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**The Classical Influence in Emily Brontë's**  
***Wuthering Heights*: Nature and the Sublime**

**Treball de Fi de Grau**

**Grau en Estudis d'Anglès i de Clàssiques**

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This is just the beginning of a new adventure.

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## Abstract

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is by now a classic piece in English literature. *Wuthering Heights* is considered a controversial novel, since it seems to be out of place in its historical moment. The novel was published during the Victorian Era, even though there is no doubt that Brontë was familiar with Romanticism, for her novel embraces many Romantic features.

Furthermore, *Wuthering Heights* could be also understood in terms of an earlier literary movement such as the Gothic. Like Gothic writers, Brontë is able to create a gloomy and mysterious atmosphere, to introduce the presence of ghosts, to incorporate the trappings of imprisonment and to depict passion-driven characters.

Nonetheless, little has been said about the Classical influence in the novel.

In the context of Romantic England there was a strong influence from the classic Antiquity, the so-called "Romantic Hellenism". Therefore, it should be not surprising that Brontë was influenced by this school of thought and translations from Latin and Greek.

The aim of this project is to show that Classical influence, in terms of nature, is more powerful than expected in *Wuthering Heights*. Firstly, I am going to focus on the importance of nature and the sublime in Antiquity. Then, I am going to make reference to Emily Brontë's treatment of nature which is essential to understand the setting in *Wuthering Heights*. Finally, I will finish by analysing two passages from the novel in which the classical features are tangible.

## Introduction

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is considered a classic of English literature. It is controversial, since the opinions about to which genre the novel belongs are polarised: the novel was published in the Victorian Era, but there is no doubt that it embraces Romantic reminiscences. There are many studies devoted to *Wuthering Heights* and they have focused on either the figure of the woman<sup>1</sup> in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the Gothic, folk and Victorian domestic realism,<sup>2</sup> or on the Gothic tradition and influence in the novel.<sup>3</sup> Many scholars defend that Gothic elements function as a means to reveal the suppressed feelings and actions of the characters. Nonetheless, much less has been said about the remarkable Classical presence in the novel, which leads Brontë to present impressive scenery. The aim of this project is to show that Classical influence, in terms of nature, is more powerful than expected in *Wuthering Heights*. I will focus on the importance of nature and the sublime in the Antiquity, and then on Emily Brontë's nature, since it has an important role in the novel. I will finish by analysing two important passages from the novel in which classical features are tangible.

It is not out of place to assert that many periods come about as a reaction to the previous one, but the case of Romantic Hellenism is quite different, since in the nineteenth century England there was a complex coexistence between Romanticism and Romantic Hellenism. On the one hand, Romantic Hellenism emerged from a great interest in the Grecian model and it has its roots in the eighteenth century, or even before since, as Webb (1993) claims. There were English and French travellers in the

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<sup>1</sup> Homans, Margaret, *Bearing the world: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986. This study analyses the two contrasting stories of the female characters: old and young Catherine.

<sup>2</sup> Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*. London: Macmillan, 1989. This book focuses on the Gothic folk and Victorian domestic realism.

<sup>3</sup> Harnisch, W. Robert. *Wuthering Heights and the Gothic Tradition*. University of Wyoming, 1971. This book discusses the Gothic tradition and elements that appear in *Wuthering Heights*.

late seventeenth and early eighteenth century who provided new and great interest in the Grecian model. Greece was seen as a model to look up to, and such desire to resemble the ancient model could be appreciated from different perspectives:

This interest [...] sometimes as a nostalgic yearning to escape into another place and another age apparently more golden than the present [...] sometimes as an emphasis on the differences between Greece and England [...] sometimes in terms of a landscape and a sense of place both distanced and idealized [...]. The fascination of Romantic Hellenism is in its endless variety. (Webb, 1993: 150)

In other words, Romantic Hellenism was a an opportunity to evade the reality which was marked by the rising of industrial power and changes in society that led Romantic Hellenists to feel deep dissatisfaction with their society. Yet, rather than a movement, Romantic Hellenism could be considered as a European phenomenon, since it is not a unified movement which follows a school of practise.

