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The Role of Nature in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through an Ecocritical Perspective

Prova finale di:

Laura Teymouri

Relatrice:

Giovanna Buonanno

Correlatrice:

Gioia Angeletti

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the complex representation of Nature in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through an ecocritical lens, situating both novels within the intersecting contexts of Romanticism and Gothic literature. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Ecocriticism, Ecogothic, Ecophobia, and Ecosublime, the study interrogates how natural landscapes operate as active, affective forces that shape narratives and the evolution of character's feeling and behaviour, rather than serving merely as passive backdrops.

Following an overview of the literary depiction of Nature through ecophilic and ecophobic perspectives, the analysis focuses on the role that Nature plays in the two novels. In *Wuthering Heights*, the wild, untamed moors function as extensions of the characters' emotional and psychological states, exemplifying a symbiotic and sometimes destructive relationship between humans and the natural world. Conversely, *Frankenstein* presents Nature as simultaneously restorative and threatening, articulating anxieties over human ambition and the ethical boundaries of scientific intervention.

By analysing these two canonical works, the dissertation demonstrates that both novels construct Nature as a site of moral, psychological, and ecological complexity, wherein awe, terror, and interconnection coexist, challenging anthropocentric worldviews. This research contributes to ecocritical scholarship by elucidating how Romantic and Gothic literary traditions articulate enduring tensions between human subjectivity and the natural environment, providing a nuanced framework for understanding the ecological imagination in early nineteenth-century literature.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Ecogothic, Ecophobia, Ecophilia, Nature

RIASSUNTO

Questa tesi esamina, da una prospettiva ecocritica, la complessa rappresentazione della Natura in *Wuthering Heights* di Emily Brontë e *Frankenstein* di Mary Shelley, collocando entrambi i romanzi all'interno del Romanticismo e della letteratura gotica. Riferendosi alle principali teorie sviluppate dell'Ecocritica—in particolare nelle categorie dell'Ecogotico, dell'Ecofobia e dell'Ecosublime—lo studio analizza come i paesaggi naturali agiscano non come semplici sfondi della narrazione, ma come forze attive, cariche di valenza emotiva, capaci di plasmare lo sviluppo narrativo e l'evoluzione psicologica dei personaggi.

Dopo una panoramica delle modalità con cui la Natura è stata rappresentata in letteratura attraverso prospettive ecofiliche ed ecofobiche, l'analisi si concentra sul ruolo specifico che essa assume nei due romanzi. In *Wuthering Heights*, le brughiere selvagge e incontaminate si configurano come proiezioni degli stati emotivi e psicologici dei personaggi, dando vita a una relazione simbiotica intensa e talvolta distruttiva tra umani e ambiente. In *Frankenstein,* invece, la Natura appare al contempo rigeneratrice e minacciosa, riflettendo le tensioni legate all'ambizione umana e ai limiti etici della conoscenza scientifica.

Attraverso l'analisi di queste due opere canoniche, la tesi dimostra come entrambe costruiscano la Natura quale spazio di complessità morale, psicologica ed ecologica, in cui meraviglia e terrore convivono, mettendo in discussione prospettive antropocentriche consolidate. Questa ricerca contribuisce così agli studi ecocritici evidenziando come le tradizioni romantica e gotica elaborino tensioni profonde e persistenti tra soggettività umana e ambiente naturale, offrendo una chiave di lettura articolata dell'immaginario ecologico nella letteratura dei primi dell'Ottocento.

Parole chiave: Ecocritica, Ecogotico, Ecofobia, Ecofilia, Natura

RESUME

Ce mémoire examine la représentation complexe de la Nature dans *Wuthering Heights* d'Emily Brontë et *Frankenstein* de Mary Shelley à travers une perspective écocritique, en situant les deux romans dans les contextes entrecroisés du Romantisme et de la littérature gothique. S'appuyant sur les cadres théoriques de l'écocritique, de l'écogothique, de l'écophobie et de l'éco-sublime, l'étude analyse la manière dont les paysages naturels fonctionnent comme des forces actives et affectives qui façonnent les récits ainsi que l'évolution des émotions et des comportements des personnages, plutôt que de servir de simples décors passifs.

Après un aperçu de la représentation littéraire de la Nature à travers des perspectives écophiles et écophobes, l'analyse se concentre sur le rôle que la Nature joue dans les deux romans. Dans *Wuthering Heights*, les landes sauvages et indomptées agissent comme des extensions des états émotionnels et psychologiques des personnages, illustrant une relation symbiotique et parfois destructrice entre l'humain et le monde naturel. À l'inverse, *Frankenstein* présente la Nature comme à la fois réparatrice et menaçante, exprimant des inquiétudes liées à l'ambition humaine et aux limites éthiques de l'intervention scientifique.

En analysant ces deux œuvres canoniques, le mémoire montre que les deux romans construisent la Nature comme un espace de complexité morale, psychologique et écologique, où coexistent émerveillement, terreur et interconnexion, remettant en question les visions anthropocentriques. Cette recherche contribue aux études écocritiques en mettant en lumière la manière dont les traditions littéraires romantique et gothique expriment des tensions durables entre la subjectivité humaine et l'environnement naturel, offrant ainsi un cadre nuancé pour comprendre l'imaginaire écologique dans la littérature du début du XIXe siècle.

Mots-clés : Ecocritique, Ecogotique, Ecophobie, Ecophilie, Nature

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INTRODUCTION

The relationship between humanity and the natural world has constantly occupied a central position in literary discourse, reflecting evolving cultural, philosophical, and scientific understandings of the environment. Across literary history, Nature has never functioned as a mere backdrop to human action; rather, it has acted as a dynamic and multifaceted force that shapes narrative structures, influences character development, and encodes broader ideological concerns. From the harmonious and idealized landscapes of pastoral tradition to the unsettling and destabilizing environments of Gothic fiction, literary representations of Nature reveal a continuous negotiation between attraction and fear, reverence and domination. This dissertation investigates the role of Nature in the development of the plot and its influence on characters in two seminal nineteenth-century novels, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, situating these works within an ecocritical framework that foregrounds the tension between ecophilic and ecophobic responses to the natural world.

In recent decades, Ecocriticism has emerged as a crucial field within literary studies, offering new ways of understanding the complex interconnections between human and nonhuman systems. By challenging anthropocentric assumptions, Ecocriticism emphasizes that human identity, culture, and experience are deeply embedded within ecological networks. Within this framework, the concepts of Ecophilia and Ecophobia provide a particularly productive lens for examining literary texts. Ecophilia encapsulates a sense of affinity, admiration, and ethical engagement with Nature, often associated with Romantic ideals of harmony, beauty, and spiritual renewal. In contrast, Ecophobia refers to fear, aversion, and the desire to control or dominate the natural world, frequently emerging in representations of hostile, unpredictable, or threatening environments. Rather than existing as mutually exclusive categories, these responses often coexist within the same text, revealing the ambivalence that characterizes human attitudes toward Nature. This dissertation argues that such ambivalence is central to understanding how Nature operates not only as a thematic concern but as a driving force within narrative and character formation.

The first chapter establishes the theoretical and historical foundation for this study by tracing the evolution of Nature's role in literature through an ecocritical perspective. It begins with the Romantic tradition to shift to pastoral, which constructs Nature as a harmonious and idealized space, sharply opposed to the corruption of urban life. This idealization is subsequently complicated by the emergence of wilderness writing, which redefines Nature as vast, untamed, and often threatening—particularly within the context of national identity and exploration. Romanticism further transforms these representations by elevating Nature into a

source of sublime experience, capable of inspiring both awe and terror while offering moments of transcendence and self-discovery. However, this engagement remains largely anthropocentric, as Nature is interpreted through human emotion and perception. The chapter then examines the Gothic's intervention, which intensifies the darker aspects of the natural world, transforming landscapes into sites of instability, fear, and psychological disturbance. Finally, it considers more recent developments within ecocritical thought, including the concepts of the Ecosublime and Ecophobia, as well as the emergence of the Ecogothic, which foregrounds Nature's autonomy and challenges the illusion of human mastery. Through this trajectory, the chapter demonstrates how literary representations of Nature increasingly reflect a growing awareness of ecological limits and human vulnerability.

Building on this theoretical framework, the second chapter offers a detailed analysis of *Wuthering Heights*, focusing on the central role of the natural environment—particularly the moors—in shaping both plot and character. In Brontë's novel, Nature is not a passive setting but an active and generative force that permeates every aspect of the narrative. The moors function as a liminal space where conventional social boundaries dissolve, allowing for the expression of intense emotions and transgressive desires. They mirror and amplify the turbulent relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, while also exerting their own influence over the characters' actions and fates. The stark contrast between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange further underscores the tension between untamed Nature and cultivated culture, suggesting that attempts to impose order on the natural world are ultimately unstable and incomplete. Moreover, the novel's use of weather, landscape, and Gothic atmosphere reinforces the idea of Nature as a living, almost sentient presence that shapes psychological states and narrative progression. Through this analysis, the chapter demonstrates how Brontë constructs a world in which human identity is inseparable from the environment, and where Nature actively participates in the unfolding of the plot.

The third chapter turns to *Frankenstein*, examining how Mary Shelley employs natural settings to explore the complex interplay between scientific ambition, moral responsibility, and ecological limits. In this novel, Nature occupies an ambivalent position: it is at once a source of beauty, solace, and inspiration, and a powerful, indifferent force that exposes human vulnerability. The sublime landscapes that punctuate the narrative—from the Alps to the Arctic—provide moments of temporary relief for Victor Frankenstein while simultaneously reflecting his inner turmoil and moral disintegration. Similarly, the Creature's relationship with Nature highlights both its nurturing and its insufficiently redemptive qualities, as natural beauty cannot ultimately compensate for social rejection and isolation. As the narrative progresses,

Nature becomes increasingly hostile and unforgiving, culminating in the desolate Arctic setting, which represents the ultimate limit of human endurance and ambition. In this context, Nature assumes an almost judicial function, punishing transgression and reinforcing the consequences of attempting to exceed natural boundaries. The chapter thus demonstrates how Shelley's novel anticipates ecocritical concerns by portraying Nature as an active force that shapes the trajectory of the plot while revealing the dangers of human hubris.

Taken together, these analyses support the central argument of this dissertation: in *Wuthering Heights* and *Frankenstein*, Nature functions as a fundamental agent in both narrative development and character formation. Far from being a static or decorative element, it actively influences events, shapes emotional and psychological states, and challenges the boundaries between human and nonhuman realms. Both novels reflect and complicate Romantic conceptions of Nature, revealing its dual capacity to nurture and to destroy, to inspire and to unsettle. Through an ecocritical lens, they expose the deep entanglement between human and environmental systems, anticipating contemporary concerns about ecological crisis and sustainability.

Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to contribute to ongoing critical discussions about the role of literature in shaping environmental consciousness. By examining how Nature operates within these texts, it highlights the ways in which literary representations both reflect and influence cultural attitudes toward the natural world. In an era increasingly defined by environmental instability and the realities of the Anthropocene, such analyses acquire renewed urgency. Literature not only mirrors the changing relationship between humanity and Nature but also offers a space for critical reflection, ethical engagement, and imaginative reconfiguration. In this sense, the study of Nature in *Wuthering Heights* and *Frankenstein* is not merely an exploration of literary form, but a broader inquiry into the conditions of human existence within a fragile and interconnected ecological system.

CHAPTER 1

THE ROLE OF NATURE IN LITERATURE THROUGH AN ECOCRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1. Introduction

In recent decades, the relationship between literature and the natural world has moved from the margins of critical inquiry to the centre of theoretical debate. In an age marked by climate crisis, mass extinction, and ecological destabilization, literary studies have increasingly turned toward Ecocriticism as a mode of inquiry capable of interrogating the cultural assumptions and studying "the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996: XVIII). As Lawrence Buell argues, Ecocriticism "challenges this anthropocentric vision" and facing today's ecological problems involves "finding better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it" (Buell, 1995: 2). Emerging in the late twentieth century, Ecocriticism insists that nonhuman entities—rivers, forests, animals, climates—possess narrative, ethical, and material agency, thereby unsettling traditional human-centred frameworks of interpretation.

This chapter examines how foundational categories from eighteenth-century aesthetics onward have structured emotional responses to landscape and shaped literary depictions of Nature. Beginning with the Romantic period, the role of Nature in literature underwent a profound transformation, gradually evolving from a passive backdrop to an active force in a lot of literary works. As William Wordsworth famously asserts, "Nature never did betray the heart that loved her" (Wordsworth, 1798: lines 122-123), highlighting Romanticism's belief in Nature as a morally instructive and emotionally restorative presence. This shift reflected significant social and intellectual changes in European society during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in particular in reaction to industrialization, the rise of philosophical individualism, and an aesthetic movement that embraced emotion, mystery, and sublimity. Romantic writers frequently idealised Nature as a source of moral truth, emotional healing, and spiritual renewal, although it remained mediated through human perception.

Within this broader framework, pastoral landscapes and wilderness occupied distinct yet interconnected positions in the literary imagination, each shaping emotional and psychological responses to the natural world. As Raymond Williams explains, "Pastoral literature is the art of making a kind of imaginary Arcadia, a place apart from the pressures of civilization" (Williams, 1973: 43). Pastoral traditionally constructed Nature as harmonious, restorative, and morally instructive—a space of retreat that soothed anxiety and reaffirmed human belonging.

Wilderness, by contrast, confronted the subject with vastness, unpredictability, and estrangement, evoking awe, fear, humility, and existential reflection.

An ecopsychological perspective further deepens this inquiry by foregrounding the emotional and cognitive dimensions of human-environment relations. Theodore Roszak asserts that the human psyche cannot be separated from the natural world (See Roszak, 1992), a principle echoed by Joanna Macy, who emphasizes that reconnecting with the natural world restores a sense of our embeddedness in environment (See Macy, 1991). Literature, in this sense, functions as an eco-psychological practice: it stages encounters between self and landscape that revealed how identity, memory, and emotion are shaped through ecological entanglement. By dramatizing both alienation from and reconnection with the natural world, literary texts contribute to a reconfiguration of the self as embedded within, rather than separated from, its environmental context.

Emerging from Ecocriticism, the Ecogothic perspective has further complicated this relationship by presenting Nature as uncanny, threatening, and resistant to human control. In *Ecogothic*, Andrew Smith and William Hughes emphasize that Ecogothic narratives foreground nature as "a site of fear, anxiety, and resistance" (Smith & Hughes, 2013: 3). The transformation of the Gothic into what is now termed Ecogothic reflects changing cultural anxieties about humanity's place within ecological systems. While traditional Gothic literature often focused on fear, transgression, and the unknown through haunted castles, supernatural beings, and psychological terror, the Ecogothic has shifted attention toward the agency of the nonhuman world. Environmental forces have then moved from being seen as atmospheric background to central agents of horror and meaning, acting independently of human intention and exposing human vulnerability and ecological dependence.

Ecophobia stands for the fear or contempt toward the agency of the natural world. Through this lens, mountains, glaciers, forests, and Arctic ice cease to be merely sublime spectacles and instead became sites of existential threat, moral reckoning, and resistance to human mastery. Timothy Morton's concept of the Ecosublime adds to this discussion, suggesting that "the sublime is not just an aesthetic experience of terror and beauty; in the Anthropocene it has become a moral and ecological register" (Morton, 2013: 96).

By bringing together Ecocriticism, Ecopsychology, aesthetic theories, the Ecogothic, and Ecophobia, this chapter argues that literary landscapes function not as static settings but as dynamic forces and active participants in narrative that shape emption, identity, and ethical imagination. As Lawrence Buell contends, "Literature gives voice to the more-than-human world and reshapes our ethical imagination" (Buell, 2005: 31). From Enlightenment mechanism

to Romantic transcendence, from Gothic terror to ecocritical revaluation, representations of Nature reveal a persistent tension between domination and reciprocity, fear and wonder, separation and interdependence. Examining these shifts illuminates how literature participates in the ongoing redefinition of humanity's relationship with the more-than-human world.

1.2. The rise of Ecocriticism

Over the last decades, Ecocriticism has undergone significant refinement and expansion, achieving greater theoretical complexity and widening its scope of inquiry. What began primarily as a focus on representations of Nature in literature has evolved to encompass analyses of urban ecologies, ecofeminist perspectives, environmental justice, postcolonial environmental concerns, and the material entanglements between human and nonhuman systems. Traditional literary theory typically focused on how texts relate to society and social structures. In contrast, Ecocriticism expands the notion of 'the world' to include the entire "ecosphere" (Glotfelty, 1996: XIX).

The term *Ecocriticism* was coined in 1978 by William Rueckert in his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*. By this word, Rueckert means "the application of Ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty, 1996: XX)[1]. Similarly, Cheryll Glotfelty defines Ecocriticism to be simply "the study of the relationships between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996: XVIII), taking into consideration the fact that "all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it" (Glotfelty, 1996: XIX). For Greg Garrard, the widest possible definition of Ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term 'human' itself" (Garrard, 2004: 5).

Glotfelty identifies three kinds of Ecocriticism. The first one concentrates on representations of Nature in canonical texts, interrogating how literary works construct, idealize, marginalize, or distort the nonhuman world. The second kind of criticism recoveries and reassesses Nature writing in both neglected and overlooked authors, and establishes figures whose works foreground ecological consciousness. The third kind of criticism moves into theoretical terrain, developing conceptual frameworks that draw on movements such as deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, and Ecological Poetics. Michael J. McDowell adds a fourth kind of

[1] See Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism", *Iowa Review 9*, no.1, 1978, pp. 71-86

ecological literary criticism that is the "practical application of theoretical ecological concepts to specific literary works" (McDowell, 1996: 383), a strand that continues to generate new theoretical developments.

