." The speaker seems to be approaching the end of her life, unable to embrace the faith that could offer salvation, leaving her in a state of existential crisis as the threat of death and hell looms closer.

In the poem "The night is darkening round me," lines such as "The giant trees are bending / Their bare boughs weighed with snow" (l.5-6), where the trees, burdened and bent by the snow, convey nature's uncontrollable force, resonate with Burke's concept of the Sublime insofar as it involves a crushing sense of feebleness when faced with nature's power. Also, the lines "Clouds beyond clouds above me, / Wastes beyond wastes below" (l.9-10) create an image of infinite space and expansive emptiness, thus reflecting the idea of the Sublime as something immeasurable and beyond human understanding, fostering a sense of both wonder and fear. Immanuel Kant's interpretation of the sublime emphasises the experience of the infinite and the recognition of human limitations in the face of such vastness. In lines like "The night is darkening round me" (l.1), the encroaching darkness symbolises the infinite, overwhelming the speaker and extending beyond their grasp. This is further illustrated in "And the storm is fast descending, / And yet I cannot go" (l.7-8), where the approaching storm represents an untameable force, heightening the speaker's sense of helplessness. The poem's depiction of endless clouds and wasteland in lines 9 and 10, along with the powerful storm and bending trees of stanzas one and two, emphasises nature's immense power and the speaker's profound feebleness in the face of such overwhelming forces.

This poem shares some of its themes with another composition by Emily: "F. de Samara to A.G.A. 'Light up thy halls 'Tis closing day;'", dated November 1st, 1838, an 11-stanza poem

with a peculiar metric. Despite beginning with two tetrameters (“Light up thy halls ‘Tis closing day”), the remaining lines of the poem are written in iambic hexameters (And, oh! my couch is bleak, beneath the rainy sky!).⁵⁵ It describes the closing act of Fernando de Samara, who, after being seduced, loved, imprisoned, exiled (“I’m drear and lone and far away” l.2) and forgotten by Augusta Geraldine Almeda, chooses to end his life with the aid of the life-taker aided by “Northwind’s bitter sigh” (l.3). The overall tone of the poem is of despondency and bitterness. Fernando, isolated and entrapped in a whirlwind of haunting images of his beloved, seeks redemption in one last prayer that he cannot utter: “I have breathed my only wish in one last, one burning prayer; / A prayer that would come forth altho’it lingered long; / That set on fire my heart, but froze upon my tongue” (l.10-12). Before fatally wounding himself, Fernando gazes upon A.G.A.’s portrait, describing “Thy black resplendent hair; / The glory-beaming brow; and smile how heavenly fair!” (l.17-18). He then focuses on the eyes, stating that he cannot see them as they are turned away, which he realises is actually a good thing because their sway would drive him even madder. However, Fernando cannot help feeling an extra layer of rejection in this inaccessibility to A.G.A.’s eyes, as this constitutes an additional barrier to her heart and soul. Fernando feels forsaken and calls AGA a “deceiver”. All hope is lost, and he curses her in his last words: “Say, that my pangs are past, but Hers are yet to come” (l.36). Fernando hangs on to the only thing he still has power over: his own life; but confesses that he cannot erase his love for A.G.A.: “Life bows to my control, but, Love I cannot kill!” (l.44).

Both these poems can be analysed in parallel with several pivotal moments in *Wuthering Heights*. Much like the novel, “The night is darkening round me” is set in an icy, craggy wasteland. Nothing buds here but leafless trees, flagellated by the wind and snow. Above, night gathers, and a storm looms. Below, the wilderness. Both are in their unmatched grandeur, offering a dizzying glimpse of infinity. Such imagery is evoked immediately in the opening of the novel. As in the poem, “the giant trees are bending”, in *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood describes the

Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end

⁵⁵ According to Roper (1995), only one other of Emily’s poems features this metric, curiously enough, “The Visionary ‘Silent is the House – All are laid asleep’”, and its shorter version, “The Prisoner (A Fragment)”, referred to in the analysis of the poem “High waving heather ‘neath stormy blasts bending”.

of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. (p.4).

Here, too, the power of the wind can only be guessed as it is, in the narrator's voice, immeasurable, as it also bends excessively the firs. The double adjective "pure, bracing" characterises the north wind, which is not only this way and that is not only tightening but also in its most raw natural state. The use of the adverb 'excessively' illustrates how crooked the firs are. On the other hand, "the gaunt thorns" are stretching their feeble arms upwards, and a simile is established ("as if") with suppliant arms in a prayer position, urging for the sun to appear.

This imagery is also present in Chapter II, by reading Heathcliff's reply to Mr Lockwood's desire to leave during the storm:

'Half an hour?' he said, shaking the white flakes from his clothes; 'I wonder you should select the thick of a snowstorm to ramble about in. Do you know that you run a risk of being lost in the marshes? People familiar with these moors often miss their road on such evenings, and I can tell you there is no chance of a change at present.' (p.10).

Both writings exhibit a pronounced sense of entrapment. Emily Brontë employs weather motifs extensively throughout her writings, and notable parallels can be observed between her earlier poetry and her novel. Although it would be overly simplistic to assume that the poem from 1837 was directly influenced by Mr. Lockwood's predicament in the novel, there is compelling evidence to suggest that the thematic elements of the poem may have influenced her later work. Specifically, the use of cold, wind, and snow to confine characters within a specific setting for narrative purposes establishes a clear thematic connection between the two works. In both instances, nature is depicted as acting against the will of the speaker or character, resulting in a profound sense of helplessness, entrapment, and isolation. In the same Chapter, Lockwood observes:

The business of eating being concluded, and no one uttering a word of sociable conversation, I approached a window to examine the weather. A sorrowful sight I saw: dark night coming down prematurely, and sky and hills mingled in one bitter whirl of wind and suffocating snow." (p.12).

The "suffocating snow" paralyses much like the "tyrant spell" in the poem. This description, which recovers the poetic elements of the "night darkening", the "wild winds", and the "bare boughs weighted with snow", further illustrates the harsh winter conditions at

Wuthering Heights, adding to the bleak and oppressive mood. The snow's heaviness and the trees twisted by the wind enhance the characters' emotional weight and the novel's sombre tone. If one is to recall the motif of heaven and earth expressed in "Clouds beyond clouds above me, / Wastes beyond wastes below" (l.9-10), the thin line that separates both planes is also evoked in the novel. When Lockwood experiences his "nightmare", the ghostly imagery and the sense of being overwhelmed reflect the novel's use of the overlapping of the natural and supernatural elements to mirror characters' inner states, similar to the way the poem uses nature to reflect emotional weight. In Chapter III, Lockwood, while in the daze that separates the states of consciousness and unconsciousness while falling asleep, says

I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause: (...) 'I must stop it, nevertheless!' I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me: (...) Terror made me cruel. (p.20).

The passage opens with a triple auditory description: "I heard distinctly the gusty wind, and the driving of the snow; I heard, also, the fir bough repeat its teasing sound, and ascribed it to the right cause:". This synaesthetic engagement not only establishes the scene's atmospheric conditions but also immerses the reader in the chaotic and formidable forces of nature, by enhancing their awareness to the environment's magnitude and its capacity to induce feelings of insignificance and fear, i.e., the description of the wind, snow and bough, as powerful and unrelenting contributes to the Sublime by presenting nature as a dominant force. Lockwood's response to the sounds culminates in a profound emotional reaction. When reaching out to grab the boughs, "my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me." (p.20). This moment of terror reflects the Sublime's psychological dimension, where the sublime experience transcends physical sensations and plunges into a realm of psychological horror. The encounter with this "little, ice-cold hand" amplifies the sense of dread and horror. This moment encapsulates the Sublime's capacity to confront individuals with the unknown or the supernatural, invoking a deep sense of awe and terror. The narrator's subsequent reaction, "Terror made me cruel", indicates the intense psychological impact of the experience, highlighting how the Sublime can elicit extreme emotional and moral responses. Brontë's portrayal of nature as an active, almost malignant force that interacts with human consciousness in both the poem and the novel

underscores the Sublime's theme of nature's power to evoke a sense of existential vulnerability and terror.

Another motif in *Wuthering Heights* that may easily connect with both "The night is darkening round me" and the novel is the wording in the tautology used by Heathcliff upon learning of Catherine's death, in Chapter XVI: "Oh, God! it is unutterable! I CANNOT live without my life! I CANNOT live without my soul!" (p.129). This is reminiscent of the theme of isolation and entrapment present in lines 4, 8 and 12 of the poem: "I cannot [will not], cannot go". This excerpt reflects Heathcliff's profound sense of emotional entrapment and isolation, similar to the speaker in the poem, who feels bound and powerless. Heathcliff's life is inextricably tied to Catherine and their tortured relationship, showcasing their own sense of entrapment with one another. They are each other's "tyrant spell". Likewise, in "Light up thy halls! 'Tis closing day", one can perceive the sense of isolation and entrapment in Fernando De Samara's accusations towards A.G.A. In a self-deprecating soliloquy, he states that she must be glad now that she will never see his face again ("Bright be thine eyes, undimmed their dazzling shine, For never, never more shall they encounter mine!" l.7-8). He even imagines her scorning him with "careless pride" should she see him in those last moments⁵⁶. In the last stanza of the poem, Fernando calls A.G.A. a "tyrant", who, despite all the pain she has caused him, still rules over his heart and soul ("Unconquered in my soul the Tyrant rules me still:" l.43). With the same tone of powerlessness and betrayal, we see Heathcliff in Chapter XV, pointing his finger at Catherine, blaming her for their downfall:

'You teach me now how cruel you've been - cruel and false. WHY did you despise me? WHY did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry; and wring out my kisses and tears: they'll blight you - they'll damn you. You loved me - then what RIGHT had you to leave me? What right - answer me - for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, YOU, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart - YOU have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine. So much the worse for me that I am strong. Do I want to live? What

⁵⁶ Quite reminiscent of the concept of "La Belle Dame sans Merci", portrayed in John Keats' ballad (1819), it also explores themes of love, loss and fatal attraction. The poem features a knight who encounters a mysterious, beautiful lady. She is described as enchanting, almost supernatural, with "wild eyes" (l.16) and an alluring charm. She offers him "roots of relish sweet" (l.25) and other seemingly magical sustenance, leading him to dream of past victims—kings, princes, and warriors—who, like him, have fallen under her spell and been abandoned. By the end of the poem, the knight is left "alone and palely loitering" (l.46) on a desolate hillside, haunted by the memory of the lady's allure. The "beautiful lady without mercy" represents an idealised yet destructive beauty, an unrequited love that can only lead to despair. The trope of "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" in Emily Brontë's work would be a fascinating topic for further research.

kind of living will it be when you - oh, God! would YOU like to live with your soul in the grave?"(p.125)

Similarly to Fernando De Samara, who turns on A.G.A. by calling her a "Deceiver" and a "Tyrant", Heathcliff calls Catherine "cruel and false", a traitor who despises his love for her. Heathcliff also has no words of comfort for Catherine, as Fernando does not have anything else to say to A.G.A. just that she deserves all the misfortune that comes her way ("Say that my pangs are past, but *hers* are yet to come" l.36). He also accuses Catherine of breaking his heart and considers suicide: "Do I want to live?". Like Fernando de Samara, in his dying words, Heathcliff declares he can annihilate everything, including himself, but "Love I cannot kill": "You know that I could as soon forget you as my existence!" (p.123).