Many were the English poets who got carried away by the balance, tranquillity and beauty of ancient Greece. One of the best known poets whose poetry is motivated by the beautiful mythology of Greece is John Keats. For instance, in Keats's *Endymion*,<sup>4</sup> a handsome Aeolian shepherd is in love with the moon goddess Selene. As Webb (1993) suggests, Keats usually presents his poems as a picturesque presentation of Greece as a land of lush pastoral variety. Such was Keats's admiration for the Grecian model that in the preface to *Endymion* he regrets about not having found the classical model before, "I hope I have not in too late day touched the beautiful mythology of Greece, and dulled its brightness: for I wish to try once more, before I bid it farewell" (Aske, 1985:53). Therefore, Keats is par excellence a Romantic Hellenist and, he was not alone in that movement, since Percy Bysshe Shelley<sup>5</sup> or even Johann

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<sup>4</sup> Published in 1818.

<sup>5</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792 –1822), an English Romantic poet best known for his classically inspired poems such as *Ozymandias*, *Ode to the West Wind* or *Music*.

Wolfgang Goethe<sup>6</sup> shared the same passion for the classics. On the contrary, Romanticism questioned any classical model. The Greek example was rejected by William Wordsworth,<sup>7</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge<sup>8</sup> or Robert Southey,<sup>9</sup> who used to relate Hellenism with paganism since they preferred a more northern, Christian literature. In addition, Webb (1993) points out that this Romantic Hellenism was regarded as a danger to traditional English values:

For some poets the Grecian emphasis ran against the grain of the English tradition; so in 1804 Joseph Cottle declared in the preface to the second edition of *Alfred*, an epic poem defiantly focused on an English national hero: “whoever in these times founds a machinery on the mythology of Greeks, will do so at his peril”. In their different ways, both Wordsworth and Coleridge resisted the temptation and both recognized a danger not only to their poetic standards but to received ideas. (Webb, 1993: 166)

Therefore, Romantic writers preferred to describe landscapes or stories that evoke adventure or romance in wild and remote places, or medieval legends based on Gothic ideals. As Aske (1985) claims, Romantic writers tended to turn to the Gothic as it posed an alternative to Hellenic mythology. However, Romantics and Romantic Hellenists, despite their discrepancies, had some points in common: both had a nostalgic yearning to look back into the past as if it was more glorious than the present and, for both, the landscape had an important role since through it we, the readers, are able to understand the feelings and actions of the characters.

Thus, in the same way that it has been argued that Emily Brontë included Gothic and Romantic features in her novel, it could be also claimed that Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* contains Classical influence. Romantic Hellenism was a movement joined by many writers and poets and, being Brontë an avid reader, it should be not surprising that

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<sup>6</sup> Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe (1749 –1832), a German writer and dramatist best known for his play *Faust*. Goethe has a poem inspired by the Grecian Model, *Hermann and Dorothea*.

<sup>7</sup> William Wordsworth (1770 –1850) a major English Romantic poet, one of the founders of the Romantic Movement and best known for his poem *The Prelude*.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772 –1834) an English Romantic poet and philosopher. He was also one of the founders of the Romantic Movement.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Southey (1774 –1843) an English Romantic poet, his fame was eclipsed by Wordsworth and Coleridge.



she, through books and poems, was readily influenced by Romantic Hellenists. Besides, Brontë had access to classics through translation and, certainly, the exquisiteness and delicacy of classics is patent in the treatment of nature of her novel. Therefore, having this evidence, Brontë could be included in the Romantic Hellenism movement.

## **Chapter I**

### **Nature and the Sublime in Antiquity**

The attitude toward nature has been always an important issue in literature. The literary device in which nature is made to react to a human situation has never received a precise title in ancient rhetoric. In the beginning, the term used to attribute human emotions and actions to animals, plants and other parts of nature was *adyanton*.<sup>10</sup> That is, as, F. Dick (1968) suggests, showing how nature is able to do the impossible. It was not until 1856 that John Ruskin<sup>11</sup> coined the literary term “pathetic fallacy”<sup>12</sup> for the attribution of human conduct within nature, in order to highlight the strong feelings that were habitual among poets including William Blake,<sup>13</sup> Keats or Shelley. Nonetheless, it is important to bear in mind that despite the fact that the term “pathetic fallacy” emerged during the Victorian period, the concept that man sees in nature his emotions was introduced by Ancient Greeks.

The pathetic fallacy has not been conceived in the same way throughout history. Homer, Theocritus and Virgil took advantage of it and were precursors of this literary

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<sup>10</sup> Ernest Dutoit, *Le Theme de l'adynaton dans la poesie antique* (Paris, 1936), p. ix, defines *adynaton* as follows: "le poete, pour représenter un fait ou une action comme impossibles, absurdes ou invraisemblables, les met en rapport avec une ou plusieurs impossibilités naturelles." From, Galen O. Rowe "The Adynaton as a Stylistic Device", *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol. 86, No. 4, October 1965: 387-396.

