

## The Monster Within Us: Heathcliff, Moral Monstrosity, and the Haunting of Contemporary Obsession

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### Abstract

This article analyses the main character, Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights*, written by Emily Brontë, and takes this character as an original figure of monstrosity paralleled to the British Gothic Tradition. Rather than his supernatural entities, Heathcliff's monstrosity is defined in the crucible of human extremity, such as his strong emotional obsession, his meticulously executed revenge, and the profound social ostracism he withstands, while it is not a product of the otherworldly. This article discusses that Heathcliff symbolises a mode of moral monstrosity, in which his humanity is purposely eroded by a singular, all-consuming passion that defies societal and ethical boundaries. Moreover, the characters, Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* and Joe Goldberg in *You*, are going to be analysed through the quintessential Gothic atmosphere of the novel, like isolated moors, old houses, and a pervasive sense of psychological horror that works as an external manifestation of his internal turmoil. The horror he inspires spreads through the fearful potential of unchecked human emotion, showing how love turns into a destructive force. Eventually, the article links this symbol between nineteenth-century figures to contemporary cultural phenomena, illustrating Heathcliff's echo in modern narratives of toxic relationships, the glorification of obsession culture, and the cyclical nature of vengeance. Therefore, by deconstructing Heathcliff's tragedy, this article shows how the anxieties surrounding and social transgression in Gothic literature keep going to resonate, offering a timeless, cautionary tale about the monstrous capabilities latent within the human heart.

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## Introduction

In English Literature, *Wuthering Heights*, written by Emily Brontë, takes its place as a brutal and major monument in the lens of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. When it was published in 1847, it was met with a combination of bewilderment and revulsion. Some scholars who were accustomed to the moral clarity of Dickens or the social criticism of Jane Austen were faced with a novel that defied easy categorisation. As Shapiro (1969) highlights in his studies, F.R. Leavis evaluated it as a “kind of sport,” an abnormality living outside the main custom of the English novel, an idea echoed by critics who saw its world as “pre-moral” and its characters as untethered from conventional ethics (p. 284). However, strangeness is the enduring power that makes this book so special. Heathcliff pulses with dark, elemental energy, eschewing easy resolutions and instead immersing the reader in a maelstrom of passion, vengeance, and spiritual desolation. Throughout the novel, having a turbulent heart, the main character, Heathcliff, is not solely a romantic hero or a simple villain. But a figure of gothic monstrosity forged not from supernatural evil, but from the intolerable extremities of human experience.

*Wuthering Heights*’s placement within that tradition is unconventional, although it is undisputedly a Gothic novel. As Qiao (2019) states that it does not follow classical examples like crumbling castles or overt supernaturalism that defined Gothic works of Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe. Conversely, Brontë creates a stage where there is more insidious and psychologically resonant horror. Moreover, as Aldewan (2017) illustrates that Gothic elements are highly embedded in the very core of the narrative such as the wild, desolate moors which separate *Wuthering Heights* from civilized world, common atmosphere of decay and death, enigmatic premonitions and ghostly apparitions that blurs the clarity between the living and the dead, and most vigorously, the psychological torment which pushes its characters to the brink of madness. As Weirong Qiao (2019) writes, the novel becomes a Gothic novel “by building wild and dark characters, gory environment, uncanny plots and supernatural scenes” (p. 1578). Therefore, the fear in the novel is internal rather than external. This is a Gothicism of the soul where the true monsters are the untamed passions of the human heart. This Focus of internalism pays attention to Heathcliff, such a terrifying and complex figure. Briefly, He is not a vampire or a demon in a literal sense; however, his war documents the process by which a human soul, twisted by obsession and brutality, turns into something monstrous and unrecognisable.

The novel’s geography offers a powerful allegory for its central conflicts, especially through the rigid opposition between its two primary settings:

*Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange. This division symbolises the irreconcilable conflict between nature and civilisation, passion and restraint, chaos and order. The home of the Earnshaws, *Wuthering Heights*, is a fortress against the elements, its very name arousing the harsh, ceaseless winds that batter the moors. Qiao (2019) mentions that the narrator, Lockwood, explains the house's exposure to "the atmospheric tumult", a place of "pure, bracing ventilation" which the north wind's power is proof in the "excessive slant of a few stunted firs" and "a diversity of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way" (p.1582). Moreover, this house is associated with the natural habitat of the primal, passionate bond between Catherine and Heathcliff, a place where social conventions hold little sway and raw emotion reigns. Thus, it symbolises a world of dangerous freedom, in which love and hate come into being in their purest, most destructive forms.

