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Passion and Repression in *Wuthering Heights* and *Rebecca*: Exterior and Interior Spaces in the Gothic Tradition

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*'The gothic represents the forces of violence, wildness and savagery, opposed to the domestic
narrative'* (Rena-Dozier)

In *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë and *Rebecca* (1938) by Daphne du Maurier, both external and internal spaces reflect the characters' inner states while also shaping the reader's experience of the texts. In particular, in Brontë's novel, the wild moors, stormy weather, and the tensions within the domestic interiors and the surrounding landscape underscore the characters' passionate and volatile behaviour. These elements also reflect the Gothic intensity of a Victorian society in which powerful emotions clash with rigid social expectations. By contrast, in *Rebecca*, du Maurier conveys repression and unease through the unpredictable sea and the secrets surrounding the first Mrs. de Winter and her life at Manderley. In doing so, the novel evokes a broader sense of alienation and psychological tension associated with the aftermath of war.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the setting is characterised by harsh weather conditions that reflect the intensity of the characters' emotions—both passionate and destructive. As Thomas Vargish observes, '[I]n order to understand Heathcliff's exploitation of the young we must look briefly at his passion for Catherine as expressed in his own childhood and youth' (7). This emotional intensity is reinforced by Brontë's use of pathetic fallacy, where the violent landscape expresses the inner turmoil of the characters. The novel establishes this turbulent atmosphere from the beginning: upon Lockwood's arrival, Heathcliff remarks that he has come during the wrong season, immediately associating the landscape with discomfort and hostility. Moreover, storms accompany some of the most intense moments in Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship. For example, when Heathcliff overhears Catherine confess that she cannot marry him because of his low social status—despite passionately declaring that their souls are the same, '[H]e's more myself than I am'—he flees the house at night during a raging storm (Brontë 81). The violent conditions reflect his emotional state and intensifies Catherine's distress over his disappearance, 'It was a very dark evening for summer: the clouds appeared inclined to thunder, and I said we had better all sit down [...] However,

Catherine would not be persuaded into tranquillity' (85). Catherine's rejection of 'tranquillity' in favour of the storm exemplifies the passionate nature of her character. In this regard, Emily Rena-Dozier writes, '[T]he gothic represents the forces of violence, wildness and savagery, opposed to the domestic [narrative]' (758). Catherine thus seeks a natural environment that mirrors her inner emotional intensity rather than embracing the constraints of domestic tranquillity, reinforcing the Gothic opposition between untamed nature and the restrictive order of the domestic sphere.

Passion in *Wuthering Heights* is not only expressed through intense feelings of fear and loss—it extends to death itself, reflected in the Gothic atmosphere. When Catherine is on the brink of death, she tries to reconnect with the external world through the open window, 'Mrs. Linton sat in a loose, white dress, with a light shawl over her shoulders, in the recess of the open window, as usual' (Brontë 157). This reflects not only her spiritual bond with nature but also her identification with the stormy weather and disorder that have shaped her relationship with Heathcliff, 'You have killed me—and thriven on it, I think. How strong you are! How many years do you mean to live after I am gone?' (160). The novel thus presents a Gothic atmosphere without resolution, where characters are drawn to chaos and emotional unrest. This is in line with Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, '[T]he course of those events is invariably set in motion by an unpleasurable tension, and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension—that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure' (7). The characters are trapped in a cycle of pain and compulsion rather than relief and healing—mirrored in the isolated Victorian setting that offers no escape for either them or the reader. Furthermore, while speaking to Nelly, Heathcliff even declares, 'If he [Edgar Linton] loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day. And Catherine has a heart as deep as I have; the sea could be as readily contained in that horse-trough, as her

whole affection be monopolized by him' (Brontë 148). The comparison Heathcliff makes, to convey the intensity of his feelings for Catherine, is striking, particularly in its contrast of time ('eighty years' and 'one day'). More significantly, the image of the sea reinforces the novel's association between emotion and untamed nature: just as the sea cannot be contained within a 'horse-trough,' Catherine's affection cannot be contained within the limits of domestic life or social expectation.