<sup>11</sup> John Ruskin (1819-1900), a leading English art critic of the Victorian Era who coined the term “pathetic fallacy” in *Modern Painters* (1843-60).

<sup>12</sup> “Pathetic fallacy is the poetic practice of attributing human emotion or responses to nature, inanimate objects, or animals. The practice is a form of personification that is as old as poetry, in which it has always been common to find smiling or dancing flowers, angry or cruel winds, brooding mountains, moping owls, or happy larks”, from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

<sup>13</sup> William Blake (1757–1827) an English poet and artist.

device. However, they had different conceptions of how man attributes his emotions in nature. Therefore, so as to understand how this concept emerges, it could be worth to take into account the historical background of its emergence. Before the Ancient Greek Era, Greeks in the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC lived in a period known as the Early Helladic Era. During this age, the first states with an urban organization and writing system appeared. Nonetheless, once the Mycenaean civilization collapsed, Greece was devoid of political organization, economy and literature, this is how the Dark Age started. Traditionally, the Dark Age was a period which was considered to be the lapse in which poverty, famine, depopulation and a lack of literature were widespread. Since everything was based on oral tradition, no literary work has endured. Besides, it was, as well, a period of transition between the Mycenaean Greece and the Ancient Greece. However, it is this last period, between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, that we should pay more attention to, since it was when the first signs of literary manifestations can be noticed, and when the epic genre emerged. The epic genre has an oral origin, but later on it started to be written, even though only a small number of poems remain. In Antiquity, in order for an epic poem to be written down, it had to have enough fame and popular acclaim. Only two epic literary works in Western culture<sup>14</sup> have made it into our days, and they are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, composed<sup>15</sup> by Homer.<sup>16</sup> It is precisely in the former where we find the first recorded attitudes of man toward nature. In the *Iliad*, more than in the *Odyssey*, nature has an important role in the poem: “To Homer, the world of external nature [...] serves as the background before which his

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<sup>14</sup> There are other epic manifestations: On the one hand, in the Middle East tradition such the *Guilgamesh* (8<sup>th</sup> century BC) written in Sumerian. On the other hand, in the Oriental tradition, the *Mahabharata* (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC) written in Sanskrit.

<sup>15</sup> The term used is “compose” since in Antiquity epic poems were conceived to be sung.

<sup>16</sup> It is not clear whether Homer composed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, this doubt is known as the “Homeric Question”. The first people who questioned the identity of Homer were the Alexandrian editors in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Many centuries later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Wolf came back with the Homeric doubts and the last study, and might be, the most reliable, was made by Parri in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

protagonists, men and gods, play their great roles” (Hartwell, 1922:181). Nature in the *Iliad* is presented as a threnody,<sup>17</sup> “when Achilles’ lament<sup>18</sup> for the dead Patroclus<sup>19</sup> reaches the depths of the sea, where the Nereids<sup>20</sup> hear it and rise the threnos to a literally “wave-breaking” (F.Dick, 1968:28). A further instance of nature’s threnody is in this final scene, when the suffering of mother and son becomes a universal lamentation. It is the moment when Thetis<sup>21</sup> predicts the imminent death of her son. Her lament merges with nature and is heard by Nereids, again, who react in despair. In this first manifestation of man and nature, it is clear that to Homer nature acts as a kind of personification of characters’ feelings in the poem since “nature must react [...] but nature herself in the form of Thetis and her sister Nereids. Nature orchestrates Achilles’ sorrow by a spontaneous threnody” (F. Dick, 1968: 28).

With the advance in civilization, men started to lose their immediate contact with nature. It coincided with the beginning of the free Greek states and their incorporation into a huge empire. Men were no longer the centre of the imaginative universe, since the Greek world of the Alexandrian age had become a materialistic society. However, not all men were satisfied with that sort of society, like Theocritus, who revived the interest in man and nature (Hartwell, 1922). Theocritus develops an exquisite sense for scenery, and his delicateness describing pictures is intimately related to a literary genre, of which actually he was the precursor, known as Pastoral. Mediterranean as he was, he knew by heart the beauty and the climate of his land<sup>22</sup> which would be captured in his poems, “long ranges of hills, barren and shadeless

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<sup>17</sup> *Threnos* or *threnody* (from Greek) is a lyrical lament over the dead.

<sup>18</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, Chapter XVIII.