These excerpts from *Wuthering Heights* highlight how the themes and stylistic elements in the novel echo those found in Emily Brontë's poems, illustrating her consistent exploration of isolation, nature's power, and emotional intensity across her works.

3.1.4 "In summer's mellow midnight"

The poem "In summer's mellow midnight," written in 1840 while Emily was back in her family home in Haworth, after her six-month stint as a teacher in Miss Patchet's school at Law Hill, near Halifax, explores nature's influence on the human mind against a backdrop of nocturnal imagery.

Externally, the poem's structure is quite straightforward, with no deviation from the quatrain format, with an ABCB rhyme scheme. The metric of the stanzas consists mostly of iambic trimeters: "In summers mellow midnight / A cloudless moon shone through" (l.1-2). However, the first version of this poem translates into a rather irregular metric, by alternating iambic trimeters with tetrameters, as in the last stanza: "And when thy heart is laid at rest (tetrameter) / Beneath the church-yard stone, (trimeter)/ I shall have time enough to mourn, (tetrameter) / And thou to be alone.". Peeck-O'Toole (1988, p.80), however, states that this first version was revised by Charlotte Brontë upon publication in 1850, resulting in a standardisation of the line metric into three iambic feet. This is, thus, the version in print today: "And when thy heart is resting / Beneath the church-aisle stone, / I shall have time for mourning, / And thou for being alone."

Charlotte Brontë corrected this stanza posthumously for stylistic purposes and to insert a biographical note into the poem, as it now would describe Emily's burial location. Unlike the speaker in the poem, Emily Brontë was buried under the floor of St. Michael and All Angels in Haworth, together with her entire family, except Anne, who died and was buried in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, in 1849. The original wording "church-yard" is also evocative of *Wuthering Heights* in the description of Catherine's grave given by Ellen: "The place of Catherine's interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope in a corner of the kirk-yard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry-plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat-mould almost buries it." (p.130). In the late 18th century, it was customary for people, especially people of a particular social standing, as would the Earnshaws and Lintons be, to be buried inside the building itself or, at least, in a vault underneath the churchyard immediately surrounding the church. The fact that Catherine is buried in the limits of the kirk-yard, where the wall is so low that the wild vegetation has already invaded, places her on another threshold between the human-built and the natural and, ultimately, between the consecrated and the pagan.

However, the poem's apparent regularity in form (perfected by Charlotte) contrasts with the internal tumult conveyed through the wind's dialogue with the speaker, thus mirroring the tumultuous interaction between nature and human experience. It begins with a vivid depiction of a summer midnight, where the moonlight and dew-laden rosetrees create a serene and reflective atmosphere. As the speaker meditates in this setting, the gentle night wind becomes an almost sentient presence, conveying messages of beauty and foreboding, thus turning it into an active, persuasive force that interacts with the speaker's thoughts and emotions. The wind, in the first part of the poem described as bearing a delicate and seducing voice, serves as both a source of comfort and a catalyst for deeper contemplation for the speaker regarding their own thoughts. Brontë's use of sensory imagery – such as the whispering wind and the rustling leaves – creates a richly atmospheric experience, drawing the reader into a space where the threshold between the physical, the natural and the spiritual becomes fluid. The second half of the poem consists of a dialogue between the speaker and the wind itself, and, as the dialogue progresses, the wind's insistence on the speaker's engagement becomes more pronounced, and the reader senses an underlying tension

between the personal autonomy of the speaker and the persuasive power of nature. The wind's persistent allure and nostalgic reminiscence highlight a struggle between the desire for isolation and the seductive pull of nature's companionship. Here, the wind is a force that both delights and challenges the human spirit. This progression culminates in the final stanza, where the speaker's resistance to the wind's urges is firmly established.

The opening stanza describes a tranquil, idyllic scene, emphasising the beauty and serenity of a summer night: "In summer's mellow midnight" (l.1). The use of the adjective mellow points to the serenity embracing the speaker and the alliteration in the repetition of the consonant /m/ sound evokes a sense of softness and intimacy. Note that, much like in the poem "High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending", the time reference is also of midnight as the optimum moment for poetic insight. The concept of midnight as a time threshold is reinforced by the use of another element often considered a threshold between two distinct planes: the window. Line 3, "Our open parlour window," indicates that the speaker is indoors. However, their attention is turned outdoors. The passage between these two planes is symbolised in the open window from where the wind invades the room and the speaker's mind escapes the room. This stanza is filled with elements of synaesthesia: the visual element with a "cloudless moon shone through" (l.2), which creates a vivid visual image of the moon's clear, unobstructed light, and the tactile element in "And rose-trees wet with dew." (l.4), which conveys the idea of freshness and renewal, as well as the embrace of the flora.

The second stanza explores the impact of nature on the speaker's thoughts and initiates the dialogue between the speaker and the wind, even though it is still in the reported speech. By personifying the wind in line 6, "The soft wind waved my hair," the speaker opens the door to the dialogue and other attributions of human actions to the wind, thus making it an active participant in the speaker's experience. The phrase "The soft wind" evokes a tactile sense of the wind's gentle touch again, as it stands as a source of delight, as a "silent musing", leading the speaker to contemplate the beauty of both the heavens and the earth: "It told me heaven was glorious, / And sleeping earth was fair." (l.7-8). By providing the wind with speech, the speaker conveys the idea that transcendence may be found in both heaven and earth, as the former is glorious, but the latter is fair.

The silence can also symbolise an empty space filled with introspection and contemplation, invaded by the wind's actions by caressing the hair and then uttering words as

the latter crosses the threshold of the windowsill. What follows is a soft battle of wills, in which reason and imagination play tug-of-war within the speaker's inner thoughts. Slightly different from Keats' concept of "negative capability"⁵⁷, where the subject empties and abandons itself to be occupied by the object, in rejection of rationality, Emily tries to balance both Imagination and Reason within her poetic voice. Hence, this silence that the wind invades is played against the speaker's own thoughts: "I needed not its breathing / To bring such thoughts to me;" (l.9-10). The wind teases and pushes boundaries, but the speaker does not forsake their Reason. What we see is a meeting between the two forces: the imaginative unknown and the rational thought. Similar to the Kantian Sublime, the speaker stands on the threshold where imagination and reason meet their limits.

The poem continues with the speaker confessing the intrusive nature of the wind, which reinforces what they already perceive about the duality between heaven and earth, particularly the darkness and mystery of the woods, which "represent what primitive, untamed even unhuman" (Roper, 1995, p.249) is. In this stanza, the wind is in its full anthropomorphic form: it breathes and whispers. There is an auditory sensation in the use of these verbs, especially in line 3 of the stanza, "But still it whispered lowly", where the pleonasm in "whispered lowly" as both the verb form and the adverb imply a soft or gentle manner of speaking. By using both "whispered" and "lowly", the speaker accentuates the delicate, almost imperceptible quality of the wind's voice, increasing the reader's awareness of its subtle influence. This redundancy contributes to the creation of a serene and ethereal atmosphere and has a direct influence on the poetic rhythm as it enhances its musicality.

The fourth stanza follows the previous ones by personifying the natural elements of the leaves and their rustling sounds, thus amplifying the mystical and almost supernatural quality of the wind's presence. By comparing the rustle of the thick leaves to a dream ("Rustling like a dream"), the speaker suggests a surreal and ethereal quality. The imagery is also enriched by the use of the synaesthesia of the auditory experience as the leaves have

⁵⁷ Romantic poet John Keats' notion of "negative capability" can be associated with silence in the sense that both involve surrendering to an unknown force and accepting ambiguity. Silence, like the negative capability, represents a space where certainty and clear answers are absent, allowing for contemplation, introspection, and the exploration of ambiguities beyond the restraints of language. In this silence, the mind is free from the interference of rationality and explanation, thus creating a space for the imagination to engage with the mysteries of existence. Just as negative capability embraces the unresolved, silence provides a quiet void where the complexities and contradictions of life can be felt and understood without the need for words or definitive conclusions: "I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (John Keats in a letter to his brothers George and Tom, on December 21st, 1817). Even here, a threshold is being crossed: the one between the presence and absence of language.

countless voices all combined in a murmur: "The thick leaves in my murmur / (...) / And all their myriad voices".

In stanza five, the speaker addresses the wind by using the imperative and the apostrophe: "Go, gentle singer" (line 1 of the stanza). The speaker personifies the wind and calls it a gentle singer", adding that its voice is rather seductive. Its "wooing voice" metaphorically describes the wind's influence as an act of courtship or persuasion. The assonance in the long [u:] sound in the line "Softly wooing at my window," contributes to the poem's tantalising and melodious quality. Despite acknowledging the wind's charm, the speaker asserts their emotional and intellectual independence as they resist its allure, indicating a desire to maintain personal control over their feelings and thoughts. This is marked by the adversative "But", clearly stating that, even though the wind's voice is captivating, it will not influence the speaker: "But do not think its music / Has power to reach my mind." The same reasoning bleeds into the next stanza, in which the speaker continues using the imperative ("play" and "leave") to steer the wind away from their thoughts and feelings, redirecting it to other natural elements, such as the scented flower or the moving boughs, upon which it can also exert its influence – by spreading the fragrance and making the boughs move: "Play with the scented flower, / The young tree's supple bough". The speaker urges the wind to let their emotional status and reasoning follow their natural course: "And leave my human feelings / In their own course to flow."

Stanza seven signals a shift in both the tone of the poem and the dynamics between the "characters", stressed metrically by the use of the hypercatalexis in the first line of the stanza: the apparent iambic "The wanderer would not heed me" has an additional syllable at the end after the trimeter is metrically complete: "me"; and, thematically, by introducing the dismissiveness of the wind of the speaker's will and reasoning. The wind, now personified as a "Wanderer,"⁵⁸ becomes more insistent, reflecting an almost forceful and coercive pursuit. The line depicts the wind as a wandering entity with aggressive traits, such as disregard for the pleas of the speaker and persistence in its intents. The tone intensifies, as there is an obvious tension between temptation and resistance, with the speaker's resolve almost subsiding under

⁵⁸ The figure of the Wanderer can also be applied to Heathcliff and Catherine at different moments of the novel *Wuthering Heights*. In Lockwood's dream, Catherine describes herself as a "waif" (p.20) who has been wandering the moors for twenty years. Later in the novel, it is Heathcliff who becomes a wanderer, roaming the moors in the darkness. After Heathcliff's death, both are seen wandering the moors together.

the wind's persistent charm. The metaphor "Its kiss grew warmer still" uses the imagery of the kiss to describe the increasing intimacy of the wind's influence. This stanza also marks the first time the wind speaks in the first person, using the interjection and the imperative: "O come! it sighed so sweetly". The imperative directed at the speaker fosters an intimate and immediate connection, thereby blurring the line between the natural and human realms. By directly inviting the speaker to engage with it in the liminal space between heaven and earth, the wind transcends its natural role, creating an intersectional space between the physical and the ethereal. The fact the wind is sighing translates the dramatic tone of its character. Moreover, the alliteration in /s/ ("sighed so sweetly") adds a soft, soothing and, perhaps more importantly, a hissing effect to the text, akin to the onomatopoeic sound of a snake.