Conversely, for Adrian A. Husain (2021), Thrushcross Grange, where the Lintons live, embodies the ideals of civilisation, refinement, and social order. Moreover, it is a "splendid place carpeted with crimson," loaded with elegance, comfort, and propriety (p. 45). These places are exposed and rugged, whereas the other place, Grange, is sheltered in a valley, protected from the rigidity of the moors. These also become a world of books, decorum, and emotional restraint, a place where identity is defined by social status, wealth, and marriage. The Grange, for Catherine, symbolises a tantalising but eventually suffocating alternative to the wild freedom she shares with Heathcliff. For her, the decision to marry Edgar Linton is a deliberate choice to join this world of civilised comfort, a treachery which sets the novel's tragic events in motion. This geographical separation is associated with Heathcliff's monstrous transformation. It is Catherine's abandonment of their divided, wild world for the artificial comforts of the Grange which breaks into pieces their unity and awakens in Heathcliff a monstrous desire for revenge. As Aldewan (2017) mentioned in his academic study, the two houses represent "two different worlds" in conflict, a clash between the "gentle, moral Edgar Linton of the Grange" and the "malevolent and magnetic Heathcliff" (p. 3). So, the Gothic Character, Heathcliff, being an integral part of the untamed landscape of the Heights, turns out to be an outsider to both worlds, his anger directed at destroying the social order that has stolen his other half.

Heathcliff's monstrosity is inextricable from his origin as an outsider, a racial and social "other" in the firmly structured society of nineteenth-century England. The novel starts with the arrival of Heathcliff at *Wuthering Heights* as a "Foundling", a dirty, ragged, black-haired child, and Mr Earnshaw discovers him on the streets of Liverpool. As Husain

(2021) suggests that his appearance in terms of physicality is referred to as a “gipsy brat” or “as dark as if it came from the devil”, which positions him in ambiguity and alienated (p. 44). People called him just “Heathcliff”, which offers as a combination of his first and last name, a metaphorical gesture that intensifies his position as an individual without lineage, property, or a legitimate place in the family tree. For Shapiro (1969), from the outset, he is dehumanised, referred to by the Earnshaw family as an it rather than acting like a human being. Therefore, this fundamental ostracism creates the groundwork of the brutalisation to come surface.

Heathcliff is condemned to systematic degradation at the hands of Hindley, whereas Mr Earnshaw shows him a puzzling favouritism after the old man’s death. Moreover, he is dismissed from a family member to a common labourer, denied education, and treated with relentless cruelty. That can be seen as both a social demotion as well as being a calculated stripping of his humanity. As Arnold (1969) shows that the attitude toward Heathcliff “dehumanises him,” solidifying him as an object rather than a person (p. 286). Critics, throughout the years, blamed this cruelty on Hindley; nevertheless, a more nuanced reading, like James Hafley (1958), offered that the abetment of other characters, like Nelly Dean. Hafley posits Nelly as a “consummate villain,” whose effective manipulations and class-driven resentment support substantially to Heathcliff’s pain. Moreover, she admits her early hatred for the boy and her actions. For example, the event of leaving the abandoned child on the staircase landing “hoping it might be gone on the morrow” shows a coldness that abets Hindley’s more overt cruelty (p. 202). Even if he is at the hands of Hindley or the more subtly prejudiced members of the household, the main character, Heathcliff, is explicitly “othered” through a role that combines the demonic with the animalistic. This merciless alienation guarantees that his potential for love and loyalty, reserved exclusively for Catherine, becomes pathologically intense. On the other hand, his response to the rest of the world solidifies into a monstrous desire for revenge. Therefore, his monster side is not innate. However, it is a direct consequence of a society that refuses to see him as human.

Nevertheless, the main catalyst for Heathcliff’s transformation from a wronged boy into a vengeful monster is the devastation of his bond with Catherine Earnshaw. Moreover, their relationship is not a traditional romance; it is a deep, notably metaphysical mixture of identities that transcends social norms, romantic love, and even the boundary between life and death. For this situation, Anne Williams (1985) highlights that this is a “mythical” bond, constructing similarities to the tragic, all-consuming

love of Tristan and Iseult, where the lovers' identities merge into one (p. 117). Moreover, as Aldewan (2017) mentioned in his article, this love is articulated most famously in Catherine's iconic confession to Nelly Dean: "he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same..." (p.3). This implication highlights a unity that is pre-social and elemental, forged in their shared childhood roaming the wild moors. As quoted in Qiao's (2019) study, their pure love, as Catherine mentions it, "resembles the eternal rock beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (p. 1580). It is about a bond of being rather than being a social or romantic convenience.