<sup>19</sup> Patroclus was Achilles’ brother-in-arms.

<sup>20</sup> In Greek mythology, they are sea nymphs. They are the fifty daughters of Nereus and Doris and they usually go with Poseidon.

<sup>21</sup> In Greek mythology, she is a sea nymph and also the goodness of water. Thetis’s husband is the hero Peleus and their son is Achilles.

<sup>22</sup> Theocritus born in Syracuse (3<sup>rd</sup> century BC).

where the hot sun beats upon their summits [...] a single pine or olive; flowers in profusion carpeting the sword- roses under the rocks [...] and in the distance the intense blue of the summer” (Hartwell, 1922: 183). Theocritus’ best known literary work are the thirty poems called *Idylls* in which he exalts love, nature’s simplicity, rural traditions. Its main characters are shepherds who abandon their tasks in order to pursue beautiful girls. Pastoral poems are set in beautiful rural landscapes, the so-called *locus amoenus*<sup>23</sup> remote from the affairs of the city. In addition, Theocritus’ power of creation and the exquisiteness of his feeling for nature are revealed through seasons and, as a whole, from all of these features emerged the Pastoral.

The pathetic fallacy in Theocritus’ poetry is usually embedded in his characters, like Dafnis, the idealized pastoral figure. Therefore, the author attributes the characters own moods to natural events, “for him the jackals, him the wolves did lament; for him did even the lion of the thicket roar, when he was dead... Many the bulls, and many the heifers and the young steers which bellowed their lament”(Hartwell, 1922: 186). Furthermore, nature has the power to change the habitual order of things, as when Dafnis dies:

Now let brambles bring forth, now let thorns bear, violets, and the fair narcissus bloom on the boughs of the juniper. Let all things become their opposites, let the pine tree bring forth pears, since Daphnis is dead, and let the stag bring the hounds to bay, and let brown owls from the mountains sing against nightingales.(Hartwell, 1922:187)

Nature would either share kind feelings, or her mood would depend on man’s “nature has beauty only in her smiling moods [...] storm and tempest would bring only discomfort or dread” (Hartwell, 1922:189).

Having dealt with the first manifestations of man and nature in Greece, it is clear that there are slight differences between how Homer and Theocritus depict the world. For instance, Homer’s nature is very much in line with the sea and sky and the mood of

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<sup>23</sup> *Locus Amoenus* is a charming, pleasant place where you feel safety and comfort.

the characters are not reflected in storms or sunny days. And yet, Theocritus' nature gained new elements such as the reaction of the weather, "he has gained a landscape in the modern sense" (Hartwell, 1922). Thus, Theocritus' nature would act as a metaphor for the human expression.

No poet before him-and few after-had such a feeling for trees, for the added loveliness to an already charming scene of a bit of woodland, a grove, or even a single tree, and nothing in his work is more memorable than his use of trees as setting the key of his landscapes. (Hartwell, 1922:190)

Theocritus would be the last Greek poet of the line of classical Greek authors who had this exquisite taste in describing landscape. Furthermore, Theocritus' *Idylls* would become the foundational poems of the Western pastoral tradition and, they would become the principal model for the illustrious Roman poet, Virgil.

Leaving behind the Greek conception toward nature, during the Augustan Era from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC to the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> AD another concept of man and nature emerged. After several civil wars, Augustus initiated an era of peace and hope known as *Pax Augustea* and established a new political system called the Empire. One of the Augustus' main aims was to restore the traditional values, the *Mos Maiorum*, which were based on the importance of religion: being pious and having respect towards your parents, your country and gods. Therefore, Augustus decided to promote this political platform through literature and, counting on the help of Maecenas,<sup>24</sup> he started to finance distinguished poets such as Virgil or Horace so as to ensure that they included his ideals in their literary works.

Virgil, apart from being one of Augustus' favourite poets, would be remembered for his great Roman epic entitled the *Aeneid*. In this epic poem, as Homer did in the *Iliad*, Virgil shows how he understands the potential of nature. The *Aeneid*

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<sup>24</sup> A friend, an ally and political advisor to Augustus, he is well remembered for being an important patron of the Augustan poets including Horace and Virgil.

begins with a ferocious storm that it is intimately related to Juno's opposition to Aeneas' destiny:

The pulsating breath of tragedy and the atmosphere of wild pathos embody with the greatest compression the nature of the emotion which permeates the whole poem. Only the image of the strongest, wildest movement in Nature-which had, of course, been transmitted through Homer, where it was first raised to the level of art-seemed to Virgil sufficiently grave and imposing for the opening of his Roman epic. (F. Dick, 1968: 29)