From an institutional perspective, Ecocriticism has been significantly shaped by the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), a professional organization founded in the United States. ASLE has played a central role in consolidating the field through its regular conferences and its peer-reviewed journal, which publishes scholarly literary analysis alongside creative work and contributions addressing environmental education and activism.

Ecocritical contributions can be divided in two major categories which focus on the human attitude toward Nature: Ecophilic theories, which considers Nature as benevolent and mothering, and Ecophobic ones, in which Nature becomes hostile and resists human control.

1.3. Ecophilia

1.3.1. Man in Nature: Nature as an interconnected system challenging anthropocentrism

During the Enlightenment period, Nature was often used to teach ethical principles or illustrate philosophical ideas: it was often analogous to human society, with its laws of order, balance, and hierarchy. Pope's famous line: *"Whatever is, is right"* (Pope, 1733-34, Epistle I, line 294) reflects the idea that Nature's structure mirrors a perfect rational plan, which humans should understand and respect. Enlightenment literature and philosophy were heavily influenced by scientific discoveries. Indeed, thinkers such as Isaac Newton and René Descartes viewed the natural world as a giant law-governed mechanism which emphasized rationality and predictability, effectively removing notions of mystery, vitality, or subjectivity from Nature. As Greg Garrard argues in *Ecocriticism* (2004), early literature frequently depicted the natural world as meaningful only insofar as it reflected, reinforced, or served human interests. This perspective embodies a strongly anthropocentric worldview**,** establishing a hierarchy in which humanity dominated and controlled a natural world that was perceived as passive and lacking independent agency. Nature could be easily found in literature, even if it was generally considered a merely scenic setting, a static backdrop to human-centred narratives and a frame for human events.

Romantic thinkers and writers rejected the reductionist view of the Enlightenment period, considering its reliance on reason as cold, impersonal. Nature was seen as a restorative alternative to industrial society, valued for its capacity to engage the imagination, evoke emotion, and enrich individual experience. According to Romantic poets, Nature was not an

inert backdrop; it was a living presence with the power to inspire, heal, and even instruct. In addition, poets and writers idealized rural life and unspoiled landscapes, portraying Nature as a source of purity, wisdom, and spiritual renewal and denouncing the loss of connection with the natural world caused by the Industrial Revolution. Nature was no longer just a physical environment but a reflection of personal emotions and a catalyst for inner transformations. Indeed, Raymond Williams suggests that this nostalgic idea of Nature as a place of solace and refuge emerged in direct response to the overcrowded, industrialized and polluted urban environments (See Raymond, 1973).

Clear examples of a new and more active role of Nature can be found in Romantic poets' works. To William Wordsworth, for instance, Nature was both a moral guide and a restorative agent, offering the peace disrupted because of the Industrial Revolution. In Wordsworth's poetry, the landscape was depicted not as a static backdrop but as a dynamic presence that shaped memory, contemplation, and spiritual growth, providing a remedy to the alienation of modern life. Nature became a means of achieving self-knowledge and spiritual renewal, a close companion in the poet's inner journey to foster emotional depth and moral development. In *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* (1798), Nature was portrayed as nurturing and benevolent, described by the author as "the anchor of [his] purest thoughts" (Wordsworth, 1798: line 108), celebrating the harmonious coexistence of humanity and the natural world while emphasising the resilience of wild landscape despite the intervention of human activity.

Other Romantic poets underlined the role of Nature in shaping human morality. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), Nature responded to human transgression punishing the mariner for killing the albatross, a symbolic act that disrupted the natural order. While the natural world initially appeared beautiful and harmonious, it turned hostile after the Mariner's crime, presenting Nature as a moral force and highlighting its supernatural and mystical dimensions. Percy Shelley believed in the greatness of Nature which could not be emulated by any form of human creation regardless their efforts, since its greatness was far beyond what humanity could reach. Nature, for Shelley, was a unifying entity that governed the universe, a benevolent and powerful presence. As he wrote in his poem *Mont Blanc* (1816), the mountains were immense and overwhelming, yet still framed through human reflection and imagination. Their vastness inspired and expanded human imagination, reflecting the Romantic faith in the mind's ability to interpret and engage with the sublime. Despite this shift from passive to active agency, the Romantic conception of Nature remained fundamentally anthropocentric: while it recognized humans as part of a larger ecological and spiritual system, cultivating an awareness of environmental interconnectedness, its significance was determined by its effects on human

consciousness. Even when endowed with formidable power, Nature was ultimately interpreted and understood through human perception.

While literary representations often placed humans at the centre of Nature, reducing landscapes to aesthetic or symbolic functions, Ecocriticism redefined Nature's role in literature and critiqued the arrogance of anthropocentrism. This attitude was sometimes described through the Ancient Greek concept of *hubris*, "this fatal flaw of overweening self-righteousness and wilful misuse of power" (Garrard, 2004: 179). Challenging this worldview, Lawrence Buell argued that ecocritical texts insisted on Nature being recognised as "a presence rather than a backdrop" (Buell, 1995: 7) emphasizing the agency of non-human Nature and presenting rivers, forests, animals, and weather as active participants in the narrative. In *Walden* (1854), Henry David Thoreau reflected deeply on the interdependence between humans and the natural world, positioning the environment as a site of moral and philosophical inquiry. For Thoreau, Nature was not merely a retreat from society but a space for ethical awakening and self-reform. Ethical living, therefore, required awareness of ecological context, simplicity, and sustainability.

1.3.2. Pastoral Nature in literature

From classical Greece to modern ecological writing, pastoral Nature in literature has remained a dynamic, historically resilient motif that negotiates the boundaries between imagination, emotion, and reality. Its enduring relevance lies in its capacity to explore human engagement with the natural world, offering imaginative, emotional, and philosophical insight. Within this tradition, Nature is represented both as an aesthetic ideal and as a moral space—a site of contemplation, critique, and ethical reflection. Pastoral landscapes present a realm of simplicity, beauty, and harmony, frequently contrasting urban life with the complexities, corruption, and anxieties of cities existence. As McDowell observes, the countryside of the pastoral tradition "cannot exist without the city or court as a counterpoint" (McDowell, 1996: 375), underscoring the genre's reliance on structural opposition.

The pastoral genre emerged in the Hellenistic period and has often been associated with the biblical Garden of Eden as a metaphor for an ideal state of human being. Two fundamental contrasts established early in its development continue to shape the pastoral tradition: "the spatial distinction of town (frenetic, corrupt, impersonal) and country (peaceful, abundant), and the temporal distinction of past (idyllic) and present (fallen)" (Garrard, 2004: 35). These spatial and temporal tensions give pastoral its characteristic blend of nostalgia and critique.

During the Renaissance, pastoral Nature functioned as a space of escape from the constraints of courtly or urban life. The rural setting allowed characters to reflect on morality and political virtue without the pressures of social hierarchy. However, Renaissance pastoral was not merely

escapist; rather, it frequently used the simplicity of Nature to critique the complexity, corruption, or artificiality of human institutions. In works such as Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calendar* (1579), the pastoral mode intertwined poetic idealization with subtle political and religious commentary. Renaissance pastoral literature also emphasized interplay between the real and the idealized: while landscapes were often depicted with poetic exaggeration, natural phenomena were described with sufficient precision to suggest familiarity and verisimilitude. This blending of artifice and realism allowed pastoral texts to engage with aesthetic pleasure while simultaneously promoting moral or philosophical reflection.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, pastoral Nature became closely associated with Romanticism. In Romantic writing, Nature assumed a therapeutic and transformative role**,** offering refuge from industrialization, social upheaval, and moral uncertainty. Wordsworth's depiction of the Lake District exemplified this concept: landscapes were not merely aestheticized but imbued with emotional resonance and moral significance, reflecting and shaping the inner life of the observer. Nature became a living presence that educated perception and nurtured spiritual growth.

Romantic pastoral also intersected with the concept of the sublime**,** particularly in depictions of mountains, lakes, and storms that inspired awe, terror, and admiration. While classical pastoral tended to celebrate harmony and order, Romantic pastoral acknowledged Nature power, unpredictability, and complexity, demonstrating a more nuanced understanding of human-nature interaction. Throughout the nineteenth century, pastoral continued to function as a response to the alienation produced by rapid industrial expansion, offering imaginative shelter against the perceived excesses of cultural and urban progress. As Grimm and Wanning note, it persisted "as a response to the alienation from Nature caused by [the] early Industrial Revolution" (Grimm & Wanning, 2016: 521).

In pastoral writing, Nature often responds to human emotion through the poetic device John Ruskin termed the "pathetic fallacy" (See Ruskin, 2010). According to him, it occurs when intense feeling distorts the mental perception to such an extent that the poet no longer sees Nature objectively. As "poetry is passion" (Bate, 1991: 73), this projection becomes an intrinsic feature of poetic expression. Trees, rivers, and fields thus mirror the emotional states of characters or frame philosophical dialogue, reinforcing the intimate bond between landscape and consciousness that characterizes the pastoral mode.

1.3.3. Wilderness

Wilderness, unlike the harmonious landscapes of the pastoral tradition, represented the settler experience in the New Worlds, with their "apparently untamed landscapes and the sharp

distinction between the forces of culture and Nature" (Garrard, 2004: 60). Rather than offering retreat, wilderness emphasized confrontation, danger, and human limitation.

In *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), Roderick Frazier Nash traced the evolution of the term from "the place of wild beasts" to "uncultivated and otherwise undeveloped land", and finally to a psychological state in which individuals feel "lost, and perplexed" (Nash, 2001: 2-3). This semantic shift transformed wilderness from a purely physical setting into an existential and psychological condition. Lawrence Buell further distinguished between *wilderness*, a spatial category, and *wildness*, a quality of autonomy and unpredictability that can persist even in human-modified environments (see Buell, 2005).

Literary representations of wilderness have evolved as well. In classical and medieval texts, it symbolized exile, danger, and moral testing, while Renaissance writers used it allegorically to explore vice and virtue. During Romanticism, poets such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Percy Bysshe Shelley celebrated untamed landscapes for their beauty and sublimity. This transformation was deeply influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's critique of civilization and idealization of the "natural" human condition and it profoundly reinforced the Romantic call to "return to Nature" (Nichols Ashton, 2011: 168).

In the American context, this perspective found expression in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854), which presented, as James C. McKusick observed, "an extended meditation on the value of a simple lifestyle, along with profoundly insightful observations of the natural world that foreshadow many aspects of modern ecological thought" (McKusick, 2000: 142). Thoreau's famous statement, "In Wildness is the preservation of the world" (Thoreau, 2008: 273), framed wildness not only as a geographical condition but as "a state of mind" (Nichols Ashton, 2011: 45).

Today, wilderness is often portrayed as a space of reinvigoration with "the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the Earth" (Garrard, 2004: 59), allowing individuals to reconnect with moral intuition and authentic emotion, countering the artificiality of urban and courtly life[2].

Modern ecocritical thought complicates this romanticization. As Alison Byerly notes, wilderness "has no meaning outside the context of the civilization that defines it" (Byerly, 1996, 54). William Cronon similarly argues that what we perceive as "wild" exists only in opposition to "civilization" (See Cronon, 1996). For centuries, Nature and culture have been considered as

[2] See Brady, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aesthetics, Ethics, and Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 2013

opposites: Nature was imagined as "eternal, unchanging, pure, gentle, wise, innocent, balanced, harmonious, and good" while culture was conceived as "temporary, progressive, polluting, violent, blind, sophisticated, distorted, destructive, and evil" (Turner, 1996: 45). As Howarth noticed, "although we cast *Nature* and *culture* as opposites, in fact they constantly mingle, like water and soil in a flowing stream" (Howarth, 1996: 69). This metaphor underscored the ecological principle of interconnectedness and dissolved rigid dualisms.

Across literary history, then, wilderness emerges as a multifaceted and evolving motif, embodying both danger and renewal, estrangement and liberation. It functions simultaneously as physical setting and symbolic landscape, a mirror of cultural anxieties and aspirations. Far from serving as mere backdrop, literary wilderness remains central to conceptions of human identity and to shifting understandings of humanity's relationship with the more-than-human world.

1.3.4. Subjective experiences: the beautiful, the sublime, the picturesque

In the eighteenth century, landscape became a powerful stimulus for emotions and psychological reflection in literary representation. Central to this transformation were three aesthetic categories which enabled writers to explore emotion, reason, imagination, and the evolving relationship between humanity and the natural world: the beautiful**,** the sublime, and the picturesque.

In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke associated the beautiful with proportion, balance, and order, qualities that produced feelings of pleasure, affection, and calm. According to Burke, landscape beauty was characterized by smoothness, delicacy, smallness, and gentle variation. These features didn't overwhelm the observer; rather, they invited closeness and emotional comfort, reassuring the viewer of an ordered and intelligible world. In the same book, Burke carefully distinguished the beautiful from the sublime: while the former was associated with brightness, smoothness, smallness, pleasure and femininity, the latter was linked infinite, solitude, emptiness, darkness, terror, and masculinity. For Burke, they should not be mixed as they were opposite concepts and binary way to respond to Nature. As Garland D. Beasley noted, "Humans submit to what is sublime, while what is beautiful submits to them" (Beasley, 2019: 183). Likewise, sublime was so terrifying and immense that it required a safe distance to be contemplated with pleasure while the beautiful posed no threat and could be comfortably controlled.

The picturesque emerged later in the eighteenth century as a mediating aesthetic category between the beautiful and the sublime. It was most strongly associated with the writer William Gilpin, whose essays, written after having toured the English countryside, documented

the moral and intellectual effects of landscapes on the observer. Gilpin presented his tours as "opportunities for moral, rational, and physical exercise, which offer the viewer the chance for wonder, awe, introspection, and even religious reflection" (Beasley, 2019: 184). In *Essay Upon Prints* (1768), he defined the picturesque as "that particular kind of beauty, which is agreeable in a picture" (Gilpin, 1768: XII). Unlike the smooth perfection of the beautiful or the overwhelming power of the sublime, the picturesque emphasized irregularity, roughness, contrast, and compositional interest.

In *Three Essays*: *on Picturesque Beauty; on Picturesque Travel; and on Sketching Landscape* (1792), Gilpin encouraged the traveller to actively engage with landscape though what he called "rational amusement" (Gilpin, 1792: 41) and "high delight" (Gilpin, 1792: 50). He promoted the development of a *picturesque eye*, capable of mediating Nature aesthetically rather than being dominated by it. In contrast to Burke's strict separation of the beautiful and the sublime, Gilpin promoted the overlap of the concepts, arguing that "*sublimity* alone cannot make an object *picturesque*" (Beasley, 2019: 183). Roughness, irregularity, obscurity and contrast, often associated with the sublime, were, for Gilpin, also essential features of the picturesque.

Ann Radcliffe offered another significant definition of the picturesque. In her essay, *On Supernatural in Poetry* (1826), she differentiated between sublime landscapes and picturesque ones, presenting two distinct visions of humanity's relationship with Nature. As Beasley observed, Radcliffe contrasted "one in which human beings can continue to attempt to dominate and control Nature, and an alternative in which they attempt to live in harmony with it" (Beasley, 2019: 177). Through her deployment of Burkean masculine sublime, Radcliffe illustrated the patriarchal impulse to control and subjugate both women and the natural world. The sublime, in this sense, reflected a cultural logic that treated both as resources to be mastered. Conversely, through the picturesque, Radcliffe imagined a more balanced way of engaging with Nature; one that valued beauty, majesty, and spiritual consolation rather than capitalistic exploitation. To dismantle the masculine dominance of outdoor space in the eighteenth century, Radcliffe allowed her female heroines "to traverse outdoor space conventionally reserved for men" (Davids, 2008: 31), and she placed them in outside spaces, reconfiguring the gendered politics of landscape.

Radcliffe expanded the Gothic setting by integrating beautiful natural sceneries which were deeply appreciated by her characters. As Deborah D. Rogers notes, she was the first author to introduce into her fiction "a tone of fanciful description and impressive narrative, which had hitherto been exclusively applied to poetry" (Rogers, 1994: 113). These landscapes functioned

not only as backdrops but also as psychological metaphors, representing the unknown, the uncontrollable, and the repressed. As Joe Bray argues, Radcliffe was particularly interested in "how natural space influences and stimulates the imagination and feelings of those who observe it" (Bray, 2014: 33-34). In fact, her characters often found solace, healing, and emotional restoration within picturesque landscapes. Anne Chandler suggests that this kind of devotion to the natural world was central for the Radcliffean narratives, whose protagonists achieved "a sense of spiritual consolation through a reverent appreciation of natural phenomena" (Chandler, 2006: 135). As Lisa Kröger notes, "The environment [..] acts as a kind of conduit of emotions, a way to experience feelings" (Kröger, 2013: 19). Whether evoking creativity and renewal or revealing the potential for evil, the environment was portrayed by Radcliffe as alive, responsive to the characters who inhabited it.