For the turning point and moment, the monster within Heathcliff is fully seen, is Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton. What Catherine does is a pragmatic betrayal of this spiritual reality for the sake of social advancement. When she chooses the Grange, she also accepts the civilisation over nature, security over soul, effectively tearing their unified being in two. For Heathcliff, overhearing just her whispering that it would "humiliate" her to marry him, this behaviour is an absolute annihilation. All the emotions that were his sole connection to humanity and his reason for being are irrevocably broken. Thus, his subsequent escape from Wuthering Heights points to the end of his innocence. After Heathcliff returns three years later to Catherine's house, He has already become a wealthy, calculating man, his entire being repurposed for a singular, monstrous goal that is revenge.

As Susan Jaret McKinstry (1985) examines, the fulfilment of this desire is worth any price, leading to a world of "dangerously powerful children, where fantasy and desire beat the adults' laws of reality and order" (p. 142). Ultimately, Heathcliff becomes a spectre of vengeance, a gothic force determined to visit upon his enemies, their children, and the same agony of dispossession he struggled with. His desire for revenge becomes the engine of his monstrosity, leading him into a "tyranny-a hero villain" means that he is both an object of terror and a figure of tragic magnificence (Qiao, 2019, p. 1580).

This chapter aims to explore Heathcliff's transformation into a gothic monster whose humanity is eroded by obsessive love and social alienation, and to argue how this monstrosity mirrors modern manifestations of emotional extremity. By following his journey from an alienated foundling to a vengeful tyrant, this chapter will discuss how Heathcliff's monstrosity is an extreme, horrible expression of human nature. He experiences the demolishing part of a love that defies all boundaries and a spirit that, when denied its rightful place, seeks not to reform the world but eventually destroy

it. He is, finally, a writer's dark exploration of what happens when the human soul is pushed beyond the limits of endurance, drawing a monster whose legacy of pain and passion goes on to haunt the literary imagination.

Therefore, the centred enigma becomes the monstrosity of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, which is a phenomenon that has fascinated and disturbed readers for generations. Moreover, Heathcliff is frighteningly and tragically human rather than being a ghoul and a spectre of traditional Gothic fiction. What makes him a monster is that his personality is cultivated within the fertile ground of social alienation, psychological obsession, and a landscape that reflects the desolation of his soul instead of springing from a supernatural curse or a demonic pact. Consequently, he has become a monster manufactured by the world that denies him, a living testament to the scary potential of human passion when it is denied, perverted, and left to fester. To figure out Heathcliff is to examine a uniquely gothic creation: a figure who becomes a force of nature by being denied his place in society, a mental phantom who blurs the borderline between victim and victimiser, and a liminal being who appears in the narrative long before he is told to walk the moors as a ghost. In conclusion, his horror is associated with the monstrous depths latent within humanity itself; on the contrary, the common belief is that he is inhuman.

### **Social Monstrosity: The Unmaking of a Man**

Heathcliff's complex journey starts in his very presence rather than an act of malice. He is accepted as an object of profound social disruption in the Earnshaw household, and his devilish characteristic is created in the crucible of his violent and systematic expulsion from the human family. He is not solely an outsider character who can not succeed in belonging. On the contrary, he is an "other" who is incessantly and brutally made to be outside. As A. Husain (2021) explains, Heathcliff's existence as a dark-skinned, speechless "cuckoo" ushers in "dissonance, the infernal, poisoning the ethic of home, creating division and conflict" (p. 45). Moreover, as Shapiro (1969) assumes that his origins are deliberately blanked, which makes him racially and socially ambiguous in a society obsessed with lineage and purity. The resident of the house always reacts to his foreignness by dehumanising him, referring to him as "it" (p.286). This linguistic implication is the beginning of a social process which denies him a name, a root, a gender, a family, and eventually, a soul separate from Catherine's.

Heathcliff's monstrosity is depicted with the illuminating the lens of class distinction. Hindley seizes the chance to reassert the tough social

order which Heathcliff's presence threatens, whereas Mr Earnshaw offers him a perplexing and disruptive form of protection. He explicitly reduces Heathcliff to the status of a common labourer, stripping him of his education, his companionship with Catherine, and his prestige. This is not about personal cruelty, but it is a calculated act of social engineering designed to push Heathcliff to turn into the animalistic, servile role his appearance recommends to them. What Arnold Shapiro (1969) highlights, the Victorian families in novels like *Wuthering Heights* perform as a "tribe, governed by power and the desire for money rather than by love" (p. 286). In this family, as mentioned, Heathcliff is the grabber who must be cast out. Moreover, the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange support this expression, acting him with the narrow prism of class. They disgust him and are labelled as "gypsy," incapable of realising past because of his rough exterior to the humanity within, a judgment Heathcliff bitterly recounts to Nelly: Cathy "was a young lady and the Lintons made a borderline between her treatment and mine" (Shapiro, 1969, p. 287).