There is something devilish about the character and behaviour of the wind, which will not relent even if not given consent: "I'll win thee 'gainst thy will." This is a clear use of the language of the Sublime, as it depicts nature overpowering the speaker's reason in a demonstration of its force. The wind continues to use its words to seduce the speaker by mentioning the history of the speaker's relationship with the wind, portraying it as a long-standing, almost intimate connection. The rhetorical questions, "Have we not been childhood friends?" and "Have I not loved thee long?" create a sense of familiarity and personal connection and appeal to the naïveté characteristic of childhood, which can be seen as rather manipulative on the wind's part. The theme emphasises the deep, enduring bond between the natural world and the speaker's inner life. By personifying the night itself in "Thou, the solemn night", the wind evokes a third party as a counterpart and witness to the wind's influence in the speaker's life. Again, the idea of silence, of the empty space that is filled with the "song" of the wind, creates a quiet, reflective atmosphere that complements the poem's themes of solitude and introspection.

As mentioned above, the last stanza suffered some changes in the wording, as stated in the 1840 manuscript and its later revision and publication in 1850 by Emily's sister Charlotte.⁵⁹ For the purposes of this analysis, the original 1840 version of the poem will be adopted. In general terms, the stanza reflects on the inevitability of separation and the

⁵⁹ This was not the only change made to the wording, as the title "The Night-Wind" was added to the manuscript, it is believed by Emily herself, when the sisters were preparing their collective poetry book in 1846, but it is definitely the most significant, as it changes the fundamental metric, syntax and semantics of the stanza, as one will be able to see in the section devoted to paralleling this poem to *Wuthering Heights*.

ultimate solitude that comes with death. By using the imagery “Beneath the church-yard stone”, the voice of the wind creates a visual image of death and burial, thus reinforcing the theme of human finitude but nature’s perennity. The wind also uses mourning (“I shall have time for mourning”) as a metaphor for the future reflection and loss experienced after death. Note that the permanent natural element uses a future verb form, “shall have time,” to highlight a future that the speaker will not have due to their mortality. This personification of the wind as a mourner, highlights its part as an active presence in the poem, though fluctuating between aggressiveness and melancholy.

The poem “In summer’s mellow midnight” is deeply intertwined with the concept of the Sublime, as articulated by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. Both Burke’s *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) and Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790) provide foundational understandings of the Sublime that illuminate the thematic and atmospheric elements of Brontë’s works.

Edmund Burke defines the Sublime as an experience of grandeur that inspires awe and terror, often evoking feelings of vastness and gloom. One may recall his definition: “The source of the Sublime is *Infinity*” (2025, p.94). This notion is reflected in the poem’s imagery of the night and the infinite expanse of nature. The wind’s capacity to evoke a sense of boundlessness connects to Burke’s idea of the Sublime as something that transcends ordinary limits and induces a profound emotional response. In “In summer’s mellow midnight”, the wind embodies the dynamical Sublime through its forceful, aggressive presence. The line “I’ll win thee’ gainst thy will” reveals the speaker’s weakness against the wind’s overwhelming force. This moment captures Kant’s notion of the Sublime as a force that challenges human capabilities, invoking both awe and a sense of immense vulnerability. Kant also writes, “The feeling of the Sublime is therefore a feeling of pain, arising from the want of accordance between the aesthetical estimation of magnitude formed by the Imagination and the estimation of the same formed by Reason”. (2017b, p.155). This duality is evident in the poem, where the wind’s gentle whisper contrasts with its underlying threat, thus creating a complex emotional experience that combines admiration with fear. The wind’s ability to inspire a sense of both beauty and terror reflects Kant’s conception of the Sublime as a multifaceted emotional and aesthetic response. The personification of the wind and its whispers also evoke the Sublime by suggesting an invisible, magnificent and powerful force in nature that connects

with the inner workings of the human mind. The "mellow midnight", "cloudless moonlit sky", and "murmuring low" conjure a serene yet haunting atmosphere, standing on the fine threshold between beauty and unease inherent to the Sublime.

There is a strong connection between this poem and "Shall Earth no more inspire thee," dated May 1841. In addition to having a similar structure, as they are both composed of quatrains with iambic tetrameters (Shall Earth no more inspire thee), they resort to the same dramatic dialogue with two poetic voices duelling in a battle of wills, even though the second voice, which is assumed to be human, remains silent. In "Shall Earth no more inspire thee," nature is personified in the use of the first person, namely in the imagery of the earth, the mountains, the sky, and the wind: "I know my mountain breezes / Enchant and soothe thee still— / I know my sunshine pleases / Despite thy wayward will." (l.9-12). Similarly to "In summer's mellow midnight", nature is also trying to allure the poet into joining it, "dwell with me" (l.8), first by the use of seductive language and then by asserting its dominance on the "dreamer": "I've watched thee every hour; / I know my mighty sway, / I know my magic power / To drive thy griefs away." (l.17-20).

The last stanza of the poem reveals nature's main asset, the wind, which recovers the features and role given in "In summer's mellow midnight": nature urges the subject to let the wind caress them as it has always been their "comrade", much like the wind in the 1840 poem has been a childhood "friend" of the speaker (l.29).

The invocation of nature as a force capable of seducing and even overpowering the subject is akin to the concept of the Sublime as it emerges from the personification of nature itself as a sentient entity endowed with a "mighty sway" and "magic power." By personifying nature, Brontë elevates it to a level where it interacts with the speaker and actively influences their emotional world. On the one hand, nature is vast and untameable but also intimate enough to "drive thy griefs away". The tension between the comfortable intimacy of its close relationship with the subject and the power it exerts on the latter captures the duality of the Sublime. Stanza six evokes another duality common to the imagery of the Sublime: that of heaven and earth. In this stanza, nature points out the singularity of the subject who, unlike many, does not urge for ascendance to heaven but was able to seek and find their heaven on earth. As in "High waveing heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" ("Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending" l.4) and "In summer's mellow midnight" (It told me heaven was glorious,

/ And sleeping earth was fair." l.7-8), in "Shall Earth no more inspire thee" the subject lingers on the threshold between heaven and earth.

A specific parallel can be drawn between the 1840 poem and several passages from *Wuthering Heights*, in which the characters experience the threshold of the Sublime, especially the ones related to a pivotal motif in the poem: the window. The window appears in many instances of the novel as the ultimate threshold, the ultimate getaway for a completely new cosmos. The first moment that depicts a window as pivotal is when Lockwood spends the night at the Heights. Zillah places him in a room said to be off limits (one of Lockwood's many transgressions), and, after the first nightmare, Lockwood reaches out to close the window, as he encounters the ghostly figure of Catherine, whose presence triggers a sense of terror and awe. This moment is not only the linchpin, the inciting incident that sets the main plot in motion but represents the crossing of many thresholds. The fact that Lockwood enters a forbidden room and invades the space of the panelled bed represents him crossing another physical threshold (by this point in the narrative, he had already crossed at least two thresholds at the Heights: the gate and the doorstep). When Lockwood stands on the line between consciousness and unconsciousness, he also stands on the metaphorical threshold between reality and imagination, the natural and the supernatural, the tangible and the intangible, thus highlighting the power of the untamed natural world and the overwhelming emotions it stirs. The window thus becomes a liminal space, where Lockwood confronts the vast, uncontrollable forces that haunt the moors, underscoring the novel's exploration of the sublime's capacity to evoke both fear and fascination.

Besides the moment already covered in the analysis of the poem "Sleep brings no joy to me", when Catherine refuses to sleep after Heathcliff's departure and waits for him in vain with both the window and the door ajar, what follows is worth mentioning in the context of "In summer's mellow midnight". After a stormy night of wind and thunder, the morning rose pleasant and mild:

The morning was fresh and cool; I threw back the lattice, and presently the room filled with sweet scents from the garden; but Catherine called peevishly to me, 'Ellen, shut the window. I'm starving!' And her teeth chattered as she shrank closer to the almost extinguished embers. (p.67)

Catherine asks Ellen to close the window. There is no more rain and the wind, like Heathcliff, is gone. What occurs next is another instance of the pivotal relevance of the window, as it also represents a threshold between life and death. After realising that Heathcliff is not coming back, Catherine falls ill and, amid her feverish delirium, Dr Kenneth expresses his concern that she may throw herself out of the window:

Mr. Kenneth, as soon as he saw her, pronounced her dangerously ill; she had a fever. He bled her, and he told me to let her live on whey and water-gruel, and take care she did not throw herself downstairs or out of the window; and then he left: for he had enough to do in the parish, where two or three miles was the ordinary distance between cottage and cottage. (p.68).

The act of self-(de)fenestration is very present in *Wuthering Heights*, not only in its conventional movement, from the inside to the outside, as is this case, but also in reverse: from the outside to the inside, as in Lockwood's dream, when it is the ghost that wishes to enter the room, and in "A summer's mellow midnight", in which it is the wind that crosses the threshold and invades the parlour.

The outward movement is again referenced when Catherine, already at the Grange and in her feverish state and self-imposed fasting, begins to mentally unravel: "You mention that name, and I end the matter instantly by a spring from the window!" (p.99). In this excerpt, it is Catherine herself who threatens defenestration upon hearing Heathcliff's name. While it seems that Catherine may be threatening suicide, it is also valid to believe she is merely seeking a way to escape from a reality she cannot reconcile. To Catherine ending "the matter" may not signify death as a result of a fall, but a final escape into the natural world, where her soul actually resides. Catherine fluctuates between an active (by ordering windows to be open or threatening defenestration) and a passive role regarding the crossing of the window threshold. In Chapter XV, she adopts a more passive role again, similar to the one of the speaker in the poem: "Mrs. Linton sat in a loose white dress, with a light shawl over her shoulders, in the recess of the open window, as usual." (p.120). Catherine's iconography at the Grange, whenever she is not locked in her bedroom, refusing to eat, sleep or talk, is sitting by an open window in an almost perpetual pause for Heathcliff to enter the parlour. That is what happens in another focal moment involving the threshold of a window. In Chapter XVI, Ellen tells Lockwood that, while Catherine was lying in repose: "I went and opened one of the windows;" (p.130). Catherine is now dead in her coffin, and Ellen, taking advantage of Edgar

Linton's moment of respite, wants to give Heathcliff the opportunity to see her before the funeral. However, Ellen does not open or unlock a door; she lets a window open. By unlocking this threshold, Heathcliff/the wind may enter the room and find Catherine again waiting.

This passive attitude alludes to another of Emily's poems, already referred to in a footnote apropos of "High waveing heather 'neath stormy blasts bending". In this poem, "The Visionary 'Silent is the House – all are laid asleep", we find the first speaker describing how they are the only one still awake in the house. The "sire" and the "dame", mentioned in line 9, are asleep. The speaker is sitting by the window looking out on the gloomy moor: "Silent is the house – all are laid asleep: / One alone looks out o'er the snow-wreaths deep, / Watching every cloud, dreading every breeze / That whirls the wildering drift, and bends the groaning trees." (l.1-4). They are waiting for someone (or something), and the lamp, which they carefully maintain glimmering, is by the window guiding this person in: "I trim it well, to be the Wanderer's guiding-star." (l.8). After the fragment which was, in the 1846 edition titled "The Prisoner", the poem goes on with the narration of Rochelle's release by Julian: "With hurried blow on blow, I struck the fetters through," (l. 125).