Although the beautiful, the sublime, and the picturesque were, and still are, distinct categories, they were deeply interconnected. Each represented a different way of responding to Nature: the beautiful emphasized harmony, pleasure, and emotional ease; the sublime confronted the observer with vastness, fear, and transcendence; and the picturesque prioritized visual composition and aesthetic mediation. Together, they marked a decisive shift in eighteenth-century aesthetics from objective standards of beauty toward subjective experience and individual perception. This transformation laid the foundation for Romanticism, Gothic fiction, and, ultimately, modern ecological reinterpretations of landscape.

1.3.5. Place, emotion, and the reconfiguration of the relationship between the self and the environment

Ecopsychology emerged in the late twentieth century in response to growing human alienation from the natural world. As an interdisciplinary field bridging Psychology and Ecology, it is grounded in the presupposition that mental and environmental health are fundamentally interconnected. As Theodore Roszak argued, the aim of Ecopsychology is "to awaken the inherent sense of environmental reciprocity that lies within the ecological unconscious...[and] to heal the more fundamental alienation between the person and the natural environment" (Roszak, 1992: 320).

Within this framework, literature becomes more than representation; it is a medium through which this alienation, and its potential healing, can be imagined and enacted. From an ecopsychological perspective, literature challenges anthropocentric assumptions by repositioning the human not as master of Nature but as participant within ecological systems. It foregrounds what Neil Evernden called the "individual-in-environment, the individual as a

component of, not something distinct from, the rest of the environment" (Evernden, 1996: 97). This conceptual shift constitutes the core of literature's ecopsychological force.

Related disciplines such as Ecological Psychology, Human Geography, and Sociology have long explored the relationship between humans and their environments, with particular attention to affect and emotion. In *Topophilia* (1974), Yi-Fu identified "the human being's affective ties" (Tuan, 1974: 93) to the material world. Similarly, in their introduction to *Emotion, Place and Culture* (2009), Liz Bondi, Laura Cameron, Joyce Davidson and Mick Smith observed that "emotions are amongst the most important ways in which […] humans are both connected with and disconnected from their world" (Smith, et al., 2009: 2). As Alexa Weik von Mossner suggested, emotions are not secondary to cognition but fundamental mechanism constitutive of it: perception, attention, and awareness emerge from embodied interaction with the environment rather than from the brain alone (See Von Mossner, 2016). Cognition and emotion are thus inseparable, just as perception cannot be confined to the nervous system but emerges from the whole organism's engagement with its surroundings.

Central to this embodied relationship is the concept of *place*. Irwin Altman and Setha M. Low defined place as "space that has been given meaning through personal, group, or cultural processes" (Altman & Low, 1992: 5). Place is not merely geographical location but a multidimensional construct that includes subjective and objective dimensions, affective and cognitive attachments, social relationships, and temporal layers.

Literature gives narrative and symbolic form to these theoretical insights. Through multisensory depictions of landscape, texts stage the interplay of perception, emotion, memory, and identity. In geographically rooted narratives, environment assumes "a role as significant as that of character or narrator" (McDowell, 1996: 386). Landscape shapes subjectivity: examining the setting with which a character interacts often reveals essential aspects of that character's inner life.

Outdoor spaces often function as spaces of solace, renewal, or protection. As Jonathan Bate suggests, writers locating their characters in these landscapes are "true ecologists" as they engage "not a disengaged thinking about [the environment], but an experiencing of it"' (Bate, 1991: 42). Literature thus shapes experiential immersion rather than abstract contemplation. Robert Macfarlane likewise emphasizes the vital connections between natural spaces and human response, underscoring the reciprocal dynamic between setting and self.[3] This relational model supports Rinda West's claim that individuals "who are able to connect with the natural

[3] See Macfarlane, Robert., *Mountains of the Mind: A History of a Fascination,* Granta, London, 2008

world in a receptive way are more likely to come to acknowledge their shadow sides, enter a process of individuation, and develop a more integrated life in community" (West, 2007: 22). The relation of self to setting becomes central to understanding both psychological development and ecological awareness.

The Romantic tradition provided a foundational example of literature's ecopsychological dimension. Poets such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge foregrounded the restorative power of Nature, often representing it as a mirror of the human psyche. Wordsworth's meditative encounters with landscape illustrated how immersion in Nature could cultivate emotional equilibrium and mental clarity. In this sense, literature functioned simultaneously as diagnosis and therapy: it revealed human psychological struggles rooted in environmental alienation while offering imaginative experiences that nurtured empathy, resilience, and biophilic awareness.

Ecopsychology, however, moves beyond Romantic Nature as symbolic projection. As Yvonne Defant argues, Ecopsychology promotes a "re-earthing of mind" by examining the "psychological relation with environment from the inner viewpoint of the Earth itself" (Defant, 2017: 38). Nature is no longer a passive backdrop or metaphor subordinate to human plots but a material environment in which "human bodies are bound by a sense of natural place, where they miss or learn to retrieve a sensory corporeal communication with the environment" (Defant, 2017: 38). This shift emphasizes corporeal communication with place and the recovery of a lived, embodied relationship with the more-than-human world.

As a cultural and imaginative practice, literature provides a privileged site for exploring these dynamics. It captures the psychological effects of ecological crisis, the restorative potential of natural environments, and the cultural construction of environmental consciousness. By representing Nature as a lived, embodied space—where individuals experience attachment, loss, estrangement, and renewal—literary works participate in shaping a more integrated understanding of human-environment reciprocity. In this sense, writers such as Emily Brontë may be regarded as "forerunners of environmentalism" (Defant, 2017: 38).

In conclusion, Ecopsychology asserts that the health of the mind and environment cannot be separated. Literature reflects and deepens this insight by dramatizing the inseparability of cognition and emotion, self and place, perception and embodiment. Through narrative, it reveals that the relationship between human identity and the natural world is constitutive. Far from serving as mere backdrop, environment becomes a dynamic presence that shapes, challenges, and sustains the human psyche.

1.4. Ecophobia

1.4.1. From Gothic to Ecogothic: Nature beyond human control

Considering the Gothic as "a literary mode rather than a genre" (Hillard, 2009: 689) enabled scholars to find Gothic elements in texts not traditionally categorized as Gothic novels. Examining some of the major writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, as Elizabeth Parker and Michelle Poland stress, it is clear that "Nature is essential to the Gothic, both in terms of where things take place and how things take place" (Parker & Poland, 2019: 2) and that, to quote T.E.D. Klein, a new kind of literary analysis starts to focus on "Setting *as* Character" (Klein, 1984: 16).

Along with the typical indoor Gothic locations such as convents, castles, and abbeys, outdoor spaces were equally significant. These locations were generally removed from society and the "civilised" world, situated instead in wild or remote environments. Early Gothic authors chose displaced settings that allowed readers to confront "their most widespread social fears and anxieties" (Hillard, 2009: 690), closing their books with a "sense of superiority in knowing that those things don't happen anymore" (Hillard, 2009: 690). While landscapes, weather and climate have always contributed to atmospheres, the Anthropocene has renewed the representation of the non-human environment and how characters react to that environment. In emotional and ecocritical terms, the Gothic has portrayed these reactions as "sublime and elevating, and e*cophilic* for the imagination" or as "hostile, malevolent, and *ecophobic*" (Armitt & Brewster, 2023: 19-20).

In 1917, Dorothy Scarborough distinguished between the aestheticization of scenery and landscapes and the active agency of non-human Nature. She claimed that, whereas in early Gothic fiction "Nature in itself and of itself is not the important thing", in later works "Nature is given a new power and becomes man's equal—sometimes far his superior —in thought and action", becoming "a terrible force in action" (Scarborough, 1917: 11-304).

Attention to the terror, mystery, and agency of the natural world has given rise to the Ecogothic. While traditional Gothic literature engaged with fear, the uncanny, and the sublime features of wild landscapes, Ecogothic literature extends this tradition to environmental concerns, transforming natural settings into sites of horror and reflection. Given that Nature is *alive*, Parker suggests a shift in perspective from "the pervasive Western anthropocentrism to 'ecocentrism'" (Parker, 2016: 218). Thus, the rise of Ecogothic marks a significant departure from previous idealisations of Nature, reflecting an evolving understanding of humanity's place within the environmental system and challenging anthropocentric assumptions. Indeed, where

traditional Ecocriticism often portrays Nature as benign or redemptive — a site of harmony and spiritual consolation, the Ecogothic complicates this vision emphasising Nature's dark, uncanny, and threatening dimensions. Nature appears haunted, contaminated, and vengeful—a site of both ecological and psychological terror. In other words, the Ecogothic confronts readers with discomfort by suggesting that human dominance is just an illusion as Nature is neither obligated to be kind nor recoverable. As Greg Garrard observes, “The natural world is no longer merely a backdrop; it acts as a character, capable of vengeance or collapse” (Garrard, 2004: 112). The natural world becomes active and morally charged, resisting human exploitation and hubris. However, the Ecogothic resists simplistic binaries of "pure Nature" versus “evil industry”, portraying instead a world where humans are both victims and perpetrators of ecological crises.

The Ecogothic is defined as a “literary mode at the intersection of environmental writing and the Gothic” (Keetley & Sivils, 2018: 1). Two key works have contributed to the materialisation of Ecogothic as a critical framework: Smith and Hughes’s 2013 collection *EcoGothic*, and the 2014 special issue of *Gothic Studies,* edited by David Del Principe, titled *The EcoGothic in the Long Nineteenth Century*. While Smith and Hughes address the attention to the fact that humanity have always tried to master Nature, Del Principe highlights the interconnectedness of Gothic and Nature writing that it is necessary to take into consideration “a non-anthropocentric position to reconsider the role that the environment, species, and nonhumans play in the construction of monstrosity and fear.” (Del Principe, 2014: 1). Together, these works reveal the instability of the separation of Nature and culture, human and non-human, signalling a loss of human control and identity while generating widespread anxiety which will give rise to Ecophobia.

The term Ecophobia is commonly associated with a fear or aversion toward Nature, often manifesting as anxiety about human dependence on or interaction with the natural environment. Simon Estok defines Ecophobia as “an irrational and groundless hatred of the natural world” (Estok, 2009: 208). Unlike the Ecogothic, which combines environmental consciousness with Gothic aesthetics, Ecophobia focuses specifically on Nature as a source of psychological and cultural terror. Through literature, imagery, and symbolism, authors explore the tension between human civilization and the unpredictable, often overwhelming forces of the natural world. In literature, Nature is depicted as threatening, inhospitable, or morally indifferent, dramatizing human vulnerability and fostering reflection on ethical responsibility. From Gothic literature, in which wild landscapes often function as sites of fear, to Romantic poetry, in which human recognize their smallness in comparison to the astonishing Nature,

Ecophobia emerges in the form of anxiety toward storms, mountains, and forests, that portray humanity fragility. As Estok argues, ecophobic narratives compel us to recognize the limits of human dominion, revealing both the fragility of our civilizations and the complex power of the natural world (See Estok, 2009).

When Estok introduced the term in his 2009 essay "*Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia*, he defined Ecophobia as the "contempt and fear we feel for the agency of the natural environment" (Estok, 2009: 207). He underlined that control was central to Ecophobia as it emerged in an historical moment that produced the urgence to dominate all living things. However, the ambition to master Nature often leads to hubris and, as a consequence, to failure. Indeed, as Lisa Kröger observes, "Nature will always be victorious in the end" (Kröger, 2013: 26). The frustration arising from humanity's failure to master Nature is, according to Estok, ecophobic since Ecophobia arises from the recognition that humans cannot fully control their lives or their world, and that "control, or lack thereof, is central to the Gothic" (Estok, 2009: 207-208).

Estok argues that Ecophobia is a complex phenomenon requiring theoretical clarification, as it is neither exclusively fear-based nor simply antagonistic toward Nature. Soon after Estok's call to theorize Ecophobia, Tom Hillard published "*Deep into That Darkness Peering*", linking Ecophobia and the Gothic. Responding to Estok, Hillard suggests that ecocritics examining Ecophobia should begin with texts which explicitly deal with fear. Thus, "examining this darker side of Nature writing, with its emphasis on fear, inevitably intersects with an examination of Gothic fiction and literature" (Hillard, 2009: 688). As Gothic literature deals with fears, "the Gothic provides a useful lens for understanding the ways that many authors, regardless of when they are writing, represented fears and anxieties about the natural world" (Hillard, 2009: 689).

Furthermore, Ecophobia derives much of its power from its association with pain and death, asserting that it's Nature's capacity to injure or kill that motivates human attempts to dominate it. Edmund Burke made a similar claim in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), noting that fear, intended as an apprehension of pain or death, "operates in a manner that resembles actual pain" (Burke, 1823: 74). The association between death and Ecophobia, as well as between death and the Burkean sublime, reveals how landscapes are often conceived not as entities to "be cherished, treasured, and nurtured, but rather it is something to be controlled, contained, and exploited for personal gain" (Beasley, 2019: 190).

While Ecogothic combines Gothic aesthetics with ecological awareness, Ecophobia focuses on human vulnerability and alienation from the natural world. In Ecogothic texts, Nature is both threatening and morally significant—active, transformative, and capable of hunting or punishing human wrongdoing. Ecophobia, in contrast, tends to portray Nature as indifferent, hostile or overwhelming. Moreover, Ecogothic critiques human hubris and environmental mismanagement, encourages empathy for nonhuman life, and emphasises interconnection and ethical responsibility. Ecophobia, on the other hand, foregrounds fear, alienation, existential fragility and the unsettling recognition of human vulnerability in the face of uncontrollable natural forces.

1.4.2. From sublime to Ecosublime

The aesthetic philosophy of the sublime, developed by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant, profoundly influenced both Romanticism and the Gothic. Burke's theory of the sublime became what Jack G. Voller describes as "the primary bridge" (Voller, 1994: IX) between the two movements. While Romantic writers employed the sublime to explore the limits of human understanding and to articulate profound encounters with the power of Nature, Gothic authors adapted it to invoke the supernatural and to inspire terror in the characters. In both cases, Nature emerged as something to be feared, respected, and revered—not because it was orderly and knowable, but because it was mysterious, powerful, and emotionally overwhelming. Although both thinkers examined the overwhelming power of Nature, they located the sublime in different aspects of human experience: whereas Kant located the sublime in rational self-transcendence, Burke emphasized emotional overwhelm.

In *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant's theory of the sublime focused on the supremacy of reason which brought excessive feeling under rational control. For Kant, the sublime was not located in Nature itself but in the human's mind response to it. When confronted with immensity or power beyond comprehension, the imagination failed; however, reason asserted its superiority by recognizing its own moral freedom and rational autonomy. The sublime thus became a philosophical experience revealing both human limitation and human greatness. Rather than submitting to terror, as in Burke's philosophy, the Kantian subject achieved intellectual mastery. The sublime became an inward realization that, although Nature may surpass humans physically, it could not dominate their rational autonomy. As Courteny Laurey Davids observed, "The sublime is a purely mental or intellectual phenomenon, and its effects are primarily those of the mind (Davids, 2008: 88). The experience produced a form of transcendence that enabled self-analysis and meditation. It allowed individuals to attain what Anne Mellor defined as an "intellectual mastery over the power of Nature" (Mellor, 1993: 87).

As Kant stated, “the disposition of the soul evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of the reflective judgment, is to be called sublime” (Kant, 1952: 98).

Burke’s theorisation of the sublime, by contrast, presented Nature as a potentially dangerous force capable of overwhelming human reason and even threatening human life. He defined the sublime as “whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (Burke, 1823: 45). He further described the sublime as “the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of feeling” (Burke, 1823: 45). For Burke, the sublime was an excessive power that cannot be contained, understood or fully explained. Clarifying the connection between the sublime and terror, he asserted that, “whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror be endued with greatness of dimensions or not” (Burke, 1823: 74). The sublime was therefore not simply a property of Nature but an effect produced within the subject’s mind.

The paradox embedded in Burke’s famous expression “delightful horror” raised the question of how terror could be pleasurable. Terror became pleasurable when experienced at a safe distance. The pleasure of the sublime depended on both literal and metaphorical distance: the observer was brought close to danger while remaining physically secure, simultaneously disturbed and reassured. Kant similarly noted that descriptions of a raging storm may “arouse enjoyment but with horror” (Kant, 1973: 47). In both theories, self-preservation was essential: fear had not to become immediate threat. As Burke explained:

> “When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, […] they are delightful, as we every day experience” (Burke, 1823: 46).

These two formulations—Burkean terror and Kantian transcendence—provided the conceptual groundwork for modern ecological reinterpretations of the sublime. Contemporary critics have developed the notion of the Ecosublime, which retains the emotional intensity of classical sublime theory while foregrounding ecological fragility and environmental crisis.

The Ecosublime refers to the literary depiction of Nature as vast, powerful, and awe-inspiring, combining wonder with fear, humility, and ethical reflection. It is built on the traditional in aesthetics theories of the sublime but specifically emphasizes ecological interdependence, environmental vulnerability, and humanity’s entanglement within natural systems. As Glen Love notes, the literary sublime awakens awe, fear, and reflection in readers,

encouraging recognition of human smallness in the face of natural power (see Love, 2003). The Ecosublime extends this insight by connecting such emotions to ecological awareness. In *Ecosublime: Environmental Awe and Terror from New Worlds to Oddworld* (2006), Lee Rozelle defines the Ecosublime as "the awe and terror that occurs when literary figures experience the infinite complexity and contingency of place" (Rozelle, 2006: 1). Confrontation with the Ecosublime produces a moment of shock that can push subjects toward new forms of psychological, social and environmental attentiveness.