However, although Virgil shows the pathetic fallacy in the *Aeneid*,<sup>25</sup> the example par excellence of his treatment of nature is found in his previous literary work, the *Eclogues*. The *Eclogues*<sup>26</sup> closely reflect Theocritus' *Idylls*, they are the Latin version, in which not only does Virgil introduce herdsmen in a bucolic landscape performing songs, but also there is political clamour due to the events that took place between 44-38 BC.<sup>27</sup> From the very beginning of the first poem, we know in advance that there would be an intimate bond between man and nature, since the last line ends with "how woodlands resound".<sup>28</sup> Unlike his other predecessors, Virgil not only attributes human feelings to natural objects and has all the variations that characterize human behaviour, but also personifies nature as an omnipresent figure by the use of the word *umbra*, which means, shade. "Virgil's ambivalent use of *umbra* which unifies the poem is completely non-Theocritean; Theocritus rarely uses the word for shade or shadow, and when he does, it always means nothing more than what it actually is. But more important, the Virgilian *umbra* mirrors a human emotion" (F. Dick, 1986).

There are illustrative examples in the *Eclogues* that would be useful to us so as to understand the concept of *umbra*. For instance, there is a complete coincidence

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<sup>25</sup> The epic poem was written between 29 and 19 BC.

<sup>26</sup> Written between 41 -39 BC.

<sup>27</sup> The *Eclogues* were written before the period of peace. During 44-38 BC several wars took place because of the murder of Julius Caesar in 44 BC. Virgil supports and extols Augustus figure in *Eclogue IV*.

<sup>28</sup> «Tu, Tityre, lentus in umbra formosam resonare doces Amaryllida silvas» Virgil, *Eclogues I*, 4-5.

between one headsman's emotions and the natural setting when the shepherd, called Corydon, is reflected in the heat of the summer day which consumes the cattle and the lizards.<sup>29</sup> To Virgil the pathetic fallacy, unlike Theocritus, is not just a metaphor of the human emotions, but tries to show the connections between man and nature, "[to Virgil] the pathetic fallacy is a means of showing a connection between man and the nonhuman force that produced and understands him" (F. Dick, 1968: 44).

There is no doubt that there are three sorts of pathetic fallacy embedded by three men in different periods in Antiquity. Despite the fact that this literary device emerged many centuries ago, there is nothing novel to us in these kinds of pathetic fallacy: "we are in its increasingly pathetic and fallacious use by the later Romanticism" (Hartwell, 1922: 190). Hence, the classics are the forerunners of the exquisite descriptions and the attitude of man toward nature.

The novel to be analysed, *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is full of pathetic fallacies. The title itself expresses the sublime through a fallacy. "Wuthering Heights" stands for tumultuous and aggressive weather, which mirrors the mood of the characters. Throughout the novel there are lots of instances in which the mood of nature is portrayed by the events in the narrative and the nature of its characters.

It should be also noted how the sublime was conceived in Antiquity. Nowadays the sublime is understood as the breathtaking feeling towards an object or vast landscape. Yet, it is important to observe that the sublime is not the beautiful of the landscape, for the beautiful is the ordered and harmonious world whereas the sublime is the sensation of fear, like contemplating the ocean. However, this conception of the sublime has not been the same throughout history. Etymologically speaking, sublime comes from the Latin word *sublimis*, which literary means "elevated", the action to

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<sup>29</sup> «Ille ubi me contra uidet: "Ocius" inquit huc ades, o Meliboe; caper tibi saluos et haedi, et, si quid cessare potes, requiesce sub umbra» Virgil, *Eclogues* VII, 8-9.

raise, to be elevated into something higher in a metaphorical way. The only treatise that has survived to our days about the sublime in Antiquity is entitled *On the Sublime*<sup>30</sup> written by an unknown author, Longinus. In Antiquity the sublime concerned a sort of speech:

But in the Greek text *Hypsous*<sup>31</sup> is a stylistic category, and concerns a type of speech which has such 'irresistible' strength that induces astonishment [...] Longinus links this state of elevated transport to the inspired author, and to texts that are themselves 'frenzied' with the 'strong inspired' impact transmitted directly to the audience from the animated author and text. (Battersby, 2007:4)

The idea of the sublime in Antiquity is expressed through language and its rhetorical devices such as the hyperbole or the asyndeton. In other words, the sublime in Antiquity is the effect achieved through rhetorical devices. In addition, it has a perfect structure and an excellence in language so as to convince and persuade the audience and to elevate them. The classical sublime had its golden era in English criticism in the late seventeenth and eighteenth century literature. They did not only take advantage of the rhetorical devices, but also started to describe desolated landscapes that produced some kind of sensations to the reader. Therefore, the Romantic sublime is the practical consequence of the classic one, since it not only could be expressed through language, but also it could be expressed with the overpowering aspects of the landscape.