There is a discussion to be had on the identity of this "someone" the first speaker is waiting for. The poem underwent several changes and adaptations for publication, especially by Charlotte Brontë in the 1850 edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, under the title 'Selections from the Literary Remains of Ellis and Acton Bell,' who added eight lines to the first three stanzas and titled this now poem as "The Visionary". Despite leaving the figure of the wanderer in line 8, Charlotte then anaphorically refers to it as "the visitant of the air" in line 13, thus making this "visitor" not human but divine or perhaps inspirational. This theory gains some traction when one realises there are no more references to the "sire" or the "dame" in the remaining stanzas. These could be interpreted as the poet ("The Visionary") waiting for inspiration in solitude (echoing Wordsworth's "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity" (2014, p.21)). The second speaker is introduced in stanza four. According to the original title, that would be Julian M.: "In the dungeon crypts idly did I stray", making Rochelle the third speaker, who dialogues with Julian from line 30 onwards. Some readers argue that the first speaker is Rochelle also, which seems unfounded in Gezari's opinion (1192, p.284), especially because that would associate Julian with the figure of the Wanderer, which seems mismatched: on the one hand, Julian, despite

not appearing in any other poem, is, within the context of this “love poem set during the Gondal civil war between Royalists and Republicans” (Alexander, 2010, p.588), a man of high social standing, as he gives stern orders to the jailor; on the other hand, in Emily Brontë’s poetry, the Wanderer is portrayed either as the personification of the wind, such as in “Light up thy halls tis closing day” (“What do we, wanderer! here, so far away from home?” l.32) and “In summer’s mellow midnight” (“The wanderer would not heed me; Its kiss grew warmer still” (l.25.26)) or as a solitary human being roaming the moors as in “Were they shepherds, who sat all day” (“And lived upon this weary Earth / A wanderer, all my life.” l. 32) and “The starry night shall tidings bring” (“Then, wanderer, kneel thee down, and pray.” l.8). Alexander (2010, p. 588) states that the first speaker is actually Julian, who, waiting for a visit from his secret lover, tells the tale of Rochelle’s liberation in flashback, from line 15 onwards. In this case, Rochelle would be the Wanderer.⁶⁰

The fact is that both the “anonymous” speaker in the first three stanzas and the captive in “The Prisoner”, now understood to be Rochelle, are waiting by the window for a visitor, whether immaterial, as the imagination or a “messenger of Hope” (l.67) in a metaphysical sense, or human, in the figure of a lover or a liberator, who also becomes a beacon of hope amidst internal and external conflict.

There are two other moments where the threshold of the window is also narratively and symbolically relevant to our understanding of “In summer’s mellow midnight” and *Wuthering Heights*. In Chapter XXXIV, Ellen describes how she found Heathcliff’s dead body: “The following evening was very wet: indeed, it poured down till day-dawn; and, as I took my morning walk round the house, I observed the master’s window swinging open, and the rain driving straight in.” (p.254). When, in the morning, Ellen Dean checks for footprints under the window to see if Heathcliff has been on one of his night excursions, she notices that the window is open, and the rain is pouring in. Here, the window appears as foreshadowing an ominous event as it is indeed confirmed when the door is broken down, and Heathcliff lies dead. Where there seems to be a mismatch at the beginning of the novel, as Catherine’s ghost appears to Lockwood and not Heathcliff, and then in the middle (one-third to be exact), when

⁶⁰ The interpretation of the Romantic figure of the ‘wanderer’ in Emily Brontë’s poetry can often be rather ambiguous. While it usually symbolises natural elements like the wind, it also acquires more abstract dimensions, such as death or imagination. In Rochelle’s context, the ‘wanderer’ may similarly be interpreted as a manifestation of death, conceived as the ultimate force of liberation. This interpretation invites a parallel with *Wuthering Heights*, wherein Heathcliff, in the final stage of his life, assumes the role of a wanderer on the moors, thus embodying both the anticipation of death and death itself.

a living Heathcliff appears to a dead Catherine through the window at the Grange, the synthesis of the characters is established as they finally meet in death. The fact that this window is swinging in an almost perpetual movement caused by the wind creates the sublime imagery of the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine coming and going, back and forth, from one side of the threshold to the other side of the threshold, as they please and always wanted, thus again blurring the lines between the natural and the supernatural, heaven and earth, as in the poem. This idea of the window being an open gate to another plane of existence is reinforced when Ellen, after describing Heathcliff's funeral, depicts him as a character of now local folklore:

But the country folks, if you ask them, would swear on the Bible that he *walks*: there are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house. Idle tales, you'll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on 'em looking out of his chamber window on every rainy night since his death (p. 255).

Ellen begins by dismissing the many reports of Heathcliff's appearances; however ("Yet"), she gives some credit to Joseph, who says he has seen Heathcliff and Catherine roaming the moors together on rainy nights through his chamber window.

Both Emily Brontë's poetry and narrative explore the notion of being drawn into a sublime experience that transcends reality, compelling the characters to confront their primate fears and desires. In "In a Summer's mellow midnight" and in *Wuthering Heights*, this experiencing of the Sublime is catalysed by the threshold of a window.

3.1.5 "Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee!"

"R. Alcona to J. Brenzaida 'Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee!'", was first written on March 3rd, 1845. The names in the title indicate that this belongs to the Gondal saga, "R. Alcona" standing for "Rosina Alcona", whereas "J. Brenzaida" for Julius Brenzaida. The Gondal storyline is difficult to trace due to the loss of the prose manuscripts, which are believed to describe the intricacies of family relations and political warfare between the families in the narrative. The only clues to the understanding of the events are the ones in the lines of Emily's (and Anne's) poems, fragments of poems, extracts of notes and lists of names written by the two sisters. Consequently, there are at least three different versions that explain the narrative background of this poem. To contextualise this analysis within the scope

of the Gondal writings, the storyline provided by Roper (1995, p.12) will be taken as reference point. The titular and addressee of the poem, Julius Brenzaida, sometimes also referred to as Julius Angora, is at the epicentre of the Gondal political drama. At some point in the narrative, he is imprisoned at the “Southern College” as punishment for his involvement with the ambitious Rosina Alcona⁶¹. Brenzaida dedicates several poems to another beloved, Geraldine S., whom he ultimately abandoned, leaving her with a child in her arms. As the King of Almedore, in Gaaldine, Julius makes a treacherous pact with his compatriot Gerald Exina. Allied with Rosina, whom he is thought to have married, thus making her A.G.A.’s stepmother, Julius wages war against Gerald to gain the throne of Gondal, during which Arthur Exina (Gerald’s brother or son from the royal house) is taken prisoner. Julius is assassinated in his palace, where Rosina lies ill. This version of the poem describes Rosina’s lament by Julius’s grave fifteen years later, dealing with the loss and trying to cope with the pain and move forward.

The title “Remembrance” was added upon its first publication in 1846 in order to obscure any reference to the Gondal saga from the poem (Peeck-O’Toole, 1988, p.33). That is why, and like in “In summer’s mellow midnight”, there are actually two versions of the poem. However, unlike what occurred in the previous poem, Emily herself made the changes for publication and not Charlotte posthumously. Besides the titles, in line 6, for instance, the original “Over the mountains on Angora’s shore;” was replaced by “Over the mountains on northern shore;” to avoid the reference to the land of Angora, in the kingdom of Gondal. Here, under analysis, is the poem’s original version, precisely for its connection with both the Gondal saga and the narrative in *Wuthering Heights*.

The poem consists of eight four-line stanzas with a consistent ABAB rhyme scheme, thus providing the poem with rhythmic flow. The regularity of the first- and third-line rhymes, the A rhymes, and second- and fourth-line rhymes, the B rhymes, serves to highlight the tension and the “back and forth” between the two forces present in the poem: on the one hand, the speaker’s internal turmoil and, on the other, the steady progression of time, which moves forward with or without their participation. These rhymes also highlight fundamental

⁶¹ According to Roper (1995, p.305-307), there have been three primary efforts to reconstruct the Gondal saga: the first one, by Laura Hinkley, in her 1947 publication titled *Charlotte and Emily*; the second one, in 1955, by Fanny Ratchford, in her *Gondal’s Queen*; and the third one, by W.D. Paden, in 1958, *An Investigation of Gondal*. Rosina Alcona is, across these works, framed both as an independent character and as the same character as A.G.A. and Geraldine, so there is still a debate to be had as to the identity and placement of Rosina in the Gondal cosmos.

relationships between words and ideas, such as opposites and paradoxes. For example, in the third stanza, "spring" rhymes (slantly) with "suffering" to highlight the antithesis between the seasons and the speaker's remembrance, which has remained unchanged. Likewise, in the sixth stanza, "destroy" rhymes with "joy" to accentuate the idea that all that was destroyed could still be cherished and remembered, even if without joy.

The poem primarily employs iambic pentameter, each line comprising five iambic feet. However, Day Lewis (1954) provides the following commentary on the poem's metre:

The line here is basically a pentameter; but it is pulled out of the ordinary young pigment amateur rhythm and given a different shape by three devices - by putting a stress on the first syllable of each line, by a marked caesura after the second foot, and by the use of "feminine rhymes" in lines one and three of each stanza. The effect of this rhythm I find extremely powerful, extremely appropriate. It is a dragging effort as of feet moving in the funeral march; an andante maestoso; it is the slowest rhythm I know in English poetry and the most sombre. (p. 13).

The most glaring example of such three devices is line 9: "Cold in the earth—and fifteen wild Decembers", where the stress of the first foot falls in the first syllable "Cold"; there is a caesura marked by a hyphen after the second foot "the earth—", and the use of a feminine ending (-ers) in "Decembers".

The poem exemplifies Brontë's use of "feminine endings" and rhymes, as all the odd-numbered lines in the poem consist of feminine endings.⁶² In addition to the usual two-syllable words in which the second is unstressed, such as "hover" and "cover" in stanza two, there is one extended feminine rhyme (Decembers/remembers) and the pronouns "thee" and "me" are unstressed in lines 1, 3, 13 and 15. Although Brontë's rhyme in this poem of "suffering" with "spring" stresses the -ing, words ending in -ing provide the most common feminine ending. This work has already included one of those examples in "High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" (1836), but there are other poems, such as "Songs by Julius Brenzaida to G.S. 'Geraldine, the moon is shining'", in which the odd rhymes are written in feminine endings: "Geraldine, the moon is shining / With so soft, so bright a ray; / Seems it not that eve's declining / Ushered in a fairer day?"; or a non-Gondal poem such as "Loud without

⁶² In poetry, a "feminine ending" refers to a line that ends with an unstressed syllable. According to C. Day Lewis, a feminine ending contrasts with a "masculine ending," which concludes with a stressed syllable. Feminine endings create a softer, more nuanced conclusion to a line, often resulting in a subtle rhythmic variation. In addition, they add complexity to the meter by extending the rhythm beyond the expected closure, highlighting the sense of incompleteness or fluidity as opposed to the more traditional masculine endings, which tend to deliver a sense of finality and strength. See Lewis, 1948, p. 78.

the wind was roaring” in its first stanza: “Loud without the wind was roaring / Through th’ autumnal sky; / Drenching wet, the cold rain pouring, / Spoke of winter nigh.”