Like the sea imagery that conveys emotional excess in *Wuthering Heights*, the sea in *Rebecca* also reflects the inner lives of characters; however, rather than expressing uncontrolled passion, it evokes repression and psychological unease. The sea where everybody thinks Rebecca drowned further reflects her haunting presence and plays a symbolic role in suppressing Mrs. de Winter's doubts and questions. The narrator confesses, 'I could not hear the restless sea, and because I could not hear it my thoughts would be peaceful too' (du Maurier 134). Her thoughts and doubts are closely tied to the natural world outside, as it is the place where Rebecca died—the source of her obsession. The view of the sea from Maxim and Rebecca's bedroom mirrors the stormy nature of their relationship and the violence of Rebecca's death. The window facing the sea also functions like an eye, suggesting that the sea 'knows' what happened. When Mrs. de Winter looks out of this window "“That big room, I was telling you about, that looked down to the sea, was Mrs. de Winter's bedroom”," she is not merely observing the view; she is searching for answers, trying to uncover the truth about the past and her husband's presumed attachment to his first wife (84). The narrator desires to access what is emotionally and narratively out of reach—Maxim's memories, his guilt, and his true feelings. Yet, because the topic is too delicate and shrouded in secrecy, she does not dare to ask about Rebecca. Instead, she spirals into her thoughts, metaphorically drowning in uncertainty, just as she believes Rebecca did in the sea. Mrs. de Winter later observes, 'Any place seemed damp and sinister when it had been

uninhabited for a certain time' while thinking about Rebecca's bedroom (172). Visiting this 'sinister' and 'uninhabited' space becomes the only way for her to reconnect with Rebecca's presence, as she continues to repress her obsessive thoughts without ever expressing them aloud. As Diana Wallace highlights, 'The Female Gothic is, of course, always concerned with "history," even when it is set in the present, because it is obsessed with a past which keeps returning, just as Rebecca's boat – *Je Reviens* – re-surfaces' (134). This cyclical return of the past becomes a form of psychological persecution. The heroine's obsessive thoughts about Rebecca and Maxim's past create a claustrophobic, suffocating atmosphere. The sea, the boat, and the open yet unknowable spaces all contribute to the Gothic tone of the novel, mirroring both the heroine's repressed doubts and the reader's shared anxiety in confronting a truth that remains, for much of the novel, inaccessible.

The open spaces in *Rebecca* also become sites of uncertainty, where the narrator's anxieties and suspicions about the first Mrs. de Winter gradually take shape. In particular, for the narrator, the open spaces represent the unknown: a version of reality she believes she understands, yet her assumptions are based on questions and doubts. Even though Rebecca is no longer physically present, her spectral presence haunts every space, internal and external, '[T]here is the almost palpable presence of Rebecca, the hero's beautiful first wife, dead only a year, who is the novel's "ghost," haunting nearly every scene in it' (Drake 86). The spaces of dreams and ghosts work in the novel as an expression of a repressed reality. The dream-like description of Manderley in Chapter 1 represents the narrator's repressed mind, 'Last night I dreamt I went to Manderley again. It seemed to me I stood by the iron gate leading to the drive, and for a while I could not enter, for the way was barred to me' (du Maurier 1). Mrs de Winter moves around Manderley's exterior, observing it from a distance without having the possibility to live there anymore. Alison Light suggests, 'Her act of repression can be seen as one of definition and expression - the unconscious literally making

sense of the conscious in a dynamic, not a static relation' (17). Like Rebecca's ghostly presence, the narrator drifts through the house as it was before the fire, refusing to confront reality and instead lingering in a world that no longer exists.

Interior spaces also are symbolic in both novels, further aligning them with the Gothic tradition. In particular, in *Wuthering Heights*, they evoke a pervasive sense of entrapment, as if the house cannot contain the characters' intense passions—passions that symbolise their inner turmoil and recurring desire for emotional self-punishment. Steven Vine explains, 'Wuthering Heights is a house under stress; its very stability is the result of a climatic "tumult" that means its windows are sunk, desperately and defensively, deep into its walls, and its clean corners are broken up by obtruding stones' (339). The house appears to be a living entity, capable of experiencing emotions itself ('under stress') due to the events happening both inside and outside. This thus makes the space an active participant in the novel, almost as if it were a character. More specifically, the physical structure of *Wuthering Heights* seems to register and absorb the emotional turmoil of its inhabitants, reflecting the violence and instability of their relationships. In this way, the house does not simply contain the narrative's conflicts but actively intensifies them, reinforcing Brontë's portrayal of space as a force that shapes and amplifies the characters' passions. Furthermore, the protagonists often experience literal and psychological imprisonment within this space, which is meant to restrain their outbursts of passions, intensifying them instead. For instance, Catherine is physically confined to her room during her final days, and Heathcliff, unable to see her freely, must visit her in secret "[Y]ou must not [see her]—you never shall through my means. Another encounter between you and the master would kill her altogether" (Brontë 147). Heathcliff and Catherine's feelings for each other only end up intensifying because they cannot see one another. Therefore, the enclosed space not only represents a barrier to the outside world but also to what that world symbolises: a toxic, consuming love and the

possessiveness embodied by both Heathcliff and Catherine. This is why, despite these physical boundaries, Catherine and Heathcliff remain drawn to one another, compelled by an emotional force that defies spatial limitations.

