Tthe representation of home in wuthering heights.

Literature, British Literature

Tthe representation of home in Wuthering Heights. The ideology of the mid-nineteenth century limited the role of Victorian women to the domestic sphere. The Victorian construction of the domestic ideal saw the woman as devoted, busy and diligent mother, bearing, raising and educating her children. Anchored to the home and providing a secure, cosy space for a husband, as a haven from his public life in the outside world, the woman and home became the ' expression of British Victorian morality... and respectability' (Watson, N. J. and Towheed, S. 2011 Romantics and Victorians, p. 339). Emily BrontÃ«'s portrayal of the domestic space in Wuthering Heights, questions this ideal and subverts it in a number of ways. Although Mr Lockwood's framing narrative in the novel is dated 1801-1802, and the events depicted in Wuthering Heights through Nelly Dean's narrative begin some thirty years earlier, it must be remembered that the book was published in 1847. Emily BrontÃ« was part of and acutely aware of this ideal and conventions of the time, illustrated clearly by the necessity for the book to be published under a pseudonym, as writing would not be considered an appropriate pastime for a lady. As Charlotte BrontÃ« explained, '... we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because——without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called ' feminine'—— we had a vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; (BrontÃ« , E. (2009[1847]) Wuthering Heights, p. 302) The events of the novel all take place within the restricted geographical area of Wuthering

Heights and Thrushcross Grange and Emily Brontë sets up these two houses in direct opposition in order to explore the effects of unrestrained feeling, passion and the intrusion of outside forces on the prevalent societal order. Depicted through Lockwood's narration in Gothic style, the Heights lacks hospitality and domestic comforts, and sets up a series of barriers - gates, causeway, courtyard, grotesque carvings — to deter intrusion, when the defences are breached, visitors walk straight into the heart of the home, where ' legs of beef, mutton and ham' are all on display, uncarpeted with