This brutal social banishment Heathcliff faced makes him bitter and substantially reshapes his understanding of the world. When he is denied by society, he internalises the crucial sense of his oppressors. His primary aim is to master the system that crushed him rather than transcending it when he comes back to *Wuthering Heights*. As Shapiro (1996) discusses, he comes as a "capitalist," using energy and trickery to exterminate the Earnshaw and Linton estate (p. 291). His revenge is a monstrous reflection of the very ethics that disenfranchised him, such as property, lineage, and ultimately power. When he turns back, Heathcliff becomes a space of "chaos and anarchy", obviously by getting mastery via the laws of property he has cunningly manipulated. His devil side lies in his excellent, horrendous adoption of the society's own latent cruelty. What he does is to hold a gloomy mirror up to the civilised world, expressing that his "barbarism" is merely a more honest and potent version of its own hidden violence. He becomes a terrifying production, which is a monster born of its own hypocrisies that the system did.

### **Psychological Monstrosity: The Abyss of Obsession and Vengeance**

As long as society provides the necessary mould for Heathcliff's monstrosity, it is his own psyche, which was ravaged by an obsessive love and a fairly strong wish for revenge, that provides it with its terrifying form. Therefore, as Aldewan (2017) notes, throughout the novel, Heathcliff's humanity is gradually eroded by a highly mighty passion for Catherine Earnshaw. This is, rather than being a simple traditional love perspective,



“metaphysical bond,” a terrifying fusion of identities which the self ceases to exist without the other. Moreover, Susan Jaret McKinstry (1985) assumes that their relationship is a form of “mimetic desire,” a “childlike struggle for power” that peers become a purpose in the other’s desperate search for a complete self (p. 143). Heathcliff mostly quoted the assertion, “I CANNOT live without my life! I CANNOT live without my soul!” (Bronte, 2021, p.97). It is certainly a literal statement of his psychological reality. Catherine is not his beloved. On the contrary, she is the very substance of his being.

Nevertheless, this metaphysical bond is severed by Catherine’s betrayal, and Heathcliff’s mentality breaks down. The only anchor to the world, love, turns into a monolithic obsession with vengeance. As one of the scholars, Qiao (2019) implies that for Heathcliff, the idea of revenge becomes the “only goal of his living,” and he is himself by it with a chilling, inhuman focus (p. 1579). He loses his capacity for empathy, and other basic human skills become mere instruments in his grand, disruptive design. For example, the character whose love is purely innocent for Heathcliff, Isabella Linton, becomes the first and most pitiable victim of this dehumanisation. Moreover, Husain (2021) assumes that Heathcliff himself confesses his monstrosity to Catherine, explaining Isabella as a mere tool in his war against Edgar: “a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic: he’s a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man” is Catherine’s own alert to her (p. 54). Heathcliff does not frustrate, subjecting Isabella to an expedition of psychological and physical torture that converts her from a naïve girl into a broken, vengeful woman. His attitude towards her shows the mentality of his psychological monstrosity, which is associated with the inability to recognise the humanity of anyone who is not Catherine.

This dehumanisation of Heathcliff peaks when Catherine passes away. His attitude is not the grief of a mortal man: it is the goal, cosmic rage of a being torn from its other half. In this place, Emily Brontë deploys one of the subtle Gothic horror mechanisms. The main character, Heathcliff, thought that disentomb Catherine’s body is a frightening act which collapses the boundary between grief and necrophilia. As Matthews (1985) explains, Heathcliff explains to Nelly his plan to have the sexton remove her coffin. Therefore, when Heathcliff is buried beside her, their bodies can inosculate and separate together till “Linton finds us, he is going to now know which is which!” (p. 36). This expression of a desire for a literal, mental, moral and metaphysical fusion with a corpse is the eventual expression of his obsession. This is a yearning which defies the nature laws and morality, signifying his integrated departure from the realm of conventional human feeling (p. 36).