However, the “Cold in the earth” metric is somewhat more complex than the straightforward five-feet-of-unstressed-stressed-syllable line. The very first line of the poem starts with a trochee, i.e., a metrical foot is made up of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable (as opposed to an iamb): “Cold in”, followed by an anapaest (a foot consisting of three syllables: two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable) “and the deep”, with an amphibrach (a metrical foot consisting of an unstressed syllable, followed by a stressed one, followed by an unstressed one): “above thee”. Although the base meter seems relatively consistent throughout the poem, metrical deviations change the pattern. This accentuates the speaker’s emotions, whose mournful tone is set in line 1. The speaker applies long syllables (“Cold”) and unstressed anapaests (“and the deep”), thus “dragging” the line. At other times, especially when the speaker wishes to mark a turn in the poem’s rhythm, there are lines characteristic of iambic pentameters, like line 25 (even though there is an extrametrical syllable at the end of the line, thus making it “feminine”): “Then did I check the tears of useless passion.”

The first two lines of the poem, “Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee, / Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!”, introduce the topic of the poem by focusing on the image of a deceased loved one, who is now “cold in the earth,” (an euphemism for dead and buried), thus indicating that this writing can be seen as an elegy. In these two lines, adjectives such as “deep” and “removed” illustrate the physical and emotional distance between the speaker and the dead person. The “deep snow” stresses the cold, isolating nature of death, while the phrase “far, far removed”, by repeating the adverb far, intensifies the sense of separation and distance in time and space while underlining the speaker’s haunting echoing grief. The exclamation at the end of line 2 (“grave!”) depicts the speaker’s emotional state. By using punctuation, which is, by default, abrupt and intense, the speaker reveals the depth of their sorrow and the overwhelming nature of their loss. These demonstrations of abruptness and intensity are common occurrences in the literature of the Sublime. In the lines, “Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee, / Severed at last by Time’s all-severing wave?”, the speaker wonders whether the passage of time has caused them to forget their love as a result of the passage of time, whose “wave” cuts all ties with the past. Time, in this context, is personified

to express how powerful it is in gradually wearing away memory and feelings, ultimately leading to a detachment between the characters and the breaking of once unbreakable bonds. The speaker's concerns emerge from the fear that time may have damaged their ability to remember and continue loving their "only Love." The speaker directly addresses their absent beloved using an apostrophe in line 3, "my only Love", emphasising their past relationship's exclusivity ("only") and suggesting that this love is not only unique but also irreplaceable. The metaphor in line 4, "Time's all-severing wave", further illustrates its destructive capacity, which can be associated with the imagery of the Sublime. The depiction of an entity, such as Time, running rampant and destroying everything in its path evokes the unstoppable, powerful forces of nature, which, like time itself, sweep everything in their path regardless of human will. The speaker realises that they are helpless in the face of the inevitable changes brought by time.

The second stanza begins with a dual time reference, "now" and "no longer" (line 5), thus highlighting the weight of the passage of time since the death of the lover and how emotionally distant the speaker feels from the past. The speaker's thoughts no longer "hover" over the grave on "Angora's shore", hinting at a gradual movement away from the source of their grief and an avoidance of the tomb. The physical distance created by the mountains and the years gone by (space and time) are metaphors for the speaker's increasing emotional detachment from the suffering. The speaker adopts a more meditative tone by moving away from constant tearful mourning towards introspection and attempted emotional balance, resorting to the imagery of their thoughts that, metaphorically represented as birds, no longer fly over the mountains to rest "their wings" on the lover's grave, already covered in heath and fern-leaves.

The rhetorical questions at the end of the first and second stanzas emphasise the speaker's self-doubt, as they have just realised that, with the distance in time and space, they have perhaps inadvertently ceased to remember the loved one with the same intensity. The poem's meter also supports the speaker's shifting emotions, with a iambic pentameter (+ unstressed syllable) in line 8: "That noble heart for ever, ever more?". The epizeuxis in "for

ever, ever more" creates a lingering effect, as if the words in the lines are being spoken at the same time they are produced in the speaker's mind.⁶³

The third stanza begins with an anaphora in "Cold in the earth" as a call back to the first stanza, but then proceeds with a specific time reference: the "fifteen wild Decembers" that have passed since their lover's death. This imagery of the "wild" Decembers stresses the contrast between winter's cold and the mildness of spring, thus reflecting on the cyclical nature of the seasons. While life goes on, spinning from winter to spring, the speaker still feels somewhat emotionally stunted, as, in lines 11 and 12, evoke a "faithful" spirit that continues to remember their lover despite the changes time brings and the overwhelming amount of suffering. This is, nonetheless, more of an internal dialogue with the speaker trying to solve the conflict between the desire to remain attached to the loved one and the inevitable effects of the passage of time. It is also an attempt to answer the rhetorical questions posed in the first two stanzas. The exclamation in line 9 ("suffering!") adds emotional intensity to this statement, as in "No, I have not forgotten", thus reinforcing the speaker's devotion despite the years that have passed. The slant rhyme between "spring" and "suffering" further highlights the tension between the natural renewal of the seasons and the speaker's static grief, thus illustrating the theme of asynchrony between the constant forward-moving natural cycles of life and the emotional status of the speaker.

In the poem's fourth stanza, the speaker addresses her long-lost love, asking for forgiveness if they happen to forget him due to the inevitable changes brought by time. Line 13 begins with an apostrophe to the "Love of youth," which could refer both to the speaker's lover and the youthful love they experienced. This first "love" is often idealised for its innocence and uniqueness. The speaker acknowledges that time and suffering have taken their toll despite their attempts to remain devoted. This internal conflict between remembering and forgetting encapsulates a universal struggle. While the speaker tries to prove their dedication, they are simultaneously aware of the inevitable impact of time. The metaphorical "world's tide" that drags them inevitably into the future mirrors life's continuous motion—one is born, lives, and dies. The speaker, by using the imperative "forgive", adopts a confessional tone and seeks the dead lover's understanding. In lines 15 and 16, the speaker admits that "sterner

⁶³ Similar to the epizeuxis in the last line of every stanza of the poem "The night is darkening around me": "can/will not, cannot go".

desires and darker hopes" (line 11) sometimes overwhelm them, thus blurring the memory of their lost love. Yet, they insist that these new hopes cannot erase their love entirely ("...but cannot do thee wrong"). This acknowledgement of life's unpredictability and the inevitability of change reinforces their vulnerability to the "world's tide." The speaker appears to accept that life brings new desires, but this does not diminish the love they once felt. The rhyme scheme - particularly the pairing of "thee" and "me" in a feminine rhyme - suggests a connection between their past love and the person they have become, symbolising the enduring influence of that love despite the changes brought about by time.

In stanza five, the speaker tells us here that there has not been anyone else since their "Sweet Love of youth.", through the parallel metaphors "No later light has lightened up my heaven" / "No second morn has ever shone for me;". The expressions "later light" and "second morn" stand metaphorically as "another lover", which has not happened. The polyptoton "light"/"lightened" stresses how the speaker has been living in darkness since the passing of the lover and the alliteration in [l] in the iambic pentameter of the first line of this stanza (+ an unstressed syllable), "No later light has lightened up my heaven", creates a synesthetic moment in its auditory appeal. It produces an elongated effect and conveys a melodic and engaging rhythm while enhancing the poem's sombre mood. Such rhythm is also evident in the anaphora "No..." (lines 17-18), which not only marks the negative and sombre tone of the poem, but also imbues it with a symmetrical structure when contrasted with the following two lines, "All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given, / All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.", which have their anaphora in the antithetical "All". All the happiness sprung from her lover when they were alive and lies with them deep down in the grave under the snow.

Stanza six marks a shift with the adversative "but": even though the speaker lives in darkness upon the death of their "golden dreams" (the dreams are painted in a golden light as it is a colour often attributed to the idealisation of the past⁶⁴, especially moments of childhood and youth) and all her happiness has died, Despair (note the capitalisation of the word, personifying it and depicting it as a large ominous force that overpowers the speaker) has not destroyed them completely. There is also the alliteration in [d]: "days, dreams, Despair,

⁶⁴ Golden Age Thinking is the nostalgic belief that a past era was superior to the present and is seen in modern psychology as a coping mechanism. The origins of the concept date back to Hesiod, who describes a "Golden Age" as a utopian time in the past when humans lived in perfect symbiosis with nature and each other. Here, it is believed that the speaker evokes the golden hue of their dreams as a contrast to their bleak existence in the present.

destroy.", which grants a melodious quality to the lines while keeping on the same tonal field. Graphically there is also something relevant: by low-casing nouns such as days, dreams and the verb form destroy and capitalising Despair, the speaker is emphasising the magnitude of the feeling when compared to other, more common and of less importance, words. Structurally, this line also marks the end of the lamentation section of the elegy, as in the next two lines ("Then did I learn how existence could be cherished, / Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy."), the speaker, after realising that despair did not destroy them entirely, they conclude that their existence could still be valued and rewarding without "the aid of joy.". Even though the speaker's happiness lies with the dead person, there are other ways to validate one's life.

Stanza seven reaffirms this will to push forward. The speaker wipes the tears from their face, saying they are of "useless passion", thus releasing themselves from the grief and rejecting full consumption by despair. They also "weaned" themselves of yearning for a person and a love that cannot be retrieved. The verb form "weaned" is often associated with the stages of childhood and youth, therefore metaphorically implying that the love they felt was a source of nourishment, but it needs to stop so they can move forward with their growth. On the other hand, the "yearning" associated with the "weaning" paints this love not only as a source of nourishment for the soul but also as some sort of addiction from which the speaker needs to be weaned. One should also notice that the rhythm in these lines is different from the poem's first part. In line 25, the pacing is faster, more diligent, and more robust. There are no deviations from the metric formula of the iambic pentameter (+ unstressed syllable): "Then did I check the tears of useless passion". There's no caesura, no dramatic pause, just the succession of five iambs with short, stressed syllables (did/check/tears). This line conveys a sense of determination and intensity as opposed to the slow rhyme of the first and second stanzas, where the speaker lingers on their nostalgia. There is a noticeable crescendo in the inner strength of the speaker. The pacing of the line remains quick, underscoring the speaker's conviction. The speaker's confrontation with the "useless passion" (l.26) and the "divinest anguish" (l.30) reflect an emotional extremity that borders on the Sublime, where grief and despair reach a level of almost metaphysical intensity. Lines 27-28, "Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten / Down to that tomb already more than mine!", emphasise such a shift in the power dynamic, as the speaker rejects ("denied") the impulse to throw themselves into the

grave of their loved one. The speaker has acknowledged ("checked" in line 25), cut loose ("weaned" in line 26), and, finally, rejected ("denied" in line 27), giving way to a newfound strength. The speaker sheds at least part of their vulnerability and has relieved themselves from the burden of loss, both of memory and the loved one. They no longer feel the appeal of the tomb but wish to carry on despite lacking the joy once felt.