In this sense, the Ecosublime overlaps with the Ecogothic: both mobilize fear, awe, vastness and atmospheric power to challenge anthropocentric assumptions. However, whereas Ecophobia stresses anxiety and the desire to control Nature, the Ecosublime retains an ambivalent mixture of terror and wonder that can generate ecological consciousness rather than mere dread. It reactivates the paradox of "delightful horror" within an ecological framework, encouraging readers not simply to fear Nature but to recognize their place within its vast, fragile, and powerful systems.

1.4.3. Ecosublime, ecogothic and ecophobic landscapes

In the second half of the eighteenth century, with the rise of Romantic theories about Nature, the mountains, the Arctic and other wild and untamed places such as forests and moors became central objects of literature interest. Read through the lens of Ecocriticism, these landscapes reveal the convergence of the Ecosublime, the Ecogothic, and Ecophobia, marking a decisive shift from pastoral harmony to wilderness confrontation.

Initially mountains were perceived as "obscure and threatening sites to be avoided at all costs" (McFarlane, 2003: 15), their inaccessibility fostering myth, fear, and superstition. In the eighteenth century, however, they became sites of fascination and aesthetic desire. The urge to gain altitude was justified by "the pursuit of scientific and geographical knowledge, the boom of 'trippers' and tourism and the imperialist and capitalist rationales behind explorative mountaineering" (Stewart, 2023: 29). Moreover, as Marc Théodore Bourrit observes, "the 'fatigues' and 'difficulties 'of ascent are rewarded not only by a greater understanding of the landscape, but also by a heightened appreciation of 'the beauties displayed in the landscape'" (Bourrit, 1775: 65). In addition to this, Edmund Burke's characterization of sublimity as rooted in "greatness of dimension" and "vastness of extent" (Burke, 1823: 97) framed mountains as landscapes capable of producing both terror and delight. In this dual affective structure laid the foundation of what may now be termed as Ecosublime: an experience that simultaneously exalts Nature's grandeur and exposes human fragility.

Mary Shelley's 1816 journey in the Valley of Chamonix exemplified this tension. Describing Mont Blanc as "a desert peopled by the storms alone" (Shelley, 1817: 179), and the glacier as an image of absolute desolation, she presented the mountain not as pastoral refuge but as a site of existential confrontation. In *History of a Six Week's Tour* (1817), she wrote: "The verge of a glacier […] presents the most vivid image of desolation that it is possible to conceive. No one dares to approach it" (Shelley, 2015: 42). Over time, the Valley of Chamonix came to be identified not only as a site of scientific importance, but also as a:

> "Rich store of lively images for the artist, as a locus of fortification and consolidation for the physically or emotionally 'afflicted', and as the destination of choice for those simply seeking 'some enjoyment from the contemplation of Nature" (Duffy, 2013: 32).

It was William Windham[4], an English excursionist, who named the glacier *Mer de Glace* to describe that seemingly limitless sea of ice—a concept later echoed in *Frankenstein*. In the novel, the alpine landscape "serves as both a means of denoting Nature's majesty and of its unsurpassable limits" (González Rodríguez, 2007: 35), foregrounding the theme of human hubris in the face of natural power.

Accordingly, the Arctic has traditionally been represented in Gothic literature as both terrifying and desirable, emerging as another perfect ecosublime landscape. Since the Romantic period, the Arctic and the Antarctic remained among the least-known regions of the globe and became, for the European imagination, the otherness sublime in Nature. In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, ice acquired a peculiar fascination: from crystals to glaciers, "the mystery of metamorphic ice beckoned, a transparent oxymoron, neither liquid nor solid, an enticing alchemy casting its spell, the enigma of purity and creation" (Lanone, 2010: 202). Ice appeared both materially unstable and symbolically charged. As Nicoletta Brazzelli observes, the presence of real or imagined explorers in the Arctic, combined with the remoteness and communicative isolation of the region, inspired a vast production of narratives that "hanno espresso la dimensione pericolosa e straniante e, nello stesso tempo, quasi magica dell'esperienza popolare" (Brazzelli, 2020: 26). This cultural phenomenon, often described as "Arctic Fever" (Craciun, 2016: 83-85), transformed the polar regions into sites of projection, where imperial ambition, scientific curiosity, and metaphysical longing converged.

[4] See Windham W.- P-Martel. *Relations de leurs deux voyages aux glaciers de Chamonix (1741-1742),* Bonnant. Genève, 1879

The failure of the first expeditions of James Cook and Sir John Franklin in search of new routes to the North Pole also generated an ecophobic vision of the Artic. These voyages captured the British imagination: the Arctic was at once a "place of terror" but also beautiful in a "sublime way" (Loomis, 1977: 110). When Franklin's 1845 expedition failed, however, the dream of conquest turned into a nightmare. After a six-year search, subsequent discoveries of the crews' tragic deaths, including evidence of cannibalism, "soured the romance" and "subverted the image of the arctic sublime" (Loomis, 1977: 110). The landscape that had inspired awe and splendour now embodied indifference and annihilation. Cook described those frozen regions as lands "doomed by Nature to perpetual frigidness […], whose horrid and savage aspect I have not words to describe" (Cook, 1777: 243). Ice was then seen as hostile and indifferent to human life. Its changeable and unstable Nature, described by Foucault as "a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them permeable" (Foucault, 1967: 26) and by Lanone as "a passage which is open will be closed the next moment" (Lanone, 2010: 208), posed severe challenges for explorers trying to chart new routes to the North Pole. The Arctic thus resisted mapping and mastery, exposing the limits of human control.

In nineteenth-century fiction, imagined polar space became "extreme, terrifying, treacherous, and yet awe-inspiring" (Bowers: 2017: 2), transforming it into Ecogothic and ecophobic terrain. Such antihuman and uncanny environments generated "an awareness of self, arguably allowing subconscious anxieties to come to the surface" (Bowers, 2017: 2).
Within this framework, the Arctic was not merely a setting but an active agent that destabilized anthropocentric confidence. The narrative frame of the Robert Walton's failed expedition in *Frankenstein* was added in a second time, functioning as a warning against the hubris of challenging Nature. When Walton and his crew set out for the Pole, they initially imagined the frozen landscape as a site of Romantic transcendence. Instead, it became a reminder of Nature's capacity to engulf, erase, and exceed human ambition once they were trapped in the ice. The Arctic operated as the ultimate wilderness beyond the pastoral and beyond rational mastery: a space where the sublime collapsed into Ecogothic dread, and where Ecophobia exposed the fragility of imperial, scientific, and anthropocentric dreams of domination.

Wild terrestrial landscapes such as moors and forests started to be considered as sublime landscapes as well, simultaneously awe-inspiring and terrifying. As wild places, they were perceived as untamed and apparently immutable yet constantly transforming. They were the wild and savage place opposed to the "civilized" world. Woodlands and forests frequently appeared in Gothic fiction as ambivalent spaces. As Brazzelli observes, they were both a "contesto ambientale rigoglioso, brulicante di vita e incontaminato, per molti aspetti gradevole

e riposante" and, at the same time, a "luogo oscuro e misterioso, di entità impenetrabile, inquietante, ostile" (Brazzelli, 2017: 60).

1.5. Conclusion

The transformation of Nature's role from Romanticism through Ecocriticism to the Ecogothic reveals a growing awareness of ecological limits and human responsibility. Romantic literature tried to find comfort and meaning in Nature but remained focused on human experience; Ecocriticism, by contrast, demands ethical engagement with the environment while the Ecogothic confronts readers with Nature's terrifying autonomy and the collapse of human control.

Across literary history, representations of Nature shift from harmony to terror and from transcendence to ecological crises. Pastoral, wilderness writing, the Gothic, the Ecogothic, Ecophobia, and the Ecosublime function as interconnected frameworks mapping this evolving trajectory. While earlier traditions treated Nature as a passive backdrop to be exploited, Romanticism reimagined it as an active force capable of renewal and self-knowledge, though still interpreted through human experience.

Pastoral writing established the foundational dichotomy between culture and Nature, portraying rural landscapes as harmonious refuges from urban corruption. Wilderness challenged this idealization by representing untamed and uncontrollable environments, especially within settler cultures where it symbolized both danger and national identity. Over time, wilderness evolved from a geographical description to a psychological condition of disorientation and existential exposure.

Ecopsychology further emphasizes the interconnection between human mental life and the natural world, arguing that alienation from Nature contributes to psychological distress. Literature reflects this perspective by portraying humans as participants within ecological systems rather than masters of them.

The Gothic intensifies Nature's agency, turning landscapes into sites of dread and instability. Storms, forests, ruins, and remote terrains express the sublime forces beyond human control.

The Ecogothic extends this confrontation into the Anthropocene, highlighting ecological volatility and exposing Ecophobia—a fear rooted in humanity's frustrated desires for mastery. Such narratives expose the fragility of civilization and dismantle the illusion of human dominance over the environment.

At the same time, the Ecosublime reconfigures classical theories of the sublime within ecological contexts. Rather than affirming human superiority, it emphasizes fragility, interdependence, and ethical responsibility.

Landscapes such as mountains, the Arctic, forests, and moors illustrate this progression. Mountains symbolize Romantic aspiration toward transcendence but also reveal human limits. The Arctic erases mastery altogether, confronting explorers with infinity and existential exposure. Forests and moors, instead, internalize wilderness, surrounding and transforming human experience while functioning as liminal spaces where ecological forces shape identity and emotion.

Collectively, pastoral, wilderness, Gothic, Ecogothic, Ecophobia, and Ecosublime together form a continuum of environmental imagination and reveal a destabilization of human centrality. They trace a cultural movement from idealization to anxiety, from transcendence to entanglement. Ultimately, literature becomes a space where aesthetic and ethical concerns converge, redefining humanity's relationship with the natural world.

CHAPTER 2

NATURE'S INFLUENCE ON PLOT AND CHARACTERS IN EMILY BRONTË'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

2.1. Introduction

Initially published under the pen name Ellis Bell in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* was later republished in 1850 with a posthumous preface written by Charlotte Brontë. The new edition included annotations about Emily's biography and background and explanatory notes about the text. According to Charlotte Brontë, the wildness and savage novel is a direct result of Emily's perception of the moors she lived on. Charlotte Brontë also tried to stimulate the interest of readers who lived in more ordinary places and consequently were not used to harsh settings. She wanted to warn about a possible feeling of alienation while reading the book, as such untamed landscapes as well as overwhelming passions could be perceived as exotic and excessive for the readers of the time. In addition, Charlotte tried to justify the presence of characters such as Heathcliff as harsh landscapes cannot but give origin to harsh people. This preface anticipates that Nature, though not itself the focus of the narrative, would still be of significance "for the actors in the drama" (Duthie, 1986: 236).

In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* Nature is indeed not merely a backdrop to the story, but it plays a crucial role in driving the narrative. It is a vibrant, symbolic force that mirrors and amplifies the feelings and the internal conflicts of the characters. It shapes the emotional, psychological, and supernatural dimension of the narrative.

Wuthering Heights' mansions are located on the Yorkshire moors, an isolated setting, battered by harsh winds and surrounded by a bleak, vast and desolate landscape. The moors surrounding Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange are mysterious and intimidating. This sublime and wild environment symbolizes the raw emotions and turmoil of the characters, an extension and a physical manifestation of their personalities: untamed, passionate and indifferent to Victorian societal norms. While Wuthering Heights represents the world of Nature and wilderness, Thrushcross Grange, on the contrary, represents civilization, order and refinement.

Supernatural elements as well are closely tied to the natural world and reinforces the idea of a gothic setting along with the sense of isolation. In addition, Catherine's ghost enhances the concept of blurred boundaries between life and death.

Another expression of Nature in the narrative is represented by the use of weather for narrative and symbolic purposes. Not only it intensifies some characters' specific emotions, especially rage and despair, but it also has a pivotal role in driving the narrative.

In Brontë's novel, the sublime appears through the wild landscape of the Yorkshire moors, the overwhelming emotional experiences of her characters, and the presence of supernatural forces that defy rational understanding. While the characters experience love, loss, and revenge, the eternal and indifferent moors remain unchanged, emphasizing the insignificance of human life in the face of Nature's enduring power.

2.2. The geography of Wuthering Heights: an isolated landscape

2.2.1. The sublime moors: a gothic atmosphere

> "The moors contribute to the novel's Gothic atmosphere. Their bleak and stormy conditions enhance the novel's sense of foreboding and mystery. The unpredictable weather and the isolation of the moors create an environment that is both beautiful and menacing, much like the characters themselves" (Manjunath, 2023: 548).

The moors represent a place where the beauty of Nature is intertwined with danger and darkness. The characters wandering the moors experience the idea that Nature is vast, terrifying, and beyond human comprehension. Furthermore, bad weather conditions, including the wind screaming, the sudden storms and the doom-laden dark nights, fuel a sense of anxiety and instability in accord with the interior torments of characters. The moors serve as a liminal space: open, desolate, and sublime. It is around the moors, between fog and silence, that the souls go around, and the edge between natural and supernatural collapses. This mysterious Nature intensifies the emotional tension of the book and underlines the impossibility of rationalization of extreme feelings, giving the story a profoundly Romantic dimension. Emily Brontë uses Nature "to delve into complex psychological landscapes and societal issues, employing vivid natural imagery and innovative narrative techniques" (Manjunath, 2023: 547).

When Lockwood arrives at Wuthering Heights, the desolate, harsh landscape foreshadows isolation and emotional emptiness. The building is in fact built on a barren terrain, confined, exposed to harsh weather, and described in bleak, wild terms. To Lockwood, the moors appear as danger and give him a sense of desolation. The wild, bleak moors, surrounded by mist and storm, echo the distance and alienation that the characters feel. For example, as Catherine approaches the end of her life, delirious and consumed by longing for the moors, she cries to

Nelly Dean, yearning to return to the wild, untamed landscape of her youth—a place that embodies her true, unrestrained self: "I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills" (Brontë, 2020:109). The inhospitable environment mirrors the intense, unrequited emotions which keep the characters in a state of torment even if it is perceived in different ways according to the characters. As summarized by Davies, "Treacherous but beautiful, the moorlands at once beckon and threaten […], and offer refuge" (Davies, 2002: 90). In other words, the same moors that threaten Lockwood are instead a source of life for Catherine and Heathcliff.

2.2.2. The moors: an isolated setting

Emily Brontë's narrative is characterized by its topography as she was profoundly influenced by the rugged Yorkshire moors where she lived with her family. Brontë, having grown up in the remote village of Haworth, was deeply attuned to the natural world, and her environment left an indelible mark on her literary imagination. Christopher Heywood has described the landscape in *Wuthering Heights* not as a detailed mapping of a "real" place but as a hybrid of locations in Yorkshire (See Heywood, 1998). As Brazzelli also suggests:

> "Although the sources had been meticulously collected from a wide range of models across a large area of the country in Yorkshire, they were then reassembled to form a landscape that is both a familiar and uncanny, self-consistent and reminiscent of real buildings and places" (Brazzelli, 2021: 232).

The story is entirely located in a specific area of a few miles as the two mansions are less than four miles distant. The moors which surround them are a physical barrier and the residents of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange are isolated with no interaction with the world outside. Ultimately, they have no alternative but to become their own limited community and live as exiled. This physical isolation amplifies the feelings of the characters, especially in the two protagonists, as they feel trapped in the house, and reinforce the connection they have with Nature. This sense of isolation is mentioned by Lockwood himself in the first chapter, when he expresses his surprise in having "fixed on the situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropist's Heaven!" (Brontë, 2020: 1).

The gloomy weather contributes to Lockwood's sense of isolation and confusion, reinforcing the grim atmosphere of the novel:

> "The savagery of such a landscape contributes to the isolation and confinement defining Brontë's narrative world, dealing with a closed group of characters living on their self-destructive passions, with no sense of a society beyond Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange" (Altick, 1991: 129).

Since Nature has a crucial importance for the development of the plot and characters' personality, Margaret Homans underlines that "there are, however, very few scenes in the novel that are actually set out-of-doors" (Homans 1978: 9). As Homans justifies, this lack of details about activities outside can be referred to Nelly's and Lockwood's narrating voices as both of them have a "house-bound perspective" (Homans,1978: 9). As stated by Homans, "Nature is made important by the omission of these episodes in the moors" (Homans, 1978: 11).

2.2.3. Wuthering Heights: a farm and a fortress

"Wuthering Heights […] stands on the defensive against both weather, as its name suggests, and against all comers. It is both farm and fortress" (Duthie 1986: 224), a sort of "prison-like house which resists foreign intrusion but is also unwilling to release its occupants" (Brazzelli, 2021: 237).

While there are no direct descriptions of the moors, there are precise and abundant references to the houses. As underlined by Margaret Homans, the doors and windows of Wuthering Height are closed when Lockwood first arrived there while they will be opened once he last comes to visit them. Their openings or closings are metaphorically associated with the psychological conditions of its inhabitants: "the closed house generally represents some sort of entrapment" (Homans, 1978: 11).

Closed windows or doors have always symbolized entrapment. When Heathcliff wants to force Cathy in the marriage with her cousin Linton, the young lady is trapped inside the house. The same situation occurs when Catherine is inside Thrushcross Grange to recover from the injury she had at her ankle and Heathcliff is outside the house, waiting for her. On the contrary, when Heathcliff dies, the window in his room is "swinging open and letting the rain in to signal the flying out of his soul" (Homans, 1978: 11), symbolizing the end of his agony. Moreover, at the end of the novel, when the barriers of hatred have broken down among the remaining protagonists, doors in the house are all open, creating a direct connection with the outside and signaling a beginning of a new life in charge of the new generation.