The last level of his psychological unmaking is his cold, considered brutality



towards the second generation. Therefore, he analyses everybody, such as Hareton, Linton, and young Cathy, not individuals, but pure recurrence of his old enemies. He remembers the abuse he suffered at Hareton, twisting the boy into a brutish, illiterate parody of his younger self. As Shapiro (1969) emphasises, this attitude is getting more monstrous by Heathcliff's chilling self-awareness: "I might sympathise with all emotions, having felt them myself," he admits, "I see what he suffers now... and certainly, he will not be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance" (p. 292). Moreover, he appreciates this produced suffering, proving himself a far monstrous figure than his own tormentor, Hindley, who was "too brutal or too foolish to understand Heathcliff" (Shapiro, 1969, p.292). Eventually, for Heathcliff, the brutality has become a refined, enlightened art. His mind is now a completely Gothic space, which is a prison of memory and hate from which there is no exit.

### Spatial Symbolism: *Wuthering Heights* as the Monster's Lair

When Gothic Literature is handled in the novel, the placement and setting are merely a backdrop. On the contrary, it is an active participant, an externalisation of the character's inner turmoil. Moreover, in *Wuthering Heights*, the settings and surrounding moors are the stages for Heathcliff's tragedy, as well as being a living embodiment of his soul. As Qiao (2019) assumes the exact name "*Wuthering*" as Lockwood notes, it explains an "atmospheric tumult," a place battered by storms, completely reflecting the violent, untamable pleasure that defines Heathcliff's monstrosity (p. 1582). Moreover, the house is a castle, isolated and grim, its design as undesirable as Heathcliff's own demeanour. Its gloomy, unadorned interiors and its state of progressive decay under his ownership mirror the spiritual rot and solitude within him. The moors, at the same time, highlight the wild, pre-social wilderness of his roots and the basic nature of his Platonic love with Catherine. Therefore, they are a space of freedom and danger, a landscape as "barbarian" and wild as the emotions that drive him (Qiao, 2019, p.1578).

Author Emily imperiously depicts the natural world as a direct parallel to Heathcliff's emotional state. The event that took place on the night when the storm started is a clear appearance of the tempest in his soul. Moreover, when Catherine passes away, the house descends into a deeper gloom, leading to a literal prison for the younger Catherine and Hareton, while Heathcliff's own heart has become a prison of sorrow and vengeance. In Emily Rena-Dozier's (2010) study, she argues that the story of Emily Brontë's dog keeper, whose existence metaphorically serves as an anecdote to fill the savage energy of the novel, illustrates the tension between the "delicate whiteness of the domestic

interior” and the “masculine animal presence that would sully” it (p. 764). Therefore, Heathcliff represents this animal presence. As a result, Catherine decides to be in the civilised, orderly world of Thrushcross Grange; she leaves this shared space, leaving Heathcliff to make him alone, and a monstrous sovereign of the wild. Therefore, *Wuthering Heights* becomes his lair, a Gothic space where he is both king and prisoner, its isolation and gloom an excellent echo of his self-inflicted exile from humanity.

### **The Supernatural Echo: A liminal Monster**

Even if Heathcliff is implicitly seen as a casual human, Brontë intentionally imbues him with a supernatural aura, depicting him as a figure that occupies the liminal space between the natural and the otherworldly, the living and the dead. He is inspired by some of the key Gothic elements, such as haunting, monstrous repetition, as well as the violation of fundamental boundaries. Moreover, as Matthews (1985) notes, Heathcliff is not only haunted but also a haunter. Therefore, as soon as Catherine passes away, he is literally possessed by her memory, directly begging to torment 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.31). This poor being to be haunted marks his definitive break with the world of the living, that he prefers to live in a world which is populated by ghosts. In turn, he becomes a ghostly presence himself, his sudden appearances and uncanny intensity giving him a demonic quality. As Hafley (1958) Heathcliff is an “evil” a “fiend”, and Lockwood believes that his presence is meaningless and unsettling.

Additionally, he turns into the engine of a monstrous Gothic repetition, circumventing the characters in a seemingly inevitable cycle of suffering. Therefore, all the time, the fears of the past are not only remembered; they are reenacted. Thus, Heathcliff pushes Hareton to comfort his own degradation, changing young Catherine into a prisoner while her mother was, and revives a parody of his own tragic love story with his sickly son Linton. This ruthless recurrence is a central point of Gothic horror, implying a world governed not by advance, but by the deterministic and inescapable return of past trauma. According to Diana (2022), as long as the Jungian lens is used, Heathcliff can be observed as representing the “unknown, unconscious part of the being,” the “chaotic forces lying underneath the rational surface” (p. 196). In this apprehension, his implementation of repetition is similar to the return of the repressed, a psychological horror made manifest.