The last stanza opens with the enjambment "And" (line 29), setting the conclusive tone to the poem as the speaker is about to add one final thought. The speaker dares not "let it languish" and linger. It is as if they know better, so they use the negative verb "dare not.", which is repeated to stress that the speaker has moved on and is now more experienced and wiser. They refuse to let Memory's (again, note the personification in the uppercase) "rapturous pain" tempt them much like a vice, which paradoxically causes pleasure/release ("rapturous") and suffering ("pain") and may be intrinsically associated with Kant's concept of "negative pleasure", in that Brontë's Sublime also combines both pain and pleasure since the speaker's mind is initially overwhelmed by something immense or overwhelming (the grief for the loss of the loved one) but ultimately takes pleasure in the realisation that reason transcends these limitations, by refusing to linger in mourning and striving to move forward:

[the feeling of the Sublime] is a pleasure that arises only indirectly; (...)Hence it is incompatible with charms; and as the mind is not merely attracted by the object but is ever being alternately repelled, the satisfaction in the sublime does not so much involve a positive pleasure as admiration or respect, which rather deserves to be called negative pleasure. (Kant, 2017b, p. 139).

The paradox repeats in the two last lines, "Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish, / How could I seek the empty world again?", in which one can see the reiteration of the combination between pleasure/release ("divinest") and suffering ("anguish"). Again, anguish is seen as more of a vice from which the speaker is "drinking deep" and recognises that if they indulge in misery, it would be nothing more than delving into a void, an "empty world" where they are alone with their sorrow. The rhetorical question at the end brings closure to this elegy as it expresses, despite never forgetting ("cannot do thee wrong"), how meaningless remaining in an empty world of sorrow would be, i.e., after experiencing the pain and pleasure of the entire cycle, it would be "useless" (line 21) to return to the starting point of permanent loss. The internal structure is now complete: the initial lament (stanzas 1-4), the praise and admiration: acknowledging the impact and significance of the deceased (stanzas 5-8), and the

consolation and acceptance in the speaker's attempt to reconcile with the loss and find a semblance of peace (stanzas 9-11).

"Cold in the earth" finds some of its main themes in *Wuthering Heights*. Line 1 introduces the imagery of the snow ("snow piled above thee"), which is recurrent in the novel, particularly, similar to the wind, in moments of life and death. Catherine dies in the Spring equinox⁶⁵ and on the day of her funeral, which, according to the typical timeframe for a Church of England burial in 18th-century Yorkshire might have been around 2 to 7 days, snow began to fall: "The day she was buried, there came a fall of snow." (p.219). The reference to the crushing weight of the earth and snow evokes a sense of awe and desolation. The theme of grief continues in line 2 ("Far, far, removed, cold in the dreary grave!"), where the epizeuxis in the adverb and the adjective "removed" hyperbolically depict not only the physical distance but the emotional chasm caused by the finality of death.

In Chapter XXXIII, Heathcliff ceases to eat, drink or rest, and becomes reclusive and morose. One afternoon, he tells Ellen Dean: "The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!" (p.245). Heathcliff realises that everything around him serves as a reminder of his loss and highlights this sense of deeply personal and isolated grief with the pronoun "I" in "I have lost her". Time went by, everyone moved on with their lives, the children grew up, and his enemies were dead. His mental and physical deterioration arises not only from malnourishment and sleep deprivation but also from the exhaustion of having spent so much time obsessing over power, cruelty and revenge. Heathcliff feels that his earthly body has finally lost Catherine and that there is nothing left to do (or say) but to wait to meet her again in the afterlife. Line 10 of the poem speaks of "brown hills that have melted into spring" (l.10), thus highlighting the changes brought about by the passage of time, and one remembers the budding relationship between young Catherine and Hareton, who were raised so differently but have bonded after substantial trauma (caused by Heathcliff).

Stanza five is of particular interest to this analysis: "No later light has lightened up my heaven, / No second morn has ever shone for me; / All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given, / All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee." because it combines the way in which both

⁶⁵ Young Catherine's birthday is mentioned to be March 20th, at the threshold of "twelve o'clock that night" (p.127), thus making it also the date of Catherine's death.

Heathcliff and Catherine articulate their mutual love. For Heathcliff, there was no other that could replace the one he felt for Catherine, nor did he seek it. From the moment of Catherine's death, his entire existence is directed towards inflicting as much suffering as possible upon those around him. For Catherine, it represents the affirmation that her entire existence has been entirely intertwined with Heathcliff's. Perhaps in the most recognised monologue in the novel, Catherine says:

What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and HE remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it. (...) My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Ellen, 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. So don't talk of our separation again: it is impracticable; (p. 64).

This immediate identification with the Other, inextricable bond between the characters, reflects the profound and consuming nature of their relationship. Similarly, in "Cold in the earth," the speaker's persistent memory of the beloved and the enduring impact of their loss highlight the inescapable nature of grief and the way it shapes one's identity. Heathcliff and Catherine are not soulmates; they are the same person.

This concept closely resembles another celebrated poem by Emily Brontë: "No coward soul is mine" (1846), particularly in its last two stanzas:

Though earth and moon were gone
And suns and universes ceased to be
And Thou wert left alone
Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death
Nor atom that his might could render void
Since thou art Being and Breath
And what thou art may never be destroyed.

This motif also resonates with Heathcliff's emotional outburst following Catherine's death, propelling him into a hopeless abyss of sorrow that mirrors the grief expressed in the poem:

Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you – haunt me, then! The murdered DO haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts HAVE wandered

on earth. Be with me always - take any form - drive me mad! only DO not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I CANNOT live without my life! I CANNOT live without my soul!' (p. 129).

The idea of the universe ceasing to exist, leaving only a solitary presence in Otherness, is, in itself, a depiction of the Sublime. The vastness of this concept, coupled with the notion of eternal existence within the Other, evokes a profound sense of awe and wonder.

It is, however, imprudent to try to establish a full correspondence of the poem to the novel and even more imprudent to fully identify the speaker of the poem as a projection of Heathcliff. Even though much of the wording and emotional tone of the poem resonates with the character in *Wuthering Heights*, there are several instances in which such immediate identification is mismatched. Visick (1958, p.15) notes the parallel to Heathcliff's lament of Catherine in the poem ("Cold in the earth, and the deep snow piled above thee' has struck many readers as prefiguring the eighteen years of Heathcliff's mourning for Catherine") but Hardy (1976, p.104) points out that the speaker cannot be Heathcliff because the latter lacks the "unobsessed remembrance, eroded and distracted" of the former. While Visick's stance can be understood, as the emotional weight presented in the poem resembles Heathcliff's immeasurable grief over Catherine's death, it is undeniable that throughout the poem, the speaker's tone drifts apart from Heathcliff's as the speaker finds consolation and expresses acceptance of their lover's absence. Heathcliff is not as able to reconcile his feelings as the poem's speaker seems to be. While the speaker managed to find a way to carry on (even without joy) and even wonders if they have, at times, failed to remember the deceased, Heathcliff finds no other purpose, no other thought in his mind other than Catherine and the urge of revenge towards those who opposed their relationship. Additionally, we need to consider that original poem belongs to the Gondal saga, namely depicting Rosina's lament for the death of her partner, Julius Brenzaida. Rosina and Heathcliff are two very different characters. Apart from being integrated into different geo-political contexts, one in the fictional war-riddled world of Gondal and the other in 18th-century Yorkshire farmland, Rosina Alcona is described by Alexander (2010, p.613) as an ambitious, haughty woman of the Gondal aristocracy who supports Julius Brenzaida's campaigns for power in Gaaldine. However, she is

also the cause of his imprisonment in the “Southern College”⁶⁶. In contrast, Heathcliff is a dark-skinned foundling, an outcast, a child abused by his adoptive brother and scorned by those of higher social standing like the Lintons. She is a shrewd, ambitious woman with political aspirations, whereas Heathcliff is often compared to a therianthrope⁶⁷ blinded by hate and vengeance.⁶⁸ The last stanza is quite illustrative of this divergence between the speaker and Heathcliff: “And, even yet, I dare not let it languish, / Dare not indulge in memory's rapturous pain;”. The antithesis in “rapturous pain” finds an echo in *Wuthering Heights* when Ellen describes Heathcliff in Chapter XXXIV:

Now, I perceived he was not looking at the wall; for when I regarded him alone, it seemed exactly that he gazed at something within two yards' distance. And whatever it was, it communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain in exquisite extremes: at least the anguished, yet raptured, expression of his countenance suggested that idea. (p. 251).

While the speaker resists the temptation or the urge to indulge in the “rapturous pain”, Heathcliff thrives and feeds off it. The distinct attitude towards their lifepaths is again highlighted in the last two lines: “Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish, / How could I seek the empty world again?”. While the speaker refuses to immerse in anguish and chooses to carry on living in the world, though empty of their lover's presence, Heathcliff decides to engage with the anguish fully; he revels in it, and, by doing so, he finds his purpose of vengeance. The invisible entity (who the reader guesses to be Catherine's ghost) sparks the Sublime emotions of pleasure and pain (Burke, 2015, p.73). Heathcliff's placement on the threshold of the Sublime is visible in his facial expressions of anguish and rapture, fear and delight.

Brontë's exploration of pain in “Cold in the earth” is a masterful depiction of the impact of memory and distance in personal loss. The poem's emotional tone is very similar to that of *Wuthering Heights*, where grief, combined with nature's grandeur, is the driving force of the

⁶⁶ The *Southern College* appears early in Brontë's juvenilia as a place of imprisonment for young nobles. The ‘college’ is depicted as featuring a stone dungeon. Julius Brenzaida's captivity due to his involvement with Rosina is dramatically monologued in “From a Dungeon Wall in the Southern College — JB” (November 11th, 1844).

⁶⁷ Chapter XVI: “He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast being goaded to death with knives and spears. I observed several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree, and his hand and forehead were both stained; probably the scene I witnessed was a repetition of others acted during the night. It hardly moved my compassion - it appalled me:” (p.129). The violent imagery of blood and self-harm, together with the auditory synaesthesia of the “howling” support the simile “like a savage beast”: Heathcliff's primal grief makes him stand on the threshold of humanity and animal instinct.

⁶⁸ The figure of Rosina is, much like Augusta's, akin to that of Lady Macbeth for her ambition, manipulation, and ruthlessness. She is the driving force behind Macbeth's rise to power, urging him to commit regicide. She represents the hubris of unchecked ambition and guilt, which lead to her downfall.

main storyline. *Wuthering Heights*, much like “Cold in the earth”, is also a reflection on the passage of time and the power of memory.

Emily Brontë’s poetry and novel depict the experience of the Sublime by placing human existence on the line of physical, emotional, metaphorical and metaphysical thresholds. Her works offer a profound exploration of the Sublime by capturing the beauty and terror of nature, along with the vastness of human emotion. Through her discursive artistry and poetic technique, Brontë’s writings encourage readers to reflect on the vast and powerful forces of nature and of the human spirit that go beyond the boundaries of one’s understanding of the self.

Conclusion

But, Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself: they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me. I never will!

Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Chapter XII

The exploration of Emily Brontë's works through the lens of the Sublime has illuminated the intricate ways she integrates and redefines this aesthetic concept, intertwining it with the motif of thresholds to create a unique and multi-layered experience. This dissertation demonstrates that Brontë's engagement with the Sublime cannot be defined or labelled within a single tradition – Romantic, Gothic, or otherwise – but is a dynamic combination that challenges conventional boundaries. Thresholds, physical and metaphorical, emerge as pivotal in shaping the Sublime within her texts. These liminal spaces – doorways and windows, but also metaphysical junctures between life and death or ontological between nature and the self and the Other – function as points of tension, transformation, and revelation. Brontë invites her characters and readers to witness and experience the power and transcendence that define her works by situating her Sublime in these in-between spaces.

In the 19th century, England stood at literal and metaphorical crossroads, better yet, railway turnouts, as it was a time of immense political, social and economic transformations, mainly resulting from industrialisation, urbanisation, and reform. To fully understand the significance of this period for authors like Emily Brontë and her siblings Charlotte and Anne, it is essential to trace the historical and cultural landscape that shaped their work. This revolution witnessed the rise of large-scale textile manufacturing, the mechanisation of production, and significant urban growth as people migrated from rural areas to cities for work, in addition to the influx of immigrants, many of those recently freed slaves. Cities such as Leeds, Bradford, and Manchester became major industrial activity centres, resulting in a new working class and a heightened sense of social consciousness amid profound economic disparities. The Brontës' writing, particularly their exploration of social inequality, can be seen as a response to these socioeconomic changes.

The Brontë siblings were deeply affected by both the personal and contemporary circumstances of their upbringing, most notably the early loss of their mother and two older

sisters, which left a profound void in their lives and triggered the permanent questioning and exploration of their shared emotional struggle. Growing up in the parsonage in Haworth, the siblings were further influenced by the harsh geographical and climatic conditions of the Yorkshire moors. Emily's encounter with natural phenomena, such as the catastrophic Crow Hill bog eruption at a young age, was crucial in awakening her affinity for the Sublime. The rugged, windswept landscape surrounding their home tested their resilience and helped shape their creative imaginations, infusing their works with themes of isolation, endurance, and an intense connection to nature. These experiences became a cornerstone of the Brontës' literary legacy, leaving an indelible mark on their writings.

The socio-economic landscape of 19th-century England was riddled with class divisions and inequalities. The burgeoning industrial capitalist class thrived, while the working class often suffered under inhumane conditions. The Brontë sisters' works reflect these disparities; *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* examine the struggles against class and gender constraints and the search for identity and belonging within societal structures that sought to confine characters within claustrophobically labelled boxes. Heathcliff's rise from an illiterate orphan to a landowner embodies this transformation yet underscores the lingering tension of class mobility, its limitations, and inherent social prejudice.

Emily Brontë, alongside her sisters, was also directly affected by the restrictive norms of gender that defined their time, mainly about education, authorship and personal expression. Their literary narratives often centred on powerful, complex female characters who defied conventional roles. Under the intentionally androgynous pen names of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell, the sisters offered their readers sharp portrayals of Jane, Catherine, and Helen, respectively, whose independence and agency challenged societal constraints around womanhood. Their publications were also targets of devastatingly critical reviews due to the genuine nature of their depictions of the human condition and experience.

The writings of Emily Brontë were also influenced by the evolving literary traditions and aesthetic theories emerging from the tumultuous events of the French Revolution and the Romantic movement. The Sublime, articulated by thinkers like Longinus, Edmund Burke, and Immanuel Kant, evokes emotional responses associated with magnificence and terror, a duality that permeates their work. Writers like Shelley, Wordsworth and Byron explored similar

themes of wonder and disillusionment, impacting how Emily, extensively knowledgeable of their work, approached her literary creations.

Longinus's work *On the Sublime*, dating back to the 1st century, marks a pivotal moment in defining the Sublime in literature. He poses critical questions on whether the Sublime is innate or learned, ultimately offering five features of Sublime writing: grand thoughts, passionate language, figures of speech, noble diction, and harmonious sentence structure. Longinus emphasises that genuine passion is crucial for producing Sublime works, stating that the amalgamation of passionate emotion and artful language uplifts writing to the highest levels. He critiques artificiality in literature, advocating for authenticity and emotional depth in conveying the Sublime experience.

On the other hand, Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) shifts the focus from linguistic expression and artistry to experiential dynamics. Burke distinguishes the Sublime from the Beautiful, categorising the Sublime as an emotional response prompted by experiences of vastness or terror in opposition to beauty, which provides comfort and pleasure. He articulates a physiological basis for these experiences, arguing that feelings of fear and self-preservation are core to understanding the Sublime. Burke asserts that the Sublime can lead to feelings of astonishment, emphasising its power in generating thrilling yet terrifying encounters with nature.

Following Burke, Immanuel Kant, in *Critique of Judgement* (1790), expands on the Sublime as a subjective experience rooted in human perception and introduces the concepts of the Mathematical and Dynamic Sublime, thus emphasising the fact that the Sublime arises from a subjective cognitive process upon the subject engagement with vast or uncontrollable forces. While the Mathematical Sublime relates to overwhelming, boundless phenomena, the Dynamic Sublime pertains to recognising nature's sheer power filtered by the observer's sense of safety. For Kant, the Sublime experience is inherently associated with reason, prompting a reflection that challenges one's understanding of the self in relation to nature.

Emily Brontë's poetry and her sole novel, *Wuthering Heights* (1847), serve as valuable texts for exploring the concept and experience of the Sublime. By making use of Longinus's many rhetorical devices, Brontë creates an immersive experience through her intricate phrasing and layered language, imagery depth, and the emotional intensity of her characters,

particularly the protagonist of her Gondal Saga, Augusta Geraldine Almeda, and *Wuthering Heights*'s Heathcliff and Catherine. Brontë's use of emotion evokes the Sublime by intertwining her characters' tumultuous experiences with nature's dynamic and often violent forces, thus combining Burke's and Kant's notions of Sublime expression.

In Brontë's writings, the Sublime and the theme of thresholds converge to heighten emotional resonance and psychological complexity. These thresholds play a crucial role in Brontë's exploration of duality within her works – such as inside and outside, human and supernatural, and freedom versus confinement. By standing in these liminal spaces, subjects and characters partake in the Sublime experience, and readers are given the opportunity to unveil and explore the profound meanings embedded not only in Brontë's poetry and prose but also in the works of several of her contemporaries. Various examples illustrate this, including Christina Rossetti's "The Convent Threshold" (1862), where the speaker stands at the intersection of physical existence and spiritual redemption, and Amy Levy's "On the Threshold" (1889), depicting the emotional distance felt after the death of a loved one.

In Emily Brontë's case, the five specific poems selected to demonstrate the integration of the Sublime within her exploration of thresholds include "High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" (1836), "Sleep brings no joy to me" (1837), "The night is darkening round me" (1837), "In summer's mellow midnight" (1840), and "R. Alcona to J. Brenzaida 'Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee!'" (1845), as these reveal Brontë's artistic journey through different stages of her life – from teenage years through her twenties – while grounding them in connections to other poetic compositions of the author and *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Brontë's poetry and narrative illustrate key themes of the Sublime, such as the tension between life and death and the interplay of natural elements as both a source of inspiration and a formidable presence.

"High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending" showcases Brontë's engagement with the Sublime through vivid natural imagery and intricate rhythm. The poem features a dactylic tetrameter, creating a melodic flow that captures the tumultuousness of nature. The personification of the heather illustrates the interplay of strength and fragility, as it bends under stormy blasts, a metaphor for human resilience against life's challenges. The imagery evokes both awe and terror, underscoring the power of nature while revealing a parallel between external forces and the internal turmoil of the human spirit. The transformative

power of nature, the juxtaposition of earthly and celestial realms, and the assertion of human liberation from confinement all contribute to the poem's invocation of the Sublime, portraying it as a vital force in Brontë's literary landscape.

"Sleep brings no joy to me", and its themes of guilt and isolation, delves into the psychological intricacies of despair and confinement, reflecting the speaker's longing for relief from torment. The poem's structure, with its rhythmic repetition and haunting imagery, echoes the speaker's entrapment within a cycle of regret. Here, sleep, an element traditionally associated with peace, becomes a tormenting presence, intensifying the sense of isolation. The meditation on death as a form of escape mirrors themes presented in *Wuthering Heights*, where the conflict surrounding love leads to despair and an unresolved longing for connection. Blending natural elements with existential dilemmas underscores Brontë's profound engagement with the Sublime to explore complex emotional states.

Emily Brontë's poem, "The night is darkening round me," was penned during a time marked by harsh winters and storms. The poem consists of twelve lines arranged in three quatrains that follow an ABAB rhyme scheme. This symmetry in the rhyme scheme reflects the cyclical nature of the speaker's predicament, where both the physical and emotional states are inescapably intertwined. Imagery plays a crucial role in establishing the emotional landscape of the poem and conveys the internal feelings of helplessness and frustration, as seen in the line "I cannot, cannot go," where epizeuxis highlights the speaker's sense of entrapment, which then evolves into "will not go." This pivotal change reflects a conscious decision to confront their emotional turmoil rather than seeking escape, hinting at a complex relationship with their suffering. The poem suggests that the speaker's immobility may be self-imposed, indicating a more profound psychological struggle tied to feelings of despair and helplessness. These thematic elements align with Brontë's other works, including the poem "F. de Samara to A.G.A. 'Light up thy halls 'Tis closing day" (1838) and her novel *Wuthering Heights*. In both writings, Brontë explores motifs of isolation, emotional turmoil, and the overwhelming aspects of nature that reflect characters' internal battles.

"In summer's mellow midnight" (1840) reflects on the relationship between nature and human thought, uniquely employing nocturnal imagery to convey this connection. It reverberates with notions of the Sublime as it evokes admiration and vulnerability through its natural imagery. Kant's Sublime, which rests on the response to the inadequacy of human

understanding faced with nature's magnitude, can be seen in the dichotomy between the wind's gentle whisper and the underlying threat it poses. The motifs explored in "In summer's mellow midnight" echo Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*, particularly concerning the symbolism of the window as a threshold. The window functions as a pivotal liminal space within the narrative—representing transitions between the inner and outer worlds, reality and imagination, life and death. This aligns with the shared theme of confronting the Sublime aspects of nature and human emotion. In addition, Emily Brontë's "In summer's mellow midnight" captures the intricate relationship between nature and human thought. The poem reflects on the Sublime, invoking themes of beauty, fear, solitude, and companionship through vivid imagery and personification. The interplay of these elements contributes to the poem's emotional depth and establishes vital interconnections with Brontë's broader literary work, including *Wuthering Heights*.

The poem "R. Alcona to J. Brenzaida 'Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee!'" (1845) appears within the context of the Gondal saga, explicitly referencing the characters Rosina Alcona and Julius Brenzaida. This narrative in verse is marked by its complex narratives concerning familial ties and political conflicts, although much of this context is elusive due to lost manuscripts. The poem hints at an elaborate tale of love, loss, and betrayal involving Brenzaida, his relationships with Rosina and Geraldine S., and his eventual demise. This particular poem serves as a lament fifteen years after Brenzaida's death, portraying Rosina's enduring grief and her struggle to reconcile the passage of time with her memories. The poem's structure underscores the speaker's emotional dissonance as they grapple with mourning and the relentless march of time. The poem employs feminine rhymes and metrical variation, contributing to its meditative, sombre tone. The speaker's emotional turmoil is juxtaposed against the inevitability of time's progression.