2.3. The contrast Nature - civilization

The contrast between Nature and culture materializes in the contrast between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, two physical and symbolic places that embody two opposite sets of values.

Wuthering Heights, located on the top of a hill, is surrounded by desolate and steep moors which are exposed to bad weather and incarnate the elemental, instinctive and Nature-aligned dimension of the people who live there according to their inner and often violent impulses. People living at Wuthering Heights are generally rough, rude and unruly, though they are energetic, vigorous and enthusiastic.

Thrushcross Grange, on the contrary, is the symbol of civilization, order and refinement. It is a place where societal and conventional norms dominate, resulting in gentle, quiet and fragile residents. It is built in "an enormous and very neat park with many plants and flowers and it is located in a valley which protects it against bad climate conditions" (Calderari, 2019:30).

The dualism Nature-culture is personified in the two male characters: Heathcliff and Edgar Linton. They embody two opposed sets of values and they are introduced to the reader with a series of metaphors referred to the natural world. For instance, while Edgar Linton is visiting Catherine at Wuthering Heights:

> "Doubtless Catherine marked the difference between her friends as one came in [Edgar Linton] and the other went out [Heathcliff]. The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country, for a beautiful fertile Valley; and his voice and greeting were as opposite as his aspect" (Brontë, 2020: 60).

Another example of metaphor draws the reader's attention to Edgar Linton's weak and irresolute temper. Nelly denigrates his indecisiveness saying: "He possessed the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half-killed or a bird half-eaten" (Brontë, 2020: 62).

Catherine is well aware of how different Edgar and Heathcliff are. While telling Nelly about her choice to marry him, Catherine defines her love for Linton

> "Like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees—my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (Brontë, 2020: 71).

Moreover, she is aware that "Linton is as different as a moonbeam from lightening, or frost from fire" (Brontë, 2020: 70).

Heathcliff is compared to "an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone" (Brontë, 2020: 89). Not only his lack of feeling is emphasized with this metaphor, but later he is even equated[5] to "a wolfish man" by Catherine, "a devil" by Isabella, a "savage beast" and a "goblin" by Nelly Dean. These comparisons are often enriched with animal traits such as the "basilisk eyes". It is therefore a sort of demonic and animal-like figure which Catherine is in love with. Nevertheless, Conger suggests that:

> "Nature provides her [Brontë] with a fund of analogies that help to describe the indescribable; namely, the irrational, magnetic attraction between Heathcliff and Catherine. […] But nature does more for Brontë here: it provides her with a fund of metaphor that renders 'natural' that which would otherwise seem 'unnatural', even demonic. […] Man's darkest impulses seem more palatable when they are allied metaphorically with the amoral, destructive forces of nature" (Conger, 1978: 1003).

When Catherine and Heathcliff illicitly spy the Linton family, Catherine is injured at her ankle and she spends five weeks at Thrushcross Grange. While being there, she comes into contact with a more refined and civilized world. Edgar Linton and his family represent the "more comfortable side of bourgeois life" (Kettle, 1968: 34) Catherine is fascinated by.
Dodworth describes Thrushcross Grange:

> "Certainly not much of a prison house, though it must have appeared so to Catherine at first, as she was used to the 'functional rawness' (Gilbert, 1987: 94) of Wuthering Heights, and the earthy freedom of the fields and moors that she roamed with Heathcliff" (Dodworth, 2012: 128).

When she comes back to the Heights, instead of a "wild, hatless, little savage" (Brontë, 2020: 45), she comes back as a "dignified person" (Brontë, 2020: 45), completely changed in dressing and manners. As she is trying to conform to social standards as people expected her to do, her

[5] See respectively Brontë, 2020 pp. 89, 118, 146, 285, 156.

> "Initial reaction of repulson toward Heathcliff comes from his dirt and his wildness, in other words, from his life as a savage in nature. She has learned, as part of the civilizing influence of the Lintons, that dirt is bad and that therefore her own savage past was bad and that therefore any relic of that past, such as Heathcliff's perennially dirty person, is to be avoided" (Homans, 1978:17).

When Edgar proposes to her, even if she is aware that "I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven" (Brontë, 2020: 70), she decides to marry him as being his wife would elevate her social status and would assure her a comfort life. Thanks to Heathcliff's three-years absence, Catherine is able to hide her true temper to everyone and to repress all the memories linked to Nature and Heathcliff. However, as soon as Heathcliff returns, she will not be able to deal with the situation and it will be the beginning of her physical and mental breakdown.

2.3.1. Crossing the moors

Most of the characters in the novel cross the moors or fluctuate between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. These relocations often lead to tragic consequences or to radical changes in the characters' personality. In other words, "People flourish or die according to their natures—as plants moved to a new place" (Williams, 1985: 114).

Dodworth Cameron underlines that "while the 'evil' characters are rendered more powerful by the realm of the moors, the 'good' characters are rendered weak, diseased or die" (Dodworth, 2012: 133). After a period of absence, good characters such as Frances, Isabella and Linton Heathcliff are destinated to death, while evil characters such as Hindley, Heathcliff and even Catherine return to the Heights reinforced and reinvigorated.

Positive characters cross the moors with ruinous consequences. Mr. Earnshaw comes back from Liverpool tired and fatigued while Hindley's wife Francis moves to the Heights and dies a few days after the birth of their son Hareton. Isabella escapes and she never returns in person to Wuthering Heights while her sickly and decaying son Linton will not survive the moors as he is too unfit for such a harsh environment. He is so weak that his father Heathcliff dominates and manipulates him for his own dark purposes. These good characters do not survive the moors as they are transplanted in an unsuitable soil.

Conversely, "only the strong, passionate individual survives" (Goodridge, 1964: 60). As a matter of fact, Hindley returns from his educational experience in the city as a married, stronger, more dominating figure. He was not a cruel character at the beginning, but his father's death and his experience out of the Heights transformed him in a demonic figure. Heathcliff's

attitude is made more powerful and forceful after his three-years absence. When Catherine comes back from her five-weeks staying at Thrushcross Grange, she is more manipulative, haughty and conscious of her beauty and of the power she has over other people.
According to Dodworth, Emily Brontë has created a mysterious void in the moors which is:

> "What the characters who leave the Heights and the Grange are forced to traverse, and their experiences in this vague realm of mystery are what transform them from the characters that they were when they left, to the characters that they become when they return" (Dodworth, 2012: 126).

2.4. Emotional Landscapes: Catherine and Heathcliff

Catherine and Heathcliff's love is extreme, consuming, and self-destructive. It transcends conventional emotion and enters the realm of obsession and metaphysical unity. Their love is not grounded in harmony or tenderness but in a wild, consuming intensity that threatens their lives. Their bond is sublime because it is overwhelming, unnatural, and deeply unsettling.

Catherine and Heathcliff have grown up in an isolated place excluded from society and, as a consequence, they become attached to the landscape where they are exiled. The moors become a nation and the people living there become citizens of this limited community. As they cannot compare with other communities, Heathcliff and Catherine need one another to mirror themselves and have a sort of reference point. In this way, they become permanently tied to one another and to this land.

Heathcliff has never really belonged to Wuthering Heights. Even if adopted by the Earnshaw family, Heathcliff never becomes Heathcliff Earnshaw. His name becomes a personification which is "indicative of a wild, uncultivated and uncivilized landscape that has not been molded to society's expectations" (Bevin, 2018: 40). He has more of a connection to this land than he has with the people in the surrounding. For this reason, he finds in Catherine a sense of belonging that no one else can give him.

Conversely, Catherine has a solid connection to the civilized world as she is expected to follow social norms even if they are not representative of her true desires. Since she was a child indeed, Catherine is described wild and rebellious with a fevered temper. "For Catherine, Heathcliff becomes a representation of the innate connection she wishes she had with the moors, an encompassing and irrefutable connection to the landscape" (Bevin, 2018: 41).

As a result, their souls are so complementary that Catherine asserts that "whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same" (Brontë, 2020: 70). They desperately need for each other, and this necessity subsequently leads to torment when they are separated.

The moors are an open and wild space where the characters can express their real selves and can escape the limitations imposed by the Victorian society or by the prison-house of Wuthering Heights. They are a perfect representation of a sublime place as they both enchant and threaten, especially for people who have never crossed those lands. Lockwood is petrified by the possibilities to get injured or get lost in the moors walking back to Thrushcross Grange. To him, the moors are a source of fear and a danger.

On the contrary, Catherine and Heathcliff have lived the most intense moments of their relationship in the moors since their childhood; they have collected such intense memories that "they both promised fair to grow up as rude as savages" (Brontë, 2020: 39).

The moors do not judge and do not impose strict rules: they offer a pure, instinctive existence, where anger and love can be manifested with no filters. Even in adulthood, the moors represent a "source of life, a place of safety and sustenance" (Brazzelli, 2021: 244).

Catherine and Heathcliff 's connection to the moors is necessary to their beings as it is "an embodiment of who they are: other, wild, free" (Bevin, 2018: 41). Whenever they feel upset or there is a conflict in progress, they find refuge and solace in the wilderness which makes them forget to return home and they enjoy it regardless of a severe punishment. While telling Lockwood how important the moors are for them since they were children, Nelly Dean says: "it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at" (Brontë, 2020: 39).

As soon as Heathcliff returns after his three-years absence, Catherine "realizes the contradictory situation she has got herself into and starts moving out of life" (Gose, 1966: 8). While pretending to be indifferent to Heathcliff and to what he represents, her true desires manifest in her dreams. When she gets up after having dreamt about her loved moors, wishing to be back there again, she looks at the mirror in her bedroom and she does not recognize herself: "ha perduto quella sua identità che è inscindibile da Heathcliff e che ha espresso qualche anno prima nella sua suprema dichiarazione di amore dicendo: 'io sono Heathcliff'" (Bompiani, 1978: 90-91).

In another dream which resembles a delirium, she confesses to Nelly of having visited heaven but:

> "It did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights, where I woke sobbing for joy" (Brontë, 2020: 70).

As her reunification with Heathcliff seems impossible, Catherine loses the will to live. She no longer feels part of the physical world as she understands she has tried to change herself and deny her real desires, in vain. Although she longs to return to the paradise of her childhood with Heathcliff, she feels trapped in a world of social convention which does not belong to her. For this reason, she aspires to a more complete release:

> "The thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart, but really with it, and in it" (Brontë, 2020: 139).

And she continues: "Oh, if I were but in my own bed in the old house! […] And that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it – it comes straight down the moor- do let me have one breath" (Brontë, 2020: 107). And again: "I wish I were out of doors – I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free…" (Brontë, 2020: 109). The air and the wind in these passages taken from her delirium are "both literally and metaphorically the breath of life" (Duthie, 1986: 240). According to her desires, being back on the moors postmortem would be heavenly, without the confines of a human body or the expectations that come with it.

2.5. The supernatural: blurred boundaries between life and death

2.5.1. The ghost

The presence of Catherine's ghost in the narrative enhances the gothic atmosphere that permeates the novel. Catherine's ghost is introduced when Lockwood is confined at Wuthering Heights because of the bad weather that makes it impossible to return to Thrushcross Grange. After having read some notes written on Catherine's diary, he falls asleep. It is not clear whether he dreams of some branches hitting the window with insistence or if this event really occurs. When he tries to catch the branch, Lockwood's fingers close on the fingers of a little girl who introduces herself as Catherin Linton. The girl asks him: "Let me in!" (Brontë: 2020: 20). Lockwood is totally frightened by this presence. "This scene, which initiates the story, draws our attention to the complexity of the role of nature" (Defant, 2017: 37).

The weather outside gives voice to this unquiet spirit. The wind howls outside the lattice causing the trees to bend and tap against the windowpane. The ghost appears as being carried of the wind, tying her soul to the land she once walked. The weather mirrors Catherine's restless soul, which has wandered the moors for more than twenty years and which have at last come home. In the meantime, she has been waiting for Heathcliff to join her in death and to finally have their "paradise regained, presumably at the Heights" (Williams, 1985: 116).

After her death, the moors become a representation of her afterlife. She appears in spectral form as she can't separate and break the relationship she has with the landscape and with Heathcliff, who still lives there. "Catherine presumably would feel more comfortable in an eternal purgatory on the moors rather than in heaven" (Dodworth, 2012: 131). As Martha Nussbaum' underlines, Catherine is looking for "a horizontal movement—not toward heaven, but toward her beloved moors and winds, severed from which she would find heaven miserable" (Nussbaum, 1996: 363). When her ghost comes close to Heathcliff, the weather generally changes, anticipating her approaching with dense fog and rising winds. Heathcliff's obsession with the moors and the weather reflects his belief that Nature, both living and spectral, is inexorably tied to his love for Catherine. Just after her death, as a matter of fact, he says: "Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you – haunt me then" (Brontë, 2020: 145). Or again, "I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad! Only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you" (Brontë, 2020: 145).

Only with Heathcliff's death the two souls can finally be in peace. However, since both of them have this strong connection with Nature, they do not move to heaven as supposed, but they still continue wandering the moors, "but only by hearsay" (Duthie, 1986: 241). As Brazzelli notices:

> "On the moors, Catherine and Heathcliff transcend the limits of their separate physical bodies yet reaffirm the ultimate value of human, not metaphysical or divine, love. Similarly, their transcendence and salvation can only exist within nature, essentially through reliving the freedom they experienced as children on the moors" (Brazzelli, 2021: 246).

Graeme Tytler observes that "Heathcliff's own concept of heaven has by the end of his life come exclusively to mean togetherness with Catherine, just as hell as long meant separation from her" (Tytler, 2007: 45). Nature is the protector of their destiny, an eternal and immutable

space where love and pain continue to exist out of time. Despite their fights and separations, the two are forced to be bound. The misty, eerie landscape is then a reflection of the characters' inescapable destinies.

Introducing an eerie transcendence, these episodes with ghosts transform the natural world into a haunted space where the boundary between life and death collapses. Lockwood's dream and encounter with Catherine's ghost evokes horror and pity at once. And the idea of being haunted by Catherine's ghost is both something desired by Heathcliff but also his greatest torment. These moments encapsulate the idea of the sublime, the simultaneous experience of awe and terror.

2.5.2. The moors as hell

Catherine's attachment to Nature is also expressed in the choice to be buried "on a green slope in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor'' (Brontë, 2020: 147) instead of in the Linton's chapel.

Once buried, Heathcliff's obsession for her leads him to dig her grave, open it from one side and lie beside her in order "to be more sublimed to dissolve together" (Charan, 2021: 220). In this sublime image of Heathcliff embracing her remains, he believes he has woken her spirit and released it from the confines of Catherine's body. Here, the land bridges the gap between life and death. Even if on the same moors, Catherine and Heathcliff cannot access each other. The land becomes an extra layer separating the two lovers, a "two yards of loose hearth is the sole barrier" (Brontë, 2020: 250) which prevents Heathcliff to reunite with Catherine.

While the boundary between the corporeal and the spirit is intangible, Heathcliff attempts to make the boundary tangible by literally scraping away soil from atop Catherine's coffin. By digging her out from under the soil, Heathcliff wants to heal the loss he feels without her. This action is actually the opposite of a funeral. Instead of digging a grave and putting some soil over the coffin, he is trying to bring Catherine back in the real world. Next to her, "a sudden sense of relief flowed from my heart through every limb. I relinquished my labor of agony, and turned consoled at once, unspeakably consoled" (Brontë, 2020: 250).

After Catherine's death, the moors that once represented a source of joy and freedom turn into a stranger place for Heathcliff. On Catherine's deathbed, Heathcliff realizes that "while you are at peace, I shall writhe in the torments of hell" (Brontë, 2020: 138). He added that "two words would comprehend my future, *death* and *hell*-existence, after losing her, would be hell" (Brontë, 2020: 129).

"The landscape becomes the embodiment of his hell, a cruel reminder of the connection he and Catherine had to each other and to his land" (Bevin, 2018: 52) and that is now lost. Natural

harmony is destroyed, for him, by the unnatural separation which cannot kill his love but makes it a source of torment.

Approaching death, Heathcliff's idealization of Catherine becomes evident as he sees "the landscape as a representation of Catherine because the landscape is literally replaced by her image" (Homans, 1978: 14). Heathcliff indeed sees her:

> "In every cloud, in every tree – filling the air at night and caught by glimpses in every object by day. I am surrounded by her image! […] The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!" (Brontë, 2020:280).

In addition to this, Heathcliff is daily tormented by the image of Cathy and Hareton in his house. They remind him of Catherine and of all the memories connected with her. Actually, they are "the only objects which retain a distinct material appearance to me; and that appearance causes me pain, amounting to agony" (Brontë, 2020: 279). He does not see anything worth living for in the physical world and therefore he starts wandering the moors looking for Catherine's ghost. Catherine's haunting and Heathcliff's torment are "embodiment of cultural geography: the human stories that once occurred on these moors still 'live' in its landscape, and are what bring Heathcliff his torment and death" (Godfrey, 2011: 12).

2.6. The weather as a narrative device

In *Wuthering Heights,* the weather is not only used as a narrative tool to drive the narrative but it also reflects the characters' emotional states. In particular, "Emily makes use of whether to draw the readers' attention to significant moments in the portrayal of her characters' emotions and relationships" (Brazzelli, 2021: 239). The storms, winds, and fogs are expressions of the internal struggles and passions of the characters. Key episodes in the book are directly tied to specific weather conditions, and these weather events mark crucial turning points in the development of the plot.