Eventually, his monstrosity is resolved thanks to his liminality. He stands on a tightrope between states which are man and beast, master and maid,

good man or villain, and most noticeably, life and death. His final days are a chilling depiction of a man willingly crossing this last boundary. He starves to death himself, his perception fixed on a sight just he can see, interacting with a presence that does not exist. He is stuck in material life, already half in the ghostly realm he longs for. The open window by his dead body, wet in rain, elucidates his successful passage into the supernatural world, ultimate victory, and victory in unification with Catherine. Finally, Heathcliff's fear is the fear of the broken boundary which exists between love and obsession, passion and cruelty, humanity and monstrosity, and finally between life and a love that is stronger than death itself.

## Analysis

### Reflection in The Contemporary World: The Modern Heathcliff

Even though 175 years have passed since its publication, *Wuthering Heights* maintains its importance in English literature as being cultural touchstone. It is a dark mirror that reflects contemporary concern about love, obsession, and the slim veil separating civility from savagery. The enduring fascination with Heathcliff is especially telling where the toxic relationships and psychological manipulations reached their peak. Moreover, his monstrosity character has not receded into literary history but has, on the contrary, gained a disturbing new relevance. Although the moors have been modified by the sprawling metropolis and handwritten letters by encrypted texts, the monstrosity of Heathcliff, like obsessive passion, his vengeful nihilism, and his romanticised persecution, is incessantly resurrected in modern narratives. Throughout the term “dark hero” of popular media to the stalker anti-hero of streaming television, the Main character, Heathcliff, is offered as a potent symbol of our era's complex relationship with emotional extremity. This rebirth of this archetype illustrates a deep-seated cultural ambivalence, a contemporaneous condemnation and romanticisation of the very behaviours that constitute his monstrosity, discovering the enduring appeal of “the monster within us.”

### The Archetype of the Obsessive Lover: From Byronic Hero to Digital Stalker

Fundamentally, *Wuthering Heights*' main character is the classical obsessive lover and a figure who consumes his identity by his object of affection. This obsession, according to Emily, is not just a flaw; it is his entire mode of being. It is what pushes him not only tragic but also terrifying, making his pain sensible, while fueling his monstrous actions. In today's world, this archetypal characteristic has slightly gained new and chilling expressions,

especially in Joe Goldberg from Caroline Kepnes's novel *You* and its popular television adaptation. Also, Joe, when compared with Heathcliff, is an outsider who builds his identity around an idealised, all-consuming love. Both suffer from the idea, which can be described as a catastrophic failure of boundaries; they see the women they wish not as independent individuals but as missing pieces of themselves, spiritual or psychological necessities for their own completion. That's why the famous quote of Catherine, "I am Heathcliff" (Bronte, 2021, p. 49) reaches its contemporary, distorted reflection in Joe's internal monologues, where he carefully deconstructs the women he stalks, changing their lives to fit a romantic narrative that exists only in his mind.

These two figures, Heathcliff and Joe, employ the same horror mechanism even though publication is separated by nearly two centuries. Both characters exemplify a mentality of justified transgression. Heathcliff's quest for revenge is framed, in his own mind and to some extent in the narrative, as a righteous response to the loss of his soul. His cruelty towards Isabella, Edgar and even their children is, from his perspective, a necessary rebalancing of a cosmic injustice. In the same way, the character of *YOU* Joe Goldberg ironically attempts heinous behaviour such as kidnapping, stalking, and murder to protect his beloved from a corrupt and undeserving world. Moreover, he posits himself as a romantic guardian, a dark knight willing to eliminate any obstacle to their perfect union. This mentality that monstrous attitudes are rationalised as expressions of profound love is the engine of their shared horror. Therefore, both push the audience into a deeply uncomfortable complicity, inviting us to empathise with their action besides meanwhile recoiling from their actions.

Also, Heathcliff and Joe are examples of how social invisibility can increase monstrosity. Because of the ambiguity of the racial and social status of Heathcliff, he is rendered functionally invisible to the gentry, allowing him to operate outside their moral codes. On the other hand, Joe Goldberg thrives in the anonymity of the digital age. For example, He prefers to use social media to build a friendly but false knowledge of his victims, exploiting the very tools of modern association to facilitate his predatory isolation. Thanks to his ability to move through the world unseen, his behaviours behind a carefully curated façade of a charming, sophisticated book lover reflect Heathcliff's returns as a polished "gentleman," a concealment which hides his savage purposes. One of the contemporary genres, "Stalker Thriller" staged by *YOU*, offers a modern Gothic atmosphere, changing the desolate moors with the equally isolating landscape of the internet. The horror Heathcliff created is modernised for an age where a person can be

completely known and yet fully objectified, their digital footprint paving the way for their own destruction. Therefore, Heathcliff's target to physically merge with Catherine's corpse finds its chilling modern equivalent in Joe's collection of digital and physical trophies, a venture to possess the principle of a person by curating the fragments of their life.