## **Chapter II Nature and the Sublime in *Wuthering Heights***

### **II.1 Nature and Emily Brontë**

*Nature is the silent witness*

To begin with, it could be worth mentioning some aspects of Emily Brontë's life, since the scenic background in *Wuthering Heights* is closed to her own landscape. Her roots to her land were such strong that Hommans (1978) suggests that Brontë

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<sup>30</sup> This treatise was written in Greek. The original title is *Peri Hypsous* and literary means "about elevation.

<sup>31</sup> Elevation.



presents us a novel which makes the reader feel a sensation of having experienced a realistic portrayal of the Yorkshire landscape.

Of the three sisters, it was Emily who showed the sensibility of a poet, her poetic activity occupied her from adolescence onward, and *Wuthering Heights* was the product of her final years. Emily developed her imagination around the influence of her natural setting as well as the close observation of birds, flowers, weather and animals. Unlike her elder sister, Emily did not show much interest in describing a sophisticated society (Duthie, 1986). Emily made a distinction between her poems: “Gondal” and “Non-Gondal works”. The former is a collection of poems in an imaginary world developed together with her sisters, Charlotte and Anne, in which love and war are the ruling passions. The action takes place in an island of the North Pacific and it describes Romantic-Era characters. The latter, are poems based on Emily’s direct experience with nature, they show a sense of captivation and liberty which Emily valued the most. Besides, the poems lack Romantic or Gothic features (medieval castles, dungeons...), but they present the mingling of nature and sentiment. The point that they have in common is that both have a distant setting, in a land of moor and mountain, with lakes and torrents which clearly evokes to Emily’s own native landscape.

It is said that the novel is basically a mirror of her poems, but with a more tragic vision, and this is clearly revealed in the treatment of nature. Nonetheless, Emily must have read many books so as to feel inspired to write her delightful poems and her captivated novel. Nowadays, on *Brontë Parsonage Museum*,<sup>32</sup> there is a virtual library which holds the largest collection of books, articles and original documents relating to the Brontë family. In this website is easy to access to a download index of books owned by the Brontë family. This index leads us to trace the literary influences on Emily

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<sup>32</sup> *Brontë Parsonage Museum*, <https://www.bronte.org.uk/museum-and-library/library>

Brontë, since as Duthie (1986) suggests, Emily, like all artists borrowed material from more than one source. There is no doubt that Sir Walter Scott,<sup>33</sup> William Shakespeare and the Bible are the main source of Brontë's inspiration. However, there are other classical sources in the Brontë's library: there is a copy of Homer's *Iliad*, a copy of the poems of the elegiac poet Horace, some fragments of Virgil's *Aeneid* and a copy of *A Classical Dictionary* written by John Lemprière (1788) which is the reference *book in mythology* and classical history. Emily Brontë took advantage of these classical sources thus, there is no doubt that she has been influenced by the delicate treatment of nature of classics. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind the fact that Brontë read Shakespeare, since his works are full of allusions to classics or even, most of his tragedies, are based on iconic figures of the classical world such as *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar* or *Titus Andronicus*.

As it happens with the classic titles that give the reader an idea of the content, such as *Idylls*, which literary means a short poem which describes the rustic life, or with *Eclogues* which literary translated means "pastoral", with *Wuthering Heights* the same happens. The reader knows beforehand that the weather and nature will play an important role throughout the novel. "Wuthering Heights" suggests wind and it is intimately related to the spirit of the novel. Storm and wind are the two elements which define the novel; they show the "atmospheric tumult" of the situation of Heights.

