**GOTHIC: Fred Botting, the New Critical Idiom**

The extravagant effects of gothic and Romantic elements tended, in 19th century fiction, to be refracted through the domestic wold central to realism as the privileged site of Victorian culture, home and family were seen as the last refuge from the sense of loss and the forces threatening social relations. The home, however, could be a prison as well as a refuge. In two novels of the period, novels that engage very differently with gothic themes, the home is the site of both internal and external pressures uncanny and terrifying at the same time. In Bronte’s Wuthering Heights (1847) gothic and Romantic forces of individual passion are fearful and invested with a sense of loss.

The desolate, stormy and wild landscape and decaying family house of Wuthering Heights embody gothic and Romantic elements that signify darker forces of individual passion, natural energy and social restriction. The novel’s hero/villain, Heathcliff, combines the roles of gothic villain and Romantic outcast in his anti-social demeanour, fierce temper, mercenary and unlawful plotting, and his quest for vengeance. With Cathy’s rebellious passions, there is a similar refusal of the niceties of domestic passivity, propriety and duty. The narrative structure of reported stories and its uncanny movement between past and present are gothic elements signalling an untamed and wild invasion of the home rather than comfortable domestication. The gothic theme that the sins of the father are visited on the offspring is manifested in the representations of the illegitimacy and brutality of paternal authority, the repetition of events, and the doublings of figures and names in successive generations. Earnshaw's domestic tyranny, Hareton’s wildness, Linton Heathcliff’s unmanliness and Catherine’s energy are all displaced duplications of the roles and characteristics of the previous generation. The duplication that signals the dependence of past structures on those of the present is also evident in the dependence of individual identities on those of others. The relationship between Heathcliff and Cathy is the most powerful example of doubling: one constituting the other’s narcissistic image of his or her own unified self. The powerful desire for unity, however, disturbs all social and familial relations. Heathcliff’s desire demands the transgression of all rules, and casts him in the figure of a fiend, a devil and a vampire. He is also associated with natural wildness, and his temperament mirrors the hostile and stormy environment he occupies.

The distinctions betwe3en nature and culture, between individual passions and social rules do not simply distinguish the artificial repressiveness of social forms from the eruption of primitive desires. They are as artificial as the constructions of an originary and natural gothic world to which they allude, a legacy of 18th century and Romantic distinctions between civilisation and wildness. Heathcliff’s passions are produced: he is a hostile middle-class family whose criticisms, exclusions and prohibitions of his progress towards the properly bourgeois ends of marriage make him wild and vengeful. Heathcliff represents the outer limit of Romantic individualism, possessed by the desire of an impossibly unity invested in the figure of Cathy. If Miss Linton can elope with Heathcliff under the illusion, as the later scornfully observes, of his romantic heroism, then antithetical characterisations of his wild, untamed nature are similarly illusory constructions signalling the spectral return of gothic and Romantic forms.

The ghosts of the novel are an effect of the internalisation of a Romantic tradition on a social rather than individual level. Ghosts are not only seen by the narrator Lockwood on his first visit to the Heights, they reappear throughout the text: Heathcliff is seen with a strange lady by members of the local community. These uncanny effects in the story re, like the effects of the story on Lockwood, signs of the return of a lost world whose contours he does not fully understand. At the end of the novel the perspective moves from the happy domestic scene at the Heights to Heathcliff’s grave. Like a Graveyard poet of the 18th century, Lockwood imagines tranquillity after death, a return to proper unity in the earth. It is a peace that remains imaginary, part of the projections of the beholder-narrator’s sense of loss and his nostalgic dwelling upon the scene, indeed, it is as a reader of the story’s romantic passions that he has identified with its subject. The text, framed by Lockwood’s longing gaze, has constructed a lost natural passion and spirit that is at once strange and desirable as a site of unity.