### The Anti-Hero and the Romanticisation of Toxic Love

Heathcliff can be viewed as the progenitor of the modern "dark hero" or "anti-hero", a character that is immoral, whose mostly brutal actions are rendered compelling and even attractive, by a backstory of severe suffering. This archetype has become a popular strength in today's popular culture, shifting from the vampires of *Twilight* to the ethically ambiguous protagonists of prestige television. These Characters, like Joe, are described by their pain. Their beast side is shown as a tragic result of trauma highly associated with social rejection, lost love, and unbearable suffering that serves to excuse or at least confuse their villainy. What Emily Rena (2010) highlights in her investigation of the Gaskell anecdote about Brontë's dog, the novel elucidates a Gothic principle that "violence is at the heart of the domestic" (p. 764). At the same time, in the same way, the anti-hero in modern products puts this extreme violence into the realm of romance, recommending that the most intense structure of love is inextricably related to danger, possession, and pain.

The cultural understanding of "romanticising toxic love," precisely common in social media spaces like TikTok and Instagram, is directly descended from the attraction of Heathcliff. Therefore, the readers and the fans of *Wuthering Heights* mostly focus on the passionate, transcendent nature of his love for Catherine, especially editing out the monstrous abuse he inflicts on others. Moreover, they create virtual mood boards and video montages set to melancholy music, believing that the love in *Wuthering Heights* is the ultimate "twin flame" romance, whereas they explicitly ignore the reality that Heathcliff's obsessive love is the direct cause of multiple deaths and a generation of suffering. This understanding of the romanticisation is a selective one, rather than being a misreading or preference to privilege the emotional density of the anti-hero over the ethical results of his actions. The declaration of Heathcliff's "If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day" (Brontë, 2021, p.87) is isolated and renowned, separated from the terrifying reality that his "love" is a power of pure destruction.

Yet, this trend goes to a contemporary cultural longing for emotional

authenticity, even at its peak and unhealthy. The anti-hero Heathcliff has a fantasy of profound, all-consuming feelings in a world where it is mostly perceived as anaemic and emotionally sterile. Therefore, Heathcliff's rageful attitude towards his love is perceived as a justified response to an unjust world, and his obsession is thought of as a testament to the depth of his capacity for love. Therefore, this is the stage where his relevance becomes most disturbing. Heathcliff is increasingly reinterpreted as a tragic, romantic ideal. Thus, Social media aesthetics, with their emphasis on curated and decontextualised moments are clearly fit into this kind of romantic story. The allowance of the appealing elements of the anti-hero, such as his tortured soul, his deep intensity for love, or his unwavering devotion, to be differentiated from the toxic reality of his behaviour. Finally, the monster is thus domesticated, made clear for consumption as a romantic fantasy.

### **“The Monster Within Us”: Heathcliff as a Mirror to Modern Extremity**

As well as being the realm of fiction, Heathcliff's mental profile echoes with broader social stress about the nature of modern identity and the expression of emotion. As identity politics rise and social discourse has increased polarisation, it has created a stage where empathy is mostly reserved for one's own “tribe”, whilst those outside it are easily dehumanised, which excellently reflects the social landscape of *Wuthering Heights*. Therefore, Heathcliff's monstrous behaviour comes with his absolute belief that the world is split into two categories: Catherine is on one side, the rest are in one side. His inability to analyse humanity in anyone outside his circle of care is a pathological extreme, but it mirrors a disturbingly prevalent urge in contemporary social and political life.

Moreover, anti-heroes symbolise a strong critique of a specific kind of performative victimhood. He is clearly wronged, a victim of horrific abuse and social injustice. Yet, he uses his victimhood as a lifelong justification for his own monstrous cruelty. For this reason, his suffering turns into a license for inflicting pain on others, trapping him and everybody around him in a ruthless cycle of vengeance. That's why past suffering is invoked as an irrefutable moral authority for present aggression, which is an extensive feature of contemporary conflict, from subjective disagreement to geopolitical conflicts. Emily's novel is just a reminder that trauma does not automatically lead to moral purity. However, it can just lightly get the seed of a new and more horrible form of monstrosity. As Husain (2021) mentions in his study, Dorothy shortly assumes, anti-hero Heathcliff symbolises a

“metamorphic” breakdown of the self, where pain acts as a catalyst which turns a victim into a creature indistinguishable from his oppressor.