Additionally, unlike *Manderley*, where an apparent sense of order is maintained through secrecy, silence, and mystery, *Wuthering Heights* becomes a site of overt domestic violence and uncontrollable anger. Early in the novel, Hindley's brutal torment of Heathcliff—beating him and threatening to kill him—reveals how the supposed safety of the home is subverted. The household, which should offer refuge from the external world (especially in the case of *Wuthering Heights*, constantly battered by severe weather), becomes even more threatening, as it contains the volatile emotional energies of its inhabitants and amplifies their conflicts. The Gothic element emerges precisely from this sense of domestic instability: the home, rather than providing shelter, becomes a source of fear and alienation. Heathcliff's position in the house further underscores this dynamic, '[His] "demonic" behaviour is at first the conventional fairytale struggle of an outsider to find a place in a family that rejects him: Cathy and Hindley are jealous of him, and Nellie leaves him on the staircase in the hopes that he will be gone in the morning' (McKinstry 143). Heathcliff remains a stranger within his own household, never accepted by Hindley and only ambiguously bound to Catherine. This ongoing sense of persecution cannot be resolved or alleviated—Heathcliff cannot erase his outsider status, particularly since he is not (to the characters' knowledge) biologically related to the Earnshaw family. While there is a possibility that he is Mr. Earnshaw's illegitimate son, this is never confirmed in the novel, leaving Heathcliff trapped in a liminal state, 'The Earnshaw family of *Wuthering Heights* is the representative household of Unlove where childhood is an experience of neglect, abuse, and rejection' (Levy 159). Therefore, Heathcliff remains neither fully inside nor outside the family, perpetually haunted by his exclusion. This factor fuels his passionate and intense

emotions, driving him to seek some form of emotional connection—whether positive or negative—with the place and the people who inhabit it.

By contrast, inner spaces in *Rebecca* are more deeply tied to the repression within the psychological realm, contributing to the novel's classification as a psychological Gothic. Mrs. de Winter's sense of defamiliarisation in the new environment of Manderley generates an ongoing atmosphere of unease and anxiety. As Lucie Armitt points out, 'As solidly constructed as any Gothic castle, Manderley is nevertheless the product of a ghostly dream' (48). The reader, alongside the narrator, uncovers the secrets of the house in real time, navigating its mysterious and disorienting spaces—both physically and mentally. Yet, the narrator is forced to remain without the answers she wants. Rebecca's oppressive and ghostly presence prompts Mrs. de Winter to repress the urge to talk about her, keeping her obsession hidden. She is not alone in this repression; Mrs. Danvers also withholds her emotions, unable to accept Rebecca's death due to the deep bond she shared with her, "I feel her everywhere. You do too, don't you?" (du Maurier 194). Rebecca's room, in particular, acts like a magnet, continuously drawing Mrs. de Winter toward it, as if it were the most forbidden and enigmatic space in the house. While interior spaces in *Wuthering Heights* function as barriers between characters and their chaotic, destructive drives, in *Rebecca*, these spaces become sites of attraction—portals into a world to which the narrator does not belong to. However, the curiosity they evoke must be repressed and kept secret, never to be fully satisfied, '[du Maurier's] best novels and short stories offer particularly interesting examples of how Gothic writing is infected by both personal and broader cultural values and anxieties' (Horner 2). Manderley mirrors the doubts and tensions brought on by World War II, which could not be easily resolved. This is why Mrs. de Winter can only access Rebecca's past indirectly, through the accounts of others, deepening her sense of exclusion and alienation. Although Manderley appears grand and richly adorned, its beauty masks the psychological torment of

its inhabitants. In Gothic fiction, no matter how majestic or elegant the setting may seem, it is the inner turmoil of its residents that ultimately shapes the emotional atmosphere of the house, determining whether it is a space of safety or danger.

Therefore, *Wuthering Heights* and *Rebecca* both present spaces where external environments—the moors and weather in Brontë's novel, and the sea in du Maurier's—highlight the contrast between outward passion and emotional repression. At the same time, internal spaces serve essential yet opposite functions. In *Wuthering Heights*, the house acts as a barrier between the outer and the inner worlds, with the characters constantly struggling against these walls, yearning to reconnect with the destructive power of their passions. In contrast, Manderley in *Rebecca* serves to physically contain and feed the repression, drawing the narrator in with its sinister spaces, which evoke curiosity and provide an illusionary way to access the repressed knowledge she seeks. Thus, the close relationship between the environment and the character emphasizes the Gothic significance of this connection, where the setting not only mirrors the characters' emotions but, more importantly, shapes them.

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