Starting from the title of the novel, particular emphasis is given to the wind. The adjective "Wuthering" is described by Lockwood as a "provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (Brontë, 2020: 2). The wind, however, as well as bad weather conditions of any sort, contribute to emphasise specific symbolic and emotional situations.

References to weather lead to significant outcomes in the plot starting from the very beginning of the novel. For instance, the bad cold Lockwood catches because of his wintry

journey back to the Grange after having visited the Heights renders him ill and immobile enough to be disposed to hear Nelly's history while he is confined to bed. Cathy first meeting with Hareton takes place one July morning because of the hot weather and her decision to have a ride to an excursion to Penistone Crags. It is on a Sunday evening that Catherine and Heathcliff visit the Grange and Catherine is injured and forced to stay at the Lintons' for five weeks, coming back home completely refined in aspect and manners. Later, Catherine is stricken with a delirious fever because she spends the night in drenched clothes looking for Heathcliff and this event gives rise to a series of dramatic consequences. Again, it is owing to a rainy night that Nelly gets her feet wet on her walk to the Heights with Cathy the following morning in soaked stockings to make her ill for three weeks, enabling Cathy to visit her cousin Linton.

2.6.1. The weather as an emotional and symbolic language

"Emily makes use of whether here and there in order to draw our attention to significant moment in the portrayal of her characters" (Tytler, 2016: 45). The weather symbolizes internal emotional states and foreshadows dramatic consequences in the plot. Even if "there are no weather descriptions of any great length" (Duthie, 1986: 237-238), weather, and storms in particular, conveys specific symbolic ideas.

Lockwood's arrival at Wuthering Heights occurs on a stormy night, where the harsh, violent wind and rain match the mood of the household. The storm emphasizes the isolation of Wuthering Heights and it mirrors the emotional intensity of the relationships within the house. The dark "night coming" and the "suffocating snow" (Brontë, 2020: 11) render the atmosphere mysterious and dangerous to Lockwood, who is forced to stay at the Heights due to *force majeure*. He feels trapped inside the house, and his meeting with Catherine's ghost is a source of terror. The following day, the moors appear as a "white ocean" (Brontë, 2020: 25) reinforcing the idea of the moors as a place that represents danger and discomfort for people who are not used to travel there. Fully covered by snow, the moors become an indecipherable set of signs without meaning.

When Mr. Earnshaw dies, Nelly perfectly remembers "a high wind blustered round the house, and roared in the chimney: it sounded wild and stormy, yet it was not cold" (Brontë, 2020: 36). The wind, again, seems to accompany the death of a member of the house.

As Catherine deteriorates physically, there is no moon at night, and "every thing beneath lay in misty darkness" (Brontë, 2020: 109), the landscape as a personification of her mental vagueness. Before Catherine's death, it is summer, with flowers blossoming and birds singing,

“all signals that […] even nature was ready to celebrate the arrival of the newborn” (Calderari, 2019: 28). On the day of the funeral, Nelly explains to Lockwood:

> “That Friday made the last of our fine days, for a month. In the evening, the weather broke; the wind shifted from south to north-east, and brought rain, first, and then sleet, and snow, On the morrow one could hardly imagine that there had been three weeks of summer” (Brontë, 2020: 148).

This quick passage to a winter weather symbolizes the coldness and depressive mood of the characters as a reaction to Catherine’s death. After her funeral, Heathcliff sees her haunting him. Her coming closer to him is often accompanied by a change in weather. The supernatural element, combined with the eerie atmosphere, creates a gothic scenery that heightens the sense of desperation and obsession in Heathcliff. As underlined by Tytler, “Rainy weather goes hand in hand with other important stages of Heathcliff’s presentation” (Tytler, 2016: 46). It is a rainy day when Heathcliff comes back to the Heights without Catherine and tells Nelly about their illicit visit at Thrushcross Grange. The rain seems to forecast the beginning of the process of separation that will involve both Catherine and Heathcliff.

When Catherine confesses to Nelly her love for Heathcliff and her decision to marry Edgar Linton, Heathcliff’s leaving is intensified by a storm, which mirrors the emotional chaos in their hearts. At first the “clouds appeared inclined to thunder” and there is “approaching rain” (Brontë, 2020: 73), but as Heathcliff doesn’t return, the storms progressively “came rattling over the Heights in full fury” (Brontë, 2020: 74) as well as a violent wind. The following morning, instead, is “fresh and cool” and the air is filled with the “sweet scents from the garden” (Brontë, 2020: 75).

Heathcliff’s return to Wuthering Heights after a three-year absence is marked by the onset of stormy weather. This storm signals the violent emotional upheaval for the other characters, particularly Catherine and Edgar. The weather reflects Heathcliff's transformation during his absence: he has become a brooding, powerful figure. Moreover, the storm amplifies Heathcliff's vengeful return and his desire to reassert control over the estate.

The violent storm that occurs over the Heights on the night of Heathcliff’s death leads Joseph and Nelly to regard that storm as a kind of “judgment on their household, thereby suggesting that some such interpretations of overwhelming acts of Nature are partly rooted in superstition” (Tytler, 2016: 45). The lattices at the Heights which were once closed are now “swinging open and the rain driving straight in” (Brontë, 2020: 289), on Heathcliff’s dead body.

Since Heathcliff's death, Joseph affirms he has seen "two on' em" from his "chamber window" (Brontë, 2020: 291), probably the two lovers' ghosts finally reunited on their beloved moors.

2.7. The moors as a calm and peaceful rebirth

In the final chapter, the weather becomes calmer and this shift symbolizes the possibility of peace and resolution, suggesting a break from the destructive patterns of the past. The calm, pleasant weather signals the end of the emotional and spiritual chaos that characterized the lives of Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw, signaling the end of the cycle of vengeance and suffering. The moors, which were once a symbol of emotional chaos, are now depicted as a place of regeneration and hope for the future. This transition to calmer, sunnier weather symbolizes the possibility of renewal and healing, a hopeful future for the next generation, that is a new era of growth and love between Hareton and Catherine Linton.

When Hareton is asked to uproot Joseph's bushes in order to plant new flowers, Joseph declares he wants to leave the house he has worked in for sixty years. "The issue appears trivial but, for him, it is not: he sees the values of the Heights, where a living has to be wrested from the land and fertile soils is precious, threatened by an alien way of life" (Duthie, 1986: 227-228). This new way of life represents the shifting from the older generation of characters to the new one. Hareton and Catherine will get marry and leave the Heights for the Grange, focusing the geography of their lives on the valley. As they will be owners of both the mansions, their connection with the moors will be in any case preserved.

After having left Wuthering Heights for the last time, Lockwood visits the graves in Gimmerton kirkyard:

> "I sought, and soon discovered, the three head-stones on the slope next to the moor—the middle one grey, and half buried in heath—Edgar Linton's only harmonized by the turf, and moss creeping up its foot—Heathcliff's still bare.
> I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth (Brontë, 2020: 292)."

Along the story the heath has become a sort of leitmotif representing the deep and passionate love for one another.

> "The heath covering the tomb-stones of Catherine, Heathcliff and Linton in the final image of the novel shows Lockwood the traces of a story of human lives that pervade the earth and dissolve into the universal soul, including the layers of the natural and human worlds" (Brazzelli, 2021: 242).

The benign sky is a signal that "the sleepers are in fact at last still" (Dabundo, 2014: 70) and looking at the graves, Lockwood is aware of "coming autumn storms" (Brontë, 2020: 292), a suggestion that strong passions and suffering will cyclically continue permeating this landscape.

2.8. Conclusion

The moors amplify and mirror Heathcliff's and Catherine's extreme feelings, their internal conflicts and their intertwined destinies. The two mansions of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights highlight the great contrast between Nature and culture, impulse and rationality, emphasizing an impossible conciliation of the two realms. For the two protagonists, the moors are a place where they can feel free and escape social norms and conventions. The landscape is at first the setting for their love but then it becomes a space of torment and loneliness.

The gothic atmosphere reinforces the idea of a living force, passing through the limits of visible and invisible and enhances the supernatural presence of Catherine's ghost. The weather too, has a crucial role in the development of the plot and in the manifestation of the characters' emotional states.

In conclusion, Brontë elevates Nature into a central mechanism that drives the narrative and shapes the characters. Through the wild moors, weather phenomena, and contrasting domestic environments, Nature is not only a backdrop but it is a dynamic, omnipresent force. Moreover, the landscape acts as a metaphor for fate and destiny. The moors are timeless, unchanging, and indifferent to human suffering. They provide a place for spiritual return and continuity, even as the characters' lives descend into chaos.

CHAPTER 3

NATURE'S INFLUENCE ON PLOT AND CHARACTERS IN MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*

3.1. Introduction

Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus was mostly written in 1816 in Villa Diodati, on the banks of a lake near Geneva. It is known that its draft is the result of a game that Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, John William Polidori, Claire Clairmont and Mary Shelly decided to play in order to spend the time. That year the climate was cold, wet and dark and it was labelled "the year without summer". The year before indeed, volcano Tambora in Indonesia had erupted and a big and thick cloud had blocked sunlight for more than a year.

The book was firstly published anonymously in 1818 and then published again with the name of the author in 1823. The 1831 edition was changed in some parts and the Arctic frame was added:

> "The first draft has been lost, but according to Mary Shelley's own account in her preface to the 1831 edition, it did not include the Arctic frame at all, but rather jumped right into Victor's first-person narrative with the famous words, 'It was on a dreary night of November'" (Cavell, 2017: 296).

The Arctic scenery represents a structural boundary to the story as the novel starts and ends in the North Pole. Furthermore, "The character Robert Walton […] performs an essential mechanical function in the book as the interlocutor who hears and records Victor's story" (Cavell, 2017: 295). The Arctic frame and the character of Walton were added partially as a critique to the arising 'Arctic fever' which captured the imagination of most British people who started to imagine the North Pole as "a place of terror but also beautiful in a sublime way" (Loomis, 1977: 110). The landscapes mirror the characters' emotional and moral states: the icy and uncanny landscapes of the North Pole represent the isolation that Walton, Frankenstein and the Monster feel. They also instill fear and terror as the ice is perceived as dangerous, treacherous and unstable. The Swiss Alps are both fascinating and dangerous too. Frankenstein is astonished by the majesty of his beloved mountains in Switzerland as well as their imponent Mer de Glace. They are a place of tranquility, a source of solace and the place where Frankenstein faces the Creature and listens to his story and requests.

Nature is not only a restorative agent which comforts and consoles Frankenstein and the Monster, but also overwhelms both of them with its magnificence, power, and vastness, thus suggesting that Nature is not submissive but holds a position of power.

The Monster shares a strong connection with Nature: rejected by both his creator and all the people he meets, he finds a parental figure in Nature; the forest teaches him how to survive and gives him strength and refuge, while the moon mothers him and it is a silent companion in most crucial episodes. Weather phenomena or elements such as thunderstorms, fire and darkness influence the characters' states of mind. Storms in particular foreshadow tragic events linked to the Monster's presence while dark and gloomy atmospheres are instead perfect devices to instill fear and terror in most of the other characters.

Frankenstein and the Monster die in the indifference of Nature which is superior to any kind of human effort to subvert it. Frankenstein's story is a warning about the dangers of going beyond the limits and defying natural order, and Walton, who embodies the spirit of the eighteenth century explorers who want to dominate the untamed Nature in search of glory, understands the dangers of this kind of attitude and turns back before it's too late. It could be argued then, that "In contrast to this terrifying rationality, Shelley offers a return to Nature, the sublime, and humane feelings" (Poorghorban, Taghizadeh, 2004: 11).

Through its profound influence on the characters' inner turmoil and its direct impact on the narrative, Nature emerges as a powerful force within the plot, both nurturing and restorative, yet also menacing and threatening.

3.2. Nature vs Science

3.2.1. The thirst of knowledge

According to Andrew Smith, Victor Frankenstein and Robert Walton personify the eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophers who promoted the belief that Nature was ordered, rational and governed by universal laws (See Smith, 2007). As children of the Enlightenment ideas of exploring new territories and pursuing forbidden knowledge, Walton's expedition to reach the North Pole mirrors Frankenstein's scientific quest to create life from death. Driven by such an excessive ambition, both Frankenstein and Walton get more and more isolated. Frankenstein, in particular, spends months in his laboratory in Ingolstadt sewing pieces of dead bodies in order to create a monster. When asked to create a female companion for the Creature, he isolates himself in a house on a deserted Scottish island, a place that imprisons him both physically and emotionally. Meanwhile, he interrupts any sort of social interaction with both his family and friends. His rejection of human relationships clouds his judgement and his

ability to think rationally. He is so focused on his missions that he doesn't even notice time passing. Indeed:

> "The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never id the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature" (Shelley, 2008: 55).

Having nothing left to save, Frankenstein follows his Creature in the icy landscapes of the North Pole in order to kill him. His body, however, is not used to cold climate and when he is rescued on Walton's vessel, "His limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering" (Shelley, 2008: 25). As soon as Frankenstein understands that Walton's expedition mirrors his own quest, he immediately warns him: "Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me, –let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips" (Shelley, 2008: 28).
The intense isolation he experiences in this desolate landscape mirrors his psychological state: he is lonely, cut off from society and tormented by guilt. In a context with no external distractions, he is forced to reflect on his ambition and to reconsiders his choices. From this perspective, the Arctic becomes a sort of purgatory to him. In listening to his story, Walton understands that pursuing glory and knowledge can lead to madness and self-destruction, as it has happened to Frankenstein. Walton then eventually turns back and his decision can be interpreted as a sort of moral redemption and a decision to value human life over a possible glory.

3.2.2. No forgiveness for Frankenstein

"Shelley's work aims to unveil the resistance of Nature against the voracious, imperialist, and dominating tendencies of man" (Poorghorban, Taghizadeh, 2004: 4) as Nature expresses its disapproval towards Frankenstein's actions in different circumstances. For instance, after having created the Monster, Frankenstein falls asleep. In his dream, which is actually a nightmare, he tries to kiss his beloved Elizabeth but she suddenly turns into the corpse of his dead mother. One interpretation of this dream could be that Victor has unconsciously realized that he has corrupted Nature in its purest form and that from now on his relationship with mother Nature is broken. To further punish his ambition, "Nature denies to Victor Frankenstein both mental and physical health" (Mellor, 1996: 282):

> "My enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety, and I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favourite employment. Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree" (Shelley, 2008: 56).

Later, Frankenstein is stricken by nervous fevers that confine him to bed for several weeks. He is tormented by anxiety, deliriums and, eventually, madness: "Every thought that was devoted to it [the Monster] was an extreme anguish, and every word that I spoke in allusion to it caused my lips to quiver and my heart to palpitate" (Shelley, 2008: 158-159).

Frankenstein is unconsciously aware of his second transgression against Nature when he accepts the Monster's request to create a female monster and, for this reason, he waits until the moon is "overspread by a thick cloud" (Shelley, 2008: 171) to throw away in the sea the remains of the female creature he has been working on. He seems to know that Nature is looking at him and he is indirectly terrified of being chastised again.

Even when Nature seems to restore or aid Frankenstein, it actually betrays him. For instance, Frankenstein and Elizabeth delight in seeing the "snowy mountains" and the "innumerable fish that are swimming in the clear waters" (Shelley, 2008: 165-166) on their wedding day but, as soon as the sun sets on, the peaceful scenery seems to be a mockery and a trap. Nature has plotted against Victor and Elizabeth is murdered by the Monster under the "pale yellow light of the moon" (Shelley, 2008: 196). Victor observes the Creature pointing the finger at the corpse of Elizabeth before jumping in the lake and disappear as fast as a lightning, so it appears that Mother Nature acts as an irritated mother and uses her adopted "son" to destroy Victor. Moreover, Victor is always teased into thinking that he is close to capturing the Monster while chasing him across the North Pole. After having used the Monster to sustain him by putting food on his path and by leaving footprints to guide him, Nature itself stops Victor from reaching the Creature. He is kept alive and helped along by the Monster only to be teased and taunted by the failure that inevitably ensues.

Despite the evident disapproval of Nature, it seems that Victor has only superficially learnt his lesson. He makes claims such as "revenge kept me alive" (Shelley, 2008: 201) and asks Walton to continue his mission in case he will perish before having completed it. Furthermore, he even makes a plea to the spirits of Nature to aid him in his quest:

> "I knelt on the grass, and I kissed the earth, and with quivering lips exclaimed, 'By the sacred earth on which I kneel, by the shades that wander near me, by the deep and eternal grief that I feel, I swear; and by thee, O Night, and the spirits that preside over thee, to purse the daemon, who caused this misery, until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict. For this purpose, I will preserve my life: to execute this dear revenge, will I again behold the sun, and tread the green herbage of the earth, which otherwise should vanish from my eyes forever. And I call on you, spirits of the dead; and on you, wandering ministers of vengeance, to aid and conduct me in my work" (Shelley, 2008: 202).

Finally, Frankenstein's obsession eventually exposes him to such mental and physical fatigue that he dies at the age of twenty-five. The Arctic represents the physical and metaphorical end of Victor's life. He dies alone, in the middle of nowhere. The ice surrounding him mirrors his internal emotional state: he feels abandoned, misunderstood, and tormented. Nature witnesses his death with an impassive attitude which is majestic yet deadly, indifferent to human suffering.

