
Wuthering Heights: Stylistic Devices In The Novel

In Wuthering Heights, one area in which the sublime is highlighted is through the gloomy landscape. In the first volume, Lockwood's description of the sheer physicality of Wuthering Heights and the heath and brackish mud he had to wade through to reach the house foregrounds elements of sublimity, most notably in the dangerous, yet awe-inspiring setting:

"Wuthering" being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. 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 of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had the foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.

Brontë's imagery of Wuthering Heights serves as a visible symbol of Heathcliff's cold and harsh character, and the physical barriers depicted may represent the restrictive forces of the social classes found throughout the novel. Her choice in diction, such as the words "tumult", "stormy", "pure", "excessive", "stunted", and "strong", illustrates the fervent, sublime love that overcomes Heathcliff and Catherine.

Later, the night that Heathcliff disappears angrily into the moors and vanishes for three years, the tempestuous weather reflects that of Catherine's emotional turmoil:

"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."

The storm is personified as "furious, violent, and destructive," thus a sublime emulation of Catherine's own destructive reactions as "her obstinacy in refusing to take shelter, and standing bonnetless and shawl-less to catch as much water as she could with her hair and clothes" left her "thoroughly drenched" and ill from her longing for Heathcliff to return. This is a fantastic metaphor as, according to Longinus, "[t]he right occasions [for metaphors] are when emotions come flooding in and bring the multiplication of metaphors with them as a necessary accompaniment" ... and "metaphors conduce to sublimity, and that passages involving emotion and description are the most suitable field for them".

Sublime wildness and tumultuous weather aren't only found in the landscape of Wuthering Heights. It is also represented within the characters themselves and their identities. The passion that Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship portrays might be identified as one seeking transcendence, or perhaps one that seeks to combine two, isolated individuals into one larger, sublime entity.

Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship was never simplistic. In childhood, she found herself "adopt[ing] a double character". While at Thrushcross Grange, where "she heard Heathcliff

termed a 'vulgar young ruffian,' and 'worse than a brute,' she took care not to act like him; but at home, she had small inclination to practice politeness that would only be laughed at, and restrain an unruly nature when it would bring her neither credit nor praise".

While later in the novel, as Catherine lies ill, she tells Nelly:

Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors — I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free... and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those Hills...

These passages clearly indicate that the moors represent more than fond memories surrounding sunny, childhood endeavors. Instead, they signal the notion that Catherine's wild nature developed out in the moors, alongside Heathcliff, and that they have become an escape for her; a manifestation of Heathcliff and a characteristic of her true nature. These fevered memories suggest that the moors are where she belongs, and despite the decisions she made, she was not meant to stay inside as the lady of a manor. Her desire to be outside and succumb to the natural elements reflects her desire to revert to her old being; one where she was carefree, untamed, and beside Heathcliff. In this way, Catherine falls victim to the sublime as she gives in to its omniscient powers, drawing her away from the comforts of her life and into a tumultuous uncertainty fueled by passion, energy, and a yearning to be free.