The poem opens with stark imagery of death and isolation, framing it as an elegy that laments a deceased lover. The physical and emotional distance caused by death is conveyed through cold, sombre imagery, while reflective rhetorical questions highlight the speaker's inner conflict about memory and the fear of forgetting. As the poem unfolds, the speaker acknowledges the destructive power of time, symbolised by "Time's all-severing wave," which threatens to erode emotional bonds. By the end, the speaker moves toward a reconciliatory

stance, recognising that while sorrow persists, life can hold meaning and significance beyond loss, ultimately affirming their existence despite the beloved's absence.

Brontë's exploration reflects the philosophical constructs of the Sublime, where pain and beauty intertwine. The speaker wrestles with feelings of longing and anguish, mirroring the awe or horror often associated with Sublime experiences. The conclusion of the poem encapsulates this rich emotional spectrum, invoking the pervasive theme of enduring love while simultaneously acknowledging the futility of lingering solely in sorrow.

The themes observed in "R. Alcona to J. Brenzaida 'Cold in the earth and the deep snow piled above thee!'" are deeply intertwined with the narrative arcs in Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*. The poem features evocative parallels reflecting the profound love and despair characteristic of the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine. Both Brontë's poem and the novel contend with themes of enduring loss and the emotional turbulence associated with memory. The poem encapsulates the internal struggle and devastation experienced by its speaker, akin to Heathcliff's relentless sorrow after Catherine's passing. The natural imagery complements the narrative's exploration of grief, emphasising the indelible connection between love and pain.

The exploration of thematic resonance between Brontë's poetry and *Wuthering Heights* illustrates how the motifs of thresholds and the Sublime intertwine throughout her works. The stormy and windy atmosphere that often goes together with pivotal life and death events and the deep emotional conflicts experienced by characters like Heathcliff and Catherine echo the earlier poetic depictions of nature, human emotion, and motivation. The character dynamics often reflect the tension between confinement and freedom, life and death, reinforcing Brontë's enduring concern with these themes. Details such as the enduring presence of nature's forces in the characters' emotional experiences demonstrate the ways in which Brontë's literary vision persists across her poetic and prose works, emphasising a cohesive narrative of the Sublime intertwined with representations of thresholds.

Despite the extensive body of scholarship dedicated to Emily Brontë, her life, and her works, this study offers a distinctive and constructive contribution by shedding new light on how the concept and experience of the Sublime are intricately woven into her poetry and narrative. While it may seem outdated to revisit a 19th-century classic that has been analysed

exhaustively and adapted across countless formats, Brontë's work remains an inexhaustible wellspring of meaning because it speaks to universal and timeless questions about human experience. By focusing on the role of literal and metaphorical thresholds as a central mechanism in shaping the Sublime, this research provides a new interpretive framework that deepens the understanding of Brontë's literary artistry. These liminal spaces function as more than period-specific settings; they transcend their historical moment, offering insights into the human condition that resonate across time, culture, and genre boundaries. In highlighting the transformative power of such spaces, this study not only enriches existing conversations around Brontë's contributions to the literary canon of the time but also affirms her enduring relevance for contemporary audiences and scholarship.

This study also opens up some lines for understanding Emily Brontë's works and potentially reshaping broader literary discussions. By focusing on the interplay between the Sublime and thresholds, it bears additional depth to existing discussions. It encourages readers and scholars to re-evaluate Brontë's language, style, and themes as tools that create a unique, liminal experience of the Sublime. This perspective shifts the focus from other themes like Gothic tropes or Romantic imagery to her storytelling's structural and experiential mechanics. It also highlights how Brontë reinvents the Sublime by situating it in liminal spaces. This contributes to the broader study of the Sublime in literature, suggesting it is not just a grand, overwhelming force but also a deeply personal, transformative experience shaped by transitional moments. This work could potentially inspire interdisciplinary approaches to Brontë's work, mainly because Emily's use of the Sublime and thresholds transcends her historical, geographical and cultural context, thus showing her enduring relevance.

Nonetheless, this work also carries some limitations, as the object herein is circumscribed to a deep analysis of five poems, plus *Wuthering Heights*, and, despite referring to many other compositions of her work, does not provide a comprehensive examination of Brontë's entire oeuvre. Also, it does not explore potential broader implications or applications to other areas of study. In addition to what has been mentioned throughout this dissertation, namely the merits of further discussion on the connection between Sappho's and Emily Brontë's writings and Mary Wollstonecraft's claim of Sublimity for women, future studies could involve a more comprehensive examination of Brontë's work. This study offers significant potential for expansion, particularly through the inclusion of a broader range of Emily Brontë's

poems to uncover the recurring themes and experiences of the Sublime that connect her poetic works. By applying the same depth of analysis to additional texts, it would be possible to further explore how Brontë's engagement with the Sublime manifests across her literary creations. Moreover, *Wuthering Heights* could be revisited with an even sharper focus on its intricate thresholds, thus delving deeper into how these liminal spaces enhance the novel's evocation of the Sublime. Such an extension would provide a more comprehensive understanding of Brontë's artistic vision and its engagement with the Sublime.

This study offers practical applications for examining the social and cultural dynamics of 19th-century literary works and the impact of political, social, and economic upheavals on artistic and literary movements. It also contributes to the fields of literature, aesthetics, and cultural studies by shedding light on the profound human responses to nature and the extremes of human potential – both its creative heights and destructive depths. The findings can be applied to the analysis of other literary works addressing the theme of the Sublime, enriching our understanding of how thresholds provoke a sense of wonder, dread, and transcendence. Furthermore, this study proposes interpreting Emily Brontë's works under the lens of the Sublime, shedding light on how her poetry and novel serve as a unifying framework for a profound comprehension of the concept and its resonance across her creations.

In answering how the Sublime takes form in Emily Brontë's works and how thresholds shape its unique manifestation, we affirm Brontë's position as a pivotal, boundary-defying voice in literary history. Her exploration of the Sublime transcends traditional aesthetic frameworks, offering readers a deeply personal and transformative encounter that radiates far beyond the pages of her texts. The interplay of thresholds heightens the Sublime experience and mirrors the reader's own negotiation of boundaries between understanding and awe, the self and the Other, reality and imagination.

As these findings illuminate the richness and complexity of Brontë's works, they also open the door to further inquiries into the intersections of the Sublime, liminality, and reader engagement across other authors and literary traditions. The journey that began with Brontë's windswept moors and shadowy thresholds is far from over; it offers a fertile ground for future exploration into how literature transforms our understanding of boundaries and the boundless. In this light, Emily Brontë's legacy not only endures but continues to inspire, reminding us of literature's power to evoke, challenge, suspend and transcend.

Annex I

Full text of the Poems Analysed in Chapter III of this Dissertation⁶⁹

“High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending”

December 13th, 1836

High waving heather 'neath stormy blasts bending
Midnight and moonlight and bright shining stars
Darkness and glory rejoicingly blending
Earth rising to heaven and heaven descending
Man's spirit away from its drear dungeon sending
Bursting the fetters and breaking the bars

All down the mountain sides wild forests lending
One mighty voice to the life-giving wind
Rivers their banks in their jubilee rending
Fast through the valleys a reckless course wending
Wider and deeper their waters extending
Leaving a desolate desert behind

Shining and lowering and swelling and dying
Changing forever from midnight to noon
Roaring like thunder like soft music sighing
Shadows on shadows advancing and flying
Lightning bright flashes the deep gloom defying
Coming as swiftly and fading as soon

⁶⁹ Spelling and punctuation standards used in Brontë, E., & Gezari, J. (1992). *Emily Brontë: The complete poems*. Penguin Books.

“Sleep brings no joy to me”

November 1837

Sleep brings no joy to me
Remembrance never dies
My soul is given to misery
And lives in sighs

Sleep brings no rest to me
The shadows of the dead
My waking eyes may never see
Surround my bed

Sleep brings no hope to me
In soundest sleep they come
And with their doleful imagery
Deepen the gloom

Sleep brings no strength to me
No power renewed [to] brave
I only sail a wilder sea
A darker wave

Sleep brings no friend to me
To soothe and aid to bear
They all gaze on how scornfully
And I despair

Sleep brings no wish to knit
My harassed heart beneath
My only wish is to forget
In the sleep of death

“The night is darkening round me”, also titled “Spellbound”
November 1837

The night is darkening round me
The wild winds coldly blow
But a tyrant spell has bound me
And I cannot cannot go

The giant trees are bending
Their bare boughs weighed with snow
The storm is fast descending
And yet I cannot go

Clouds beyond clouds above me
Wastes beyond wastes below
But nothing drear can move me
I will not cannot go

"In summer's mellow midnight", also titled "The Night-Wind"
September 11th, 1840

In summer's mellow midnight
A cloudless moon shone through
Our open parlour window,
And rosetrees wet with dew

I sat in silent musing –
The soft wind waved my hair
It told me heaven was glorious
And sleeping earth was fair –

I needed not its breathing
To bring such thoughts to me
But still it whispered lowly
'How dark the woods will be! –

'The thick leaves in my murmur
Are rustling like a dream,
And all their myriad voices
Instinct with spirit seem'

I said, 'Go, gentle singer,
Thy wooing voice is kind:
But do not think its music
Has power to reach my mind –

'Play with the scented flower,
The young tree's supple bough –
And leave my human feelings
In their own course to flow'

The Wanderer would not leave me
Its kiss grew warmer still –
'O come,' it sighed so sweetly
'I'll win thee 'gainst thy will –

'Have we not been childhood friends?
Have I not loved thee long?
As long as thou hast loved the night

Whose silence wakes my song?

'And when thy heart is laid at rest
Beneath the church-yard stone
I shall have time enough to mourn
And thou to be alone' –

"Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee," also titled "Remembrance"
March 3rd, 1845

Cold in the earth—and the deep snow piled above thee,
Far, far, removed, cold in the dreary grave!
Have I forgot, my only Love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time's all-severing wave?

Now, when alone, do my thoughts no longer hover
Over the mountains, on that northern shore,
Resting their wings where heath and fern-leaves cover
Thy noble heart for ever, ever more?

Cold in the earth—and fifteen wild Decembers,
From those brown hills, have melted into spring:
Faithful, indeed, is the spirit that remembers
After such years of change and suffering!

Sweet Love of youth, forgive, if I forget thee,
While the world's tide is bearing me along;
Other desires and other hopes beset me,
Hopes which obscure, but cannot do thee wrong!

No later light has lightened up my heaven,
No second morn has ever shone for me;
All my life's bliss from thy dear life was given,
All my life's bliss is in the grave with thee.

But, when the days of golden dreams had perished,
And even Despair was powerless to destroy;
Then did I learn how existence could be cherished,
Strengthened, and fed without the aid of joy.

Then did I check the tears of useless passion –
Weaned my young soul from yearning after thine;
Sternly denied its burning wish to hasten
Down to that tomb already more than mine.

And, even yet, I dare not let it languish,
Dare not indulge in Memory's rapturous pain;
Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,

How could I seek the empty world again?

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