3.2.3. Nature as a restorative agent

Shelley uses Nature as a restorative agent for most of the characters, especially Frankenstein. "Nature is therapeutic since, although it has not the power to heal his emotional injuries, it is a way for him to evade his pain" (González Rodríguez, 2018: 17). The healing power of Nature can be observed when Victor claims: "These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving" (Shelley, 2008: 96).

Shelley starts from the very beginning of the novel to use natural metaphors to describe Victor's love for Nature:

> "I feel exquisite pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind, and changed its bright visions of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self ... I find it arise, like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost forgotten sources; but swelling as it proceeded, it became the torrent which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys" (Shelley, 2008: 38).

In this passage, Frankenstein compares the passion for science to a mountain river which at first seems calm and harmless but it is actually a devasting force which brings him pain and sorrows.

After the Monster's escape, Victor symbolically recovers from his illness when he sees small buds replacing the leaves fallen down the trees. Spring indeed "contributed greatly to my

convalescence. I felt also sentiments of joy and affection revive in my bosom; my gloom disappeared, and in a short time I became as cheerful as before I was attacked by the fatal passion" (Shelley, 2008: 62).

The moment his brother William has been murdered by the Creature and Justine, the family's servant, is about to be condemned for the crime, Victor falls in despair. His friend Henry tries to comfort him, but in vain. On the contrary, it is Nature which "heals him and allows him to maintain his sanity"[6] while travelling back to Geneva to his family:

> "I remained two days at Lausanne, in this painful state of mind. I contemplated the lake: the waters were placid; all around was calm, and the snowy mountains, 'the palaces of nature,' were not changed. By degrees the calm and heavenly scene restored me, and I continued my journey towards Geneva" (Shelley, 2008: 74).

Frankenstein searches for relief in Nature, which becomes "his personal therapy when he undergoes torment or stress"[7] and not in social relationships which, on the contrary, seem to bother him:

> "About this time we retired to our house at Belrive. This change was particularly agreeable to me. The shutting of the gates regularly at ten o'clock, and the impossibility of remaining on the lake after that hour, had rendered our residence within the walls of Geneva very irksome to me. I was now free. Often, after the rest of the family had retired for the night, I took the boat, and passed many hours upon the water" (Shelley, 2018: 91).

Frankenstein is upset because in Geneva he can't wander in Nature as long as he would like to. Living in Geneva is described to be "irksome" while Belrive allows him to go to the lake alone and spend some time on the water while the rest of his family is sleeping. Victor's father suggests him to marry his cousin Elizabeth, because he believes that love will cure his son and assumes it is companionship that Victor lacks. After the wedding, Elizabeth sees Victor in pain and tries to cheer him resorting to Nature to make him forget about his fatalities:

[6] See Ames, Williams. "On Nature in *Frankenstein*". *The Poet's Forum*, The Poet Forum, www.poetsforum.com/papers/222_1.html

[7] Ibidem

> "Observe how fast we move along, and how the clouds which sometimes obscure, and sometimes rise above the dome of Mont Blanc, render this scene of beauty still more interesting. Look also at the innumerable fish that are swimming in the clear waters, where we can distinguish every pebble that lies at the bottom. What a divine day! How happy and serene all nature appears!" (Shelley, 2008:193).

Nevertheless, this time Victor is too desperate to get solace from Nature as he is perfectly aware of the warning of the Creature to "be with him on his wedding night" (Shelley, 2008:168). His thoughts are so focused on the Monster that he has become blind to the beauty of Nature.

3.3. Emotional Landscapes

3.3.1. The sublime Arctic

As claimed by Greenwood, "The Arctic has traditionally been represented as a sublimely terrifying geographical space in Gothic literature" (Greenwood, 2023: 63). Before leaving, Walton describes the Arctic using a language infused with "Romantic fervour" (Bowers, 2017: 6). The Arctic is indeed portrayed as a "country of eternal light", a "country of beauty and delight" where "the sun is forever visible; its broad disk just skirting the horizon and diffusing perpetual splendour", and where "snow and frost are banished" (Shelley, 2008:15). Walton's positive image of the icy landscape relies on his thirst of conquest of a place which is unknown and, as a consequence, fascinating: "I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and my tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man" (Shelley, 2008: 16). His ambition is also supported by the idea of "the inestimable benefit" which he "shall confer on all mankind to the last generation" (Shelley, 2008: 16). However, once left in the direction of the North Pole, he looks for the favour of the weather conditions instead of focusing on possible dangers that may occur:

> "The floating sheets of ice that continually pass us, indicating the dangers of the region towards which we are advancing, appear to dismay them. We have already reached a very high latitude; but it is the height of summer, and although not so warm as in England, the southern gales, which blow us speedily towards those shores which I so ardently desire to attain, breathe a degree of renovating warmth which I had not expected" (Shelley, 2008: 22).

Nevertheless, his idyllic idea of polar Nature dramatically changes once facing the icy vast landscape of the North Pole. As Vijay Mishra observes, there is a change of perspective in Walton's description of the Pole where "awe turns to terror as his ship in engulfed by ice, and identifies this shift as the juncture in which the Arctic becomes yet another sublime" (Mishra, 1994: 214). Once surrounded by ice, Walton and his crew see it cracking and then forming mountains. Since ice "seems to be alive" (Bowers, 2017: 5), they feel "shut by ice", surrounded by "vast and irregular plains of ice which seemed to have no end" (Shelley, 2008: 23). Consequently, feelings of terror and "anxious thoughts" (Shelley, 2008: 24) start to spread among them. Ice becomes then treacherous, dangerous and mortal. Even when it breaks before the end of the day, they prefer waiting until the morning to leave, fearing to encounter other mountains of ice which could crush the vessel. Frankenstein tries in vain to minimize these dangers, transforming "these vast mountains of ice" in "mole-hills" (Shelley, 2008: 213). Nevertheless, most comrades are still on the verge of mutiny because of the fear, the despair and the excessive cold which has already killed a lot of men. Moreover, most of them are afraid that "if, as was possible, the ice should dissipate, and a free passage be opened, I [Walton] should be rash enough to continue my voyage, and lead them into fresh dangers, after they might happily have surmounted this" (Shelley, 2008: 214). Interestingly enough, when the ice finally cracks, it is driven northwards by the wind, leaving "the passage towards the south perfectly free" (Shelley, 2008: 216), as if Nature is suggesting Walton not to pursue his quest and instead come back home.

The encounter with the Monster takes place in the Arctic. Walton's crew have already seen him but, despite technological tools on the vessel, they have only seen that he has "the shape of a man" and that he is very fast. Further reinforcing the idea of this mysterious presence, the Creature disappears into the icy darkness, heading northward. Another element of terror and anxiety emerges as "in all Arctic exploration there was a sense of crossing an ontological boundary into a non-historical realm" (McCorristine, 2016: 150). McCorristine refers to the "perceived atemporality of polar space". Although Walton precisely records the dates as a common practice of explorers at the time, the reader doesn't know when the letters have been read. His records could have been remained undiscovered for a long time, maybe even after Walton's death, and this hypothesis "creates an uncanny space that blurs the boundaries between life and death" (Bowers, 2017: 13).

3.3.2. The sublime mountains

The mountains, with their glaciers so vast to be compared to a "Mer de Glace", emphasize the smallness of humanity and the uncontrollable force of the natural world. Edmund Burke suggested that their "greatness of dimension […] vastness of extent, or quantity, has the most striking effect" (Burke, 1823: 97) in summoning the paradoxical combination of terror and delight so integral to the elevated emotional state of the sublime.
Frankenstein has always admired the mountains in his birthplace, showing respect, reverence and affection to them:

> "I discovered more distinctly the black sides of Jura, and the bright summit of Mont Blanc; I wept like a child: 'Dear mountains! My own beautiful lake! How do you welcome your wanderer? Your summits are clear; the sky and lake are blue and placid'" (Shelley, 2008: 74-75).

The isolated Swiss mountains are described with a language of the "grandeur, the superlative, and speculative" (Stewart, 2023: 31), full of adjectives and sensorial words:

> "The surface is very uneven, rising like the waves of a troubled sea, descending low, and interspersed by rifts that sink deep [...] the opposite mountain is a bare perpendicular rock. From the side where I now stood Montanvert was exactly opposite [...] and above it rose Mont Blanc, in awful majesty. I remained in a recess of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and stupendous scene" (Shelley, 2008: 98).

Shelley's depiction of Mont Blanc and the surrounding landscape merges awe, terror, and moral intensity, creating a complex interplay of ecological and psychological effects. The uneven terrain, "rising like the waves of a troubled sea" and "interspersed by rifts that sink deep," evokes the Ecosublime, inspiring wonder and reverence for Nature's vastness while emphasizing humanity's smallness and lack of control. At the same time, the "bare perpendicular rock" and the narrator's position in a secluded recess reflect the Ecogothic, highlighting the eerie, uncanny qualities of the environment and its capacity to mirror inner turmoil, isolation, and moral reflection. Finally, Mont Blanc's "awful majesty" generates ecophobic anxiety, provoking fear and a sense of vulnerability in the face of the untamed, potentially hostile wilderness. Together, these perspectives show how Shelley's natural landscapes function as spaces that are simultaneously beautiful, threatening, and morally

resonant, shaping human perception and emotional experience in ways that blend ecological consciousness with Gothic intensity.

As suggested in the following passage, the grandeur of mountains has also a restorative effect on Frankenstein. The sublime landscape offers Victor temporary peace and spiritual renewal:

> "I remembered the effect that the view of the tremendous and ever-moving glacier had produced upon my mind when I first saw it. It had then filled me with a sublime ecstasy [sic] that gave wings to the soul, and allowed it to soar from the obscure world to light and joy. The sight of the awful and majestic in nature had indeed always the effect of solemnizing my mind, and causing me to forget the passing cares of life" (Shelley, 2008: 97).

Climbing alone not to "destroy the solitary grandeur of the scene" (Shelley, 2008: 97), Victor allows himself a moment of peace: "My heart, which was before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy" (Shelley, 2008: 98).

Indeed, as suggested by Brazzelli, the glacier is a "sito di purificazione, […] spazio di fuga dai limiti della civiltà e dalle sue imposizioni" (Brazzelli, 2017: 83). Therefore, Victor's climb can be interpreted as a search for moral clarity after experiencing a sense of guilt. However, his contemplative meditation is broken by the sight of a figure "advancing towards [him] with superhuman strength" (Shelley, 2008: 98). The Monster can withstand cold climate and can easily move on that impervious territory. The Creature's physical abilities are also shown during Frankenstein's permanence at the place where William has been killed. Frankenstein sees the Monster in the flash of a thunderstorm, suddenly realizing that he is William's murder. He watches him climbing to the top of a mountain:

> "I thought of pursuing the devil; but it would have been in vain, for another flash discovered him to me hanging among the rocks of the nearly perpendicular ascent of Mont Salève, a Hill that bounds Plainpalais on the south. He soon reached the summit, and disappeared" (Shelley, 2008: 79).

It can be inferred that, despite its beauty, the mountain impresses on Frankenstein "his own powerlessness" (Randel, 1984: 525), an evident reminder that limits of Nature can never be surpassed.

3.3.3. The Creature: a voyage of discovery

Immediately rejected by his creator, the Creature can be considered a newborn who is not able to understand natural phenomena and, for this reason, feels "confused, disoriented and vulnerable" (González Rodríguez, 2018: 19). His life turns to be a voyage of discovery of himself and of Nature since the moment he escapes in the forest near Ingolstadt. There, he experiences isolation and abandonment for the first time: "I was a poor, hopeless, miserable wretch, I knew, and could distinguish, nothing; but, feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat down and wept" (Shelley, 2008: 103).

Even if the first encounter with Nature is not positive, in the forest he finds refuge, solace and rest. As underlined by Brazzelli, even if the forest is a dangerous place, it is also "il luogo di opportunità e trasformazione. Come luogo di passaggio, la foresta immette in una nuova vita, e permette la migliore comprensione di sé e del mondo" (Brazzelli, 2017: 63). In contrast with human cruelty, Nature is actually kind and nurturing. It can be asserted that Nature replaces the Monster's absent parental figure. The moon in particular mothers him. Once awake, the darkness and the cold make him cry but suddenly a "gentle light stole over the heavens, and gave him a sensation of pleasure" (Shelley, 2008:103). This wonderful moon "enlightened his path", helping him finding food.

Although Nature is not as restorative for the Monster as it is for Frankenstein, it provokes in the Creature a feeling of relief. Besides, thanks to the positive influence of Nature he temporarily forgets about his creator's rejection. As long as time passes, the Monster starts enjoying even minor natural elements such as the songs of the birds, the flowers and the trees. Spring and summer, in particular, brings him happiness:

> "Spring advanced rapidly; the weather became fine, and the skies cloudless. It surprised me, that what before was desert and gloomy should now bloom with the most beautiful flowers and verdure. My senses were gratified and refreshed by a thousand scents of delight, and a thousand sights of beauty" (Shelley, 2008: 116).

Autumn and winter, on the contrary, bring him sadness along with cold and wet, and the snow makes the country desolated: "Nature decayed around me, and the sun became heatless; rain and snow poured around me; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface of the earth was hard and chill, and bare, and I found no shelter" (Shelley, 2008:139-140).

The Monster understands that Nature is helping him and that can be used to survive: the streams supply him with water and trees with shadow, fire can produce heat and light but can cause pain as well, and darkness allows him to wander with a little danger to be seen by humans.

If on the one hand Nature is a gentle teacher for the Monster, on the other it also forces him to confront with reality. He realizes how ugly he is and why people are so scared by his image while seeing for the first time his face "reflected in water, or his shadow in the moonshine, even as that frail image and that inconstant shade" (Shelley, 2008: 131). Furthermore, Nature increases his sadness when, rejected by the old De Lacey, in the forest "the cold stars shone in mockery, and the bare trees waved their branches above him: now and then the sweet voice of a bird burst forth amidst the universal stillness. All, save him, were at rest or in enjoyment" (Shelley, 2008: 136). The sadness experienced turns into uncontrollable anger. Right before taking revenge on the De Lacey family, the Creature describes how a mysterious wind starts to blow up and makes him feel uncontrollably outraged:

> "As the night advanced, a fierce wind arose from the woods, and quickly dispersed the clouds that had loitered in the heavens: the blast tore along like a mighty avalanche, and produced a kind of insanity in my spirits, that burst all bounds of reason and reflection. I lighted the dry branch of a tree, and danced with fury around the devoted cottage, my eyes still fixed on the western horizon, the edge of which the moon nearly touched (...) The wind fanned the fire, and the cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it, and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues" (Shelley, 2008: 138-139).

In this passage, "Nature does not provide the Creature with restoration and tranquility, but rather it encourages the Creature to hysterically set the family's cottage on fire" (González Rodríguez, 2018: 20).

In his voyage of discovery of Nature, the Monster changes his attitude towards it from his birth to the end of the novel. "The first part of the Creature's narrative contains several references to suffering from the cold, but elsewhere he is presented as impervious to it, thus gaining a symbolically charged affinity with the realms of ice" (Cavell, 2017: 301). As a matter of fact, after a short period of difficulty, the Monster is then able to climb mountains rapidly and easily. He also threatens Victor, asking him to follow him towards the North Pole: "Follow me," entices the Monster, "I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive" (Shelley, 2008: 204).

Despite his ability to resist cold, fatigue and hunger, the isolation of the Arctic mirrors the Creature's loneliness as he has been abandoned by his own creator and rejected by the entire society. His final monologue expresses deep sorrow and regret and the Arctic becomes the final refuge of his misunderstood existence.

3.4. The weather

3.4.1. The power of light: thunderstorms and fire

In the novel light is used to symbolize discovery, knowledge and purification while darkness represents ignorance, fear and uncertainty. "The different kinds of light, which change from bright and warm to bleak and dark, set a sad emotional tone for the novel, and also reveal the tragic fate of the characters and the darkness deep inside" (Lu & Zhang, 2023: 40). Thunderstorms and lightnings have a significant role for Frankenstein starting from his adolescence in Belrive:

> "We witnessed a most violent and terrible thunder-storm. It advanced from behind the mountain of Jura; and the thunder burst at once with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens. I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump" (Shelley, 2008: 40-41).

From this moment on, Frankenstein decides to become a scientist and the idea of electricity as a motive power will ultimately result in his "infus[ing] a spark of being" (Shelley, 2008: 57) into his Creature on a dreary night of November. The harsh weather reflects Victor's fear and dread while giving life to a non-human creature and symbolizes the unnaturalness of his experiments. "The 'watery clouded eyes of the Monster' (Shelley, 2008: 57), as well as his recurring appearances during periods of rain and storm, reinforce an association between the Creature and the weather that reflects his weird climatological origins" (Mayer, 2018: 231). Thunderstorms are so fascinating for Frankenstein to be described with a precise language full of details:

> "I quitted my seat, and walked on, although the darkness and storm increased every minute, and the thunder burst with a terrific crash over my head. It was echoed from

> Salêve, the Juras, and the Alps of Savoy; vivid flashes of lightning dazzled my eyes, illuminating the lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire; then for an instant everything seemed of a pitchy darkness, until the storm recovered itself from the preceding flash. The storm, as is often the case in Switzerland, appeared at once in various parts of the heavens. The most violent storm hung exactly north of the town, over that part of the lake which lies between the promontory of Belrive and the village of Copêt.
>
> Another storm enlightened Jura with faint flashes; and another darkened and sometimes disclosed the Môle, a peaked mountain to the east of the lake" (Shelley 2008: 75-76).