## **II.2 Passages**

I will now analyse two passages from the novel *Wuthering Heights* in order to reflect the classical influence in the treatment of nature. Nature in *Wuthering Heights* could be also considered as another character in the novel, since it clearly reflects the

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<sup>33</sup> Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832) a Scottish novelist and poet.

attitude of the characters in the drama. The first passage to be analysed would present two idealized descriptions of lying on the moors in a hot July day:

He said the pleasantest manner of spending a hot July day was lying from morning till evening on a bank of heath in the middle of the moors, with the bees humming dreamily about among the bloom, and the larks singing high up over head, and the blue sky, and bright sun shining steadily and cloudlessly. 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 throates, and blackbirds, and linnets, and cuckoos pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance [...]. (Brontë, 1995:248)

This passage comes from chapter X<sup>34</sup> when Nelly discovers that Cathy has been spending his evenings visiting Wuthering Heights and, Cathy, gives Nelly an account of her visits. Linton and Cathy grew very fond of each other, despite their social differences. Cathy belongs to the refined and civilized world whereas Linton, like his father, belongs to the “uncivilized” world. Each has different conceptions of a perfect July day, which would reveal their personalities. At first sight, their descriptions evoke to a bucolic classic scenery that makes the reader feel as he was surrounded by the shady trees in this harmonious atmosphere, together with the company of land animals. Firstly, to Linton his perfect July day is quite calm and mere for it could be related to his personality. Linton is presented as a constantly ill, and despised by his father, facts that made him to act in a very cautious way, so Linton is content with peace. It is important to observe the word Heaven, as to Linton his perfect July day would be comparable with Heaven, an idea which could be related to his life, since he is living a Hell in Wuthering Heights. Conversely, Cathy's idea of how to spend a hot afternoon is seen as a juxtaposition of Linton's calm and peaceful idea. To her, a perfect day is not

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<sup>34</sup> Chapter IX, Volume II.

synonym of lying all day long, but hers include movement “rocking in a rustling green tree”. To Cathy as well as her mother and also, as well as Emily Brontë, the moors are present in her ideal day. The presence of the moors could be understood as Cathy’s sense of exile. Therefore, the moors stand for her spiritual barrier in two ways in her life. On the one hand, the moors are seen as the distance between herself and Linton. On the other hand, the moors are conceived such as her own personal conflict to restrain her headstrong, sometimes arrogant and impulsive character. In addition, another key word of her description is wind. It seems as if wind was the second nature for women (as well for the author) in the novel. Wind is synonym of life and such is its importance that is the first word in the title. Note that Cathy does not mention that her perfect day should include a shiny sun or rain, but wind:

The power of the north wind blowing across the high ground immediately behind the house is shown by “the excessive slant” [...] For Emily, even more than for her sisters, this air was both literally and metaphorically the breath of life. In the delirium at Grange, Catherine feels that her chance of life depends on the window opened [...] “Do let me feel it- it comes straight down the moors . Do let me have one breath”. (Duthie, 1986: 240)

Wind would be conceived as an omnipresent figure that would be present throughout the novel. Brontë’s wind could be compared to Virgil’s *umbra*, owing to the fact that both establish the connection between man and nature through intangible figures. The last aspect of Cathy’s description is music, which is also relevant in Antiquity. The pastoral genre, music has an essential role, since shepherds explain their love affairs by singing. Also, the presence of animals is common in the classical poetry as they react according to the mood of characters. In this passage birds do not sing in a conventional manner, but are “pouring out music”, as a means to reveal Cathy’s bliss. To conclude this passage, it is clear that cousins’ descriptions are as idealized as the classical ones. The presence of animals and music, the importance of fine weather and the vital role of

the nature make the reader think whether this fragment comes from *Wuthering Heights* or from any *Eclogue*.

The second passage to analyse is a dialogue that would express the perception of the sublime:

The abrupt descent of Penistone Craggs particularly attracted her notice, especially when the setting sun shone on it, and the topmost Heights; and the whole extent of landscape besides lay in shadow.

I explained that they were bare masses of stone, with hardly enough earth in their clefts to nourish a stunted tree.

‘And why they are bright so long after it is evening here?’ she pursued.

‘Because they are great deal higher up than we are’, replied I; ‘you could not climb them, they are too high and steep. In winter the frost is always there before it comes to us; and, deep, into summer, I have found snow under that black hollow on the northeast side!’

‘Oh you have been on them!’ she cried, gleefully. ‘Then I can go, too, when I am a woman. Has papa been, Ellen?’