Eventually, the most powerful idea of Heathcliff lies in his role as a manifestation of “the monster within us”, the identification that the most horrible evils are born from the very passions we prize most immensely: love, loyalty, honour, passion, and the desire for justice, rather than being external, metaphysical or supernatural. Therefore, what makes *Wuthering Heights* different is that it declines the easy comfort of an easy moral binary. On the contrary, it pushes the reader to acknowledge that Heathcliff’s potential for deep love is inseparable from his potential for monstrous cruelty. His desire is sublime, yet it is the sublime of a hurricane, a force of nature which is awesome in its power but completely reckless to the destruction it leaves in its wake. In romanticising Heathcliff, we are satisfied with a dangerous fantasy which is the intensity of a feeling can be separated from its ethical results.

Consequently, when *Wuthering Heights* is analysed with the elements of Gothic literature, it serves as a powerful antidote to this modern tendency. It draws us completely into the terrible, claustrophobic stage that Heathcliff’s desire builds, pushing us to witness the generations of misery which flow from his singular, obsessive love. Therefore, this character does not allow us the luxury of a sanitised anti-hero. On the contrary, the monstrosity of Heathcliff is not an exotic “other” to be safely admired from a distance, analysis. He is a terrifying chance latent within the human mind, a gloomy potential which is unleashed when people let pain become their identity and their love to get an excuse for their own monstrosity. That’s why Heathcliff continues to haunt as a creepy reflection of the darkness that we all can deal with, if people lose sight of the line between a grand passion and a monstrous possession.

## Conclusion

As Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* declines to offer easy answers about the nature of love, humanity, and monstrosity, this novel stands on a formidable and horrifying note. Moreover, Heathcliff remains not as a spectre from a forgotten age but as an enduring archetype of human capacity for self-destruction. This chapter has discussed that Heathcliff’s monster side is not an external or supernatural force. On the contrary, it is an internal catastrophe experienced in the crucible of deep human experience. This monstrosity of Heathcliff is born of social alienation that mercilessly rejects his humanity, and a psychological obsession, such as absolute trauma, that



corrodes his very being, existing only as a vessel for vengeance. Thus, this transformation illustrates that the most terrifying monsters are the ones who reside within the passionate, wounded human heart rather than the one who lurks in the shadows of haunted castles.

This chapter deconstructs the romantic ideal that transcendent love elevates the human spirit. Especially, love, in *Wuthering Heights*, is not a way to gain freedom. On the contrary, it is a gateway to a terrifying form of “dehumanisation” Their metaphysical bond that offers a unity beyond mortal comprehension eventually directs a shared abyss rather than a divine merging. Heathcliff’s lost soul devotes his life to a nihilistic campaign of destruction; his attitudes exemplify how an unchecked passion, severed from empathy and morality, can be a monstrous and insatiable force. His psychological unmaking because of the obsession with Catherine’s corpse to his calculated cruelty toward the next generation offer a cruel cautionary tale. It shows that the density of an emotion is no measure of its virtue; love, in its most extreme form, can be a tool, and sorrow can be justification for unrelenting evil. The Gothic elements of the novel, supernatural echoes work as an external manifestation of this internal decay, showing that the true haunting is not just by a ghost, but by the relentless memory of a love that was too strong to exist in the world and too destructive to truly die.

When Heathcliff’s reflection is explored in the contemporary world, it is seen that his figure is not close to a mere historical curiosity. He is the terrifying progenitor of the modern “dark hero” and obsessive lover archetype, characters dominating our cultural landscape from television to social media trends. The characters like Joe Goldberg in *You*, with modern fascination and the broader cultural romanticisation of toxic relationships, illustrate a contemporary mirror of the Gothic elements that Brontë highly articulated. In these modern narratives, as in the reception of *Wuthering Heights* itself, there is a risk of aestheticize pain and packaging psychological extremity as a form of profound authenticity. The devil side of the characters’ acts of the anti-hero are often framed as a tragic but compelling consequence of a deep and misunderstood love, a novel is trying to show their cruelty and invites a perilous form of empathy.

Finally, what makes Heathcliff so popular is his status as a forerunner to the “emotional monster” of the modern world. *Wuthering Heights* is a highly relevant reminder that the forces that give rise to a terrifying monster, which have social ostracism, tribalistic prejudice, and the weaponisation of trauma, are continuous dangers. Brontë’s novel offers a crucial and uncomfortable inquiry into the darkness which supports our most cherished ideals of love

and justice. It leads the reader to face the possibility that within magnificent desire lurks a potential for monstrous possession, and that the line between a tragic victim and horrible villain is dangerously thin. Moreover, Heathcliff is more than just a character in a nineteenth-century novel: he is an eternal example of “the monster within us,” a remarkable warning against the destructive allure of a love that seeks not to coexist with the world itself, but to consume it entirely.

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