What is interesting about this storm is the sudden appearance of the Monster:

> "A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy demon, to whom I had given life" (Shelley, 2008: 76).

Since the lightening makes him visible to Victor, it is as if the storm is responsible for the Creature's existence.

By the end of the novel, the same lightning which inspired him with his scientific ventures is now used to describe how Victor feels: "But I am a blasted tree; the bolt has entered my soul; and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit, what I shall soon cease to be – a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity, pitiable to others, and abhorrent to myself" (Shelley, 2008: 160).

While lightening is used in reference to knowledge and power, fire has both a purifying and a destructive effect in the plot. One day the Monster finds a fire left by some wandering beggars but he doesn't know what it is. Fire gives him heat and light, and allows him to cook food. Getting closer, the heat of the flames makes him feel "overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it" (Shelley, 2008: 104). Even if the Monster gets burnt, he is attracted by the idea that "the same cause should produce such opposite effects" (Shelley, 2018: 104). Indeed, according to the Monster, fire is both dangerous and fascinating. The destructive force of the fire is shown in two key episodes. The lightning which hits an oak tree when Frankenstein is fifteen years old is so powerful that "the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump… I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed" (Shelley, 2008:

41). Similarly, after having been rejected by the De Lacey family, the Monster decides to set fire to their cottage. It "was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it and licked it with their forked and destroying tongues" (Shelley, 2008: 139).

At the end of the novel, fire is also used as a purifying instrument. As his creator has died, the Monster has nothing left but die as well. He chooses to do it by self-immolation as in the Ancient Greece: "I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult in the agony of the torturing flames" (Shelley, 2008: 223). The agony he wants to die in seems to represent a sort of purgatory, a punishment for all the crimes he has committed in life.

3.4.2. Darkness and gloomy atmospheres

As suggested by González Rodríguez, "Nature in the novel intensifies the passages in which terrifying events take place" (González Rodríguez, 2018: 9). Gloomy and dark atmospheres appear to be a constant presence which anticipates a tragic event. For instance, when the Monster is created, "it was on a dreary night" and "the rain pattered dismally against the panes" (Shelley, 2008: 57). From this moment on, storms are used to reveal in advance the Monster's presence to Frankenstein. According to González Rodríguez, storms are elements of the sublime for several reasons which can all be found in the novel and that create tension and terror in Frankenstein:

> "First, storms fill the sky with darkness, which is a terrible privation. Second, although they cause obscurity, their lightnings illuminate the objects for a very short period of time. Thus, our eyes only receive a slight piece of information about what surrounds us, what makes our imagination complete the image" (González Rodríguez, 2018: 10).

Furthermore, the noise of the thunder and of the rain falling down "overpower the soul, to suspend its action, and to fill it with terror" (Burke, 1823: 115). As soon as the Creature disappears, the storm gives place to a calmer atmosphere. This shift in weather reflects the shift from anxiety and terror perceived by Frankenstein to calmness and tranquility.

Gloomy atmospheres manifest the power of Nature to punish those who transgress its boundaries. On their wedding night, for instance, Elizabeth and Frankenstein are caught by a strong wind and a heavy storm before the Monster's arrival. Similarly, Walton and his crew understand that "Our situation was somewhat dangerous, especially as we were compassed round by a very thick fog" (Shelley, 2008: 23). The dense fog doesn't allow the crew to see what is happening around them, instilling terror and fear in their thoughts. When the Creature decides to set the De Lacey's cottage on fire,

> “As the night advanced, a fierce wind arose from the woods, and quickly dispersed the clouds that had loitered in the heavens: the blast tore along like a mighty avalanche, and produced a kind of insanity in my spirits, that burst all bounds of reason and reflection” (Shelley, 2008: 138).

The wind seems to support the Creature’s intentions as it “fanned the fire” (Shelley, 2008: 139). Finally, when Frankenstein decides to throw away the parts of the female creature in the sea, he is caught by a fierce wind and from high waves that make him think about death:

> "I might be driven into the wide Atlantic, and feel all the tortures of starvation, or be swallowed up in the immeasurable waters that roared and buffeted around me. I... felt the torment of a burning thirst… I looked upon the sea, it was to be my grave" (Shelley, 2008: 172).

3.4.3. The mothering and tormenting moon

The moon is another sublime element in the novel which has a double function: it has a mothering attitude towards the Monster and it is a source of torment for Frankenstein. It has always been present in Frankenstein’s life since the birth of the Creature. While Frankenstein is experimenting, “the moon gazed on his midnight labors, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness” (Shelley, 2008: 54). Its presence symbolizes the observing and judging presence of Nature.

The moon continues to impede his experiments as shown when Frankenstein accepts the Monster’s request to create him a companion. There is no longer the guide of the sun which has always given him strength. The dim light of the moon, instead, forces him to question himself about his intentions:

> “I sat one evening in my laboratory; the sun has set, and the moon was just rising from the sea; I had not sufficient light for my employment, and I remained idle, in a pause of consideration of whether I should leave me labour for the night, or hasten its conclusion by an unremitting attention to it” (Shelley, 2008: 165).

In addition, while throwing away the pieces of the female creature, the moon “which had before been clear, was suddenly overspread by a thick cloud” (Shelley, 2008: 171), as it doesn’t want to see his second attempt to go against natural laws.

The moon illuminates the Creature whenever the two characters happen to be in the same place and forces Frankenstein to see him like a "devil that he abhors. Nature is showing the Creature to Frankenstein in its true light, something unnatural that never should have occurred" (Worth, 2014: 3). Indeed, it is thanks to the moonlight that "By the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable Monster whom I Created" (Shelley, 2008: 58). The presence of the moonlight allows Frankenstein to see actions which would be unknown without any kind of light. As a matter of fact, "The light of the moon makes the evil cannot be hidden, but the weakness of the moonlight makes the uncovering of the evil fall into the dead silence" (Lu & Zhang, 2023: 42).

"In Frankenstein, the imagery of the moon also appears several times as a dark thread that is coterminous with the storyline and has the importance of foreshadowing the development of the story" (Lu & Zhang, 2023: 43). The light of the moon always highlights the presence of the Monster as it happens on Victor's first weeding night: "I trembled, and my heart failed within me; when, on looking up, I saw, by the light of the moon, the demon at the casement" (Shelley, 2008: 166). While in the chamber with Elizabeth:

> "I [Frankenstein] happened to look up. The windows of the room had before been darkened, and I felt a kind of panic on seeing the pale-yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber. The shutters had been thrown back; and, with a sensation of horror not to be described, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred" (Shelley, 2008: 196).

The torment provoked by the presence of the Monster revealed by moonlight continues when Frankenstein is at the cemetery and he hears a scornful laugh coming from behind and which is reechoed by the mountains. Looking for the source of that sound, Frankenstein sees the Monster: "Suddenly the broad disk of the moon aroused, and shone full upon his ghastly and distorted shape, as he fled with more than mortal speed" (Shelly, 2008: 203).

While the moon is actually torturing Frankenstein causing him fear and terror, it has, on the contrary, a mothering effect on the Monster. As "The moon is considered to be a companion and an important spiritual support for human beings" (Shen, 2021: 24), the same does it for the Monster, even if he is artificially created. Having been rejected by both his creator and by people, he finds refuge in the forest and he is delighted by the moonlight as it is "The only object that I could distinguish" (Shelley, 2008: 103). As the first point of reference found in Nature, the moon metaphorically becomes a light in the Monster's heart: it embraces him in

gentle silence and gives him strength, peace and tranquility in the darkness. It also becomes a point of reference to signal the time passing. As soon as the Monster gets used to the presence of the moon, he starts noticing how it gradually fades as its size diminishes: "several changes of day and night passed, and the orb of night had greatly lessened" (Shelley, 2008: 103).

To conclude, in *Frankenstein* the moon embodies both judgment and consolation. It exposes Victor to the consequences of his ambition, illuminating the Monster and provoking fear and moral reckoning, while simultaneously offering the Creature comfort, guidance, and a maternal presence in a hostile world. This dual role underscores Nature's power to both nurture and punish, revealing the intertwined fates of creator and creation. Through lunar imagery, Shelley emphasizes that the natural world reflects and shapes human experience, illuminating both terror and solace.

3.5. Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder

While the novel seems to condemn people who try to go beyond natural limits, at the same time it promotes a more respectful attitude towards its power and greatness. This attitude is personified in the characters of Henry Clerval, Elizabeth Lavenza and Ernest Frankenstein. While Victor Frankenstein is brought to madness as a sort of punishment for his actions, "Those characters capable of feeling the beauties of Nature are rewarded with physical and mental health" (Mellor, 2017: 244). Even if respectful and grateful of little natural things, both Henry and Elizabeth are victims of the Monster's thirst of vengeance whereas Ernest, Victor's brother, is the only survivor of Frankenstein's family. In the first edition of *Frankenstein,* he is the only member of the family to reject the career of lawyer in order to become a farmer. In other words, he renounces a career in the field of culture for a job in touch with Nature. It is Elizabeth who informs Victor about his brother's choice:

> "I proposed that he should be a farmer... A farmer's is a very healthy happy life; and the least hurtful, or rather the most beneficial profession of any. My uncle [wanted him] educated as an advocate ... but... it is certainly more creditable to cultivate the earth for the sustenance of man, than to be the confidant, and sometimes the accomplice, of his vices" (Shelley, 2008: 59).

Describing Elizabeth's passion for Nature, Frankenstein underlines how she is impressed by very small things:

> "In the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home—the sublime shapes of the mountains; the changes of the seasons; tempest and calm; the silence of winter and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers—she found ample scope for admiration and delight" (Shelley, 2008: 36).

Henry Clerval's relationship to Nature represents one moral touchstone in the novel. "Because he 'loved with ardour' 'the scenery of external nature'" (Shelley, 2008: 156), he is endowed with a generous sympathy, a vivid imagination, a sensitive intelligence, and an unbounded capacity for devoted friendship" (Mellor, 2017: 244). Instead of Frankenstein who looks for isolation and loneliness, Clerval is described as a man whose "dream was to become one among those names recorded in story as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species" (Shelley, 2008: 38). The differences between the two friends are underlined by Frankenstein himself:

> "How great was the contrast between us! He was alive (...), joyful when he saw the beauties of the setting sun (...). He pointed out to me the shifting colours of the landscape, and the appearances of the sky. 'This is what it is to live,' he cried, 'how I enjoy existence'" (Shelley, 2008: 154).

According to González Rodríguez, "It is undeniable that landscape is employed by Mary Shelley as a mean of intensifying the distinction between the characters' opposed personalities" (González Rodríguez, 2018: 16). The two characters indeed, react differently to Nature. As Braida highlights, Frankenstein's "description, introduced as direct speech, expresses his impression of the landscape through the language of sensibility and the passions, namely, through the use of adjectives and verbs that express a feeling, rather than a pictorial quality" (Braida, 2016: 29):

> "The mountains of Switzerland are more majestic and strange; but there is a charm in the banks of this divine river, that I never before saw equalled. [...] Oh, surely, the spirit that inhabits and guards this place has a soul more in harmony with man, than those who pile the glacier, or retire to the inaccessible peaks of the mountains of our own country" (Shelley, 2008: 156).

For Clerval, instead, the landscape is a “living entity endowed with a ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ separated from the human mind and yet in harmony with it” (Braida, 2016: 30). Indeed, in Clerval's company Victor becomes again

> “The same happy creature who, a few years ago, loved and beloved by all, had no sorrow or care. When happy, inanimate Nature had the power of bestowing on me the most delightful sensations. A serene sky and verdant fields filled me [Victor] with ecstasy” (Shelley, 2008: 70).

Even Frankenstein, in his moments of tranquility or youthful innocence, can actually respond powerfully to the glory of Nature. As Walton notes in a letter addressed to his sister Margaret, "the starry sky, the sea, and every sight afforded by these wonderful regions, seems still to have the power of elevating his soul from earth" (Shelley, 2008: 29).

3.6. Conclusion

Reflecting Romantic influences, Shelley portrays Nature as a sublime and powerful force which is both beautiful and terrifying. It is a restorative force which offers solace and comfort to both the Creature and Frankenstein. The sublime settings offer Frankenstein a momentarily reconnection with beauty and Nature. They give him solace from anxiety and despair. Similarly, the Creature, abandoned and unloved, finds his early joy in Nature. However, his relationship with Nature highlights the contrast between beauty and despair, solitude and suffering. Indeed, Nature mothers him and gently accompanies him in the discovery of the natural world but it cannot always have a curative effect and the two protagonists are involved in a cycle of violence and vengeance.

Weather phenomena have a crucial influence in the development of the plot and in representing the characters’ inner turmoil. Lightening is used as a symbol of the destructive power of knowledge. Fire as well has a devastating effect but it can also be an instrument of purification and a device for surviving the darkness of the forest. The moonlight is both mothering towards the Creature and torturing towards Frankenstein.

Nature symbolically mirrors the characters’ state of mind. For instance, spring and summer suggest hope and renewal while autumn and winter represent coldness and isolation. Likewise, Victor’s pursuit of the Creature takes him across the North to the Arctic, a desolate and frozen setting which represents the emotional and moral barrenness of both the characters.

Shelley's final setting serves as a reminder of human vulnerability and emphasizes the dangers of unchecked ambition. Robert Walton's journey into the frozen North parallels Victor's own, and Nature ultimately defeats them. Nature becomes therefore an agent of judgment, who can support characters who venerate it or punish people who try to go beyond natural limits. Shelley's portrayal of the natural world as a sublime, unforgiving, and judging force, embodies the Romantic belief of a Nature that can both fascinate and destroy.

In conclusion, Gothic Nature in *Frankenstein* is not merely a setting. Instead, it is alive and supports the narrative influencing both the characters and the plot. Shelley uses sublime beauty and terror to explore the dangers of ambition, the pain of isolation, and the limits of human power. In doing so, she designs a Gothic setting that is as psychologically and deeply complex as the characters who wander in it.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the evolution of Nature's representation—from Romanticism to the Gothic and, ultimately, to the Ecogothic—reveals a profound shift in how literature conceptualizes the relationship between humanity and the natural world. What begins in Romanticism as a source of solace, transcendence, and self-reflection gradually transforms into a far more complex and unsettling force: one that defies human control and exposes the limitations of anthropocentric thought. Through frameworks such as pastoral, wilderness, the Gothic, Ecophobia, and the Ecosublime, literature traces a trajectory from idealization to anxiety, from harmony to entanglement, and from passive backdrop to active ecological agency.

This progression is vividly embodied in *Wuthering Heights* and *Frankenstein*, where Nature ceases to serve merely as scenery but becomes a dynamic force shaping narrative structure, character development, and thematic complexity. In Emily Brontë's novel, the moors operate as both Ecosublime and Ecogothic spaces, embodying freedom and threat, vitality and desolation. They dissolve the boundaries between inner and outer worlds, mirroring and amplifying the passions of Heathcliff and Catherine while exerting their own autonomous influence, revealing the intricate interdependence of human identity and environment. The contrast between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange underscores the tension between untamed Nature and imposed cultural order, ultimately demonstrating the impossibility of fully reconciling these opposing forces. The moors, in their vastness and indifference, resist domestication, exposing the limitations of rational control and positioning human experience as inseparable from the ecological systems that shape and unsettle it.

Similarly, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* presents Nature as sublime, dynamic, and often punitive—a force operating beyond human authority. While it offers moments of consolation and beauty to both Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, it ultimately reveals its inability to fully heal or redeem human suffering. Instead, Nature becomes a space where ambition, isolation, and moral transgression are magnified. The novel's shifting landscapes—from the restorative landscapes of Switzerland to the desolate expanses of the Arctic—chart a movement from temporary harmony to complete estrangement, culminating in a confrontation with the limits of human power. In Shelley's narrative, Nature assumes an almost judicial role, rewarding reverence while punishing transgression, and thereby reinforcing the dangers of unchecked scientific ambition and the consequences of attempting to surpass natural boundaries.

Across both texts, forests, moors, mountains and Arctic landscapes emerge as liminal spaces of transformation, where the illusion of human mastery collapses. These environments confront characters with vulnerability, isolation, and existential exposure, while simultaneously

offering moments of insight and renewal. In doing so, they anticipate Ecocritical and Ecogothic concerns, emphasizing interdependence, ecological fragility, and the ethical implications of human actions. These landscapes are never neutral; they are charged with aesthetic, emotional, and ethical significance. Forests oscillate between shelter and threat, functioning as spaces of both regeneration and danger, while the moors, the mountains and the Arctic amplify isolation and vulnerability through their vastness and indifference. In each case, Nature acts not as a passive backdrop but as an active participant in the narrative, shaping human identity, emotion, and fate.

Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates that literature provides a crucial site for rethinking the relationship between humanity and the natural world. By tracing Nature's shifting role across literary traditions and though close textual analysis, it becomes evident that human experience is neither separate from nor superior to the environment but fundamentally embedded within complex ecological systems. In these texts, the natural world is not merely observed—it acts, responds, and sometimes resists. In an era defined by ecological crisis, these representations acquire renewed significance, compelling a reconsideration of humanity's place within a fragile and unpredictable planetary system.

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