‘Papa would tell you, Miss,’ I answered, hastily, ‘that they are not worth the trouble of visiting. The moors, where you ramble with him, are much nicer; and Thrushcross park is the finest place in the world’. (Brontë, 1995:190)

This dialogue comes from chapter IV<sup>35</sup>. Here, Cathy is a teenager who wants to explore the landscape that surrounds her. However, Mr Edgar Linton (her father), does not allow her off the grounds of Thrushcross Grange. But, when her father is away in London, Cathy, in Nelly’s care, tries to obtain more information from Nelly about the Penistone Craggs. It is common knowledge that the sublime invokes feelings of danger and terror, for the character is removed from his comfort zone. It is exactly what happens in this fragment, since Nelly has an over-protective attitude towards Cathy. Nelly does not want Cathy to follow the road to the outer world and she stresses the fact that travelling the moors would be a threat. Another characteristic of the sublime is the scenery of a desolate landscape. Nelly tells Cathy the abruptness of Penistone Craggs and, she also explains how shadowy is the landscape to Cathy, in order to make her realise that Penistone Craggs is not a safe place. The nursemaid insists on the fact that the moors “are much nicer” as well as safe. She also highlights that Thrushcross garden is “the

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<sup>35</sup> Chapter IV, Volume II.

finest” place in the world. Nelly by comparing Penistone Craggs and Thrushcross park is making clear the contraposition between the sublime and beautiful. On the one hand, Penistone Craggs stands for the sublime, with its rock dangerous mass and wind which produce a terrifying sense mixed with pleasure. Conversely, Thrushcross park represents beauty with a large and beautiful garden and with the fresh-cut grass and sweet-scented flowers. In a sense, this passage, and the whole novel, is considered to be a constant tension between the sublime and beautiful, since the former is illustrated by Wuthering Heights and Penistone Craggs and the latter by Thrushcross park.

In this passage not only does appear Romantic sublime, but also the sublime understood in Antiquity. Even though it is true that an overwhelming pleasure as well as a sense of terror generated by the landscape are felt by Nelly and Cathy, they through their dialogue and speech, are also able to elevate the reader. The key word in this fragment is “high” which appears in two occasions in the same sentence through a polyptoton.<sup>36</sup> The use of rhetorical devices, such as the polyptoton or the hyperbole (when Nelly assures that the best place in the world is Thrushcross park) add cogency and beauty to the text and make the reader attract his attention. Besides, etymologically speaking, hyperbole comes from Greek *ὑπέρ* and it literary means “on the top”. Therefore, the use of hyperboles should be not a surprising fact, since the desired effect is to elevate the readership.

To conclude this passage, I would argue that Brontë is able to create the sublime. Not only does she create the sublime from a Romantic perspective, but also the sublime understood in Antiquity, through language and rhetorical devices.

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<sup>36</sup> Polyptoton is a stylistic scheme in which words from the same root are repeated in a different way, such as “high” – “higher”.

## Conclusion

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* has always been an interesting novel of study because of its endless variety of themes. The novel contains major themes such as love, revenge, betrayal, suffering and the ones that I have looked at in this project: nature and the sublime. Even though the novel was published in the Victorian Era, it is considered to be Gothic, mostly in terms of landscape. The usual setting of a Gothic novel has been described as a remote place isolated from the city. Indeed, *Wuthering Heights* is depicted as an isolated place which is surrounded by a gloomy atmosphere. Nonetheless, there are certain aspects of the landscape and nature which have not been dealt in detail, but which are of considerable importance, such as the classical influence in the novel.

This project has attempted to claim which are the main classical features that could be found in the novel. To do so, a historical background to nature and the sublime understood in Antiquity has been provided. Furthermore, I have also mention Emily Brontë's personal treatment of nature and her literary influences, since it is almost impossible to understand *Wuthering Heights* without the author's background.

By analysing the passages, I can corroborate that the classical influence in *Wuthering Heights* is more than expected. The descriptions are detailed and exquisite, and the bond between man and nature is as much as important as in Antiquity. There is no doubt that the dramatic natural surroundings have seeped into the mood of characters.

In addition, the sublime is an essential aspect in Antiquity and also, in *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë is able to illustrate the sublime understood in Antiquity, as well as the sublime understood in the Romantic period, by making the reader feel terror and pleasure.

I would like to finish by claiming that classical influence is patent in all arts, and literature is not an exception. The Classics would always be the reference model and an endless source of inspiration. Even in books that one could have ever imagined, like *Wuthering Heights*, there is a strong classical influence. Classics are called “classics” for many reasons, but one of the most important is that it does not matter how many years or centuries have been passed, for the classic model would be always valid, “the image of Greece and of the Greek achievement was constantly refined, revised, refuted or reinterpreted through a complex and continuous process of redefinition”. (Webb, 1993: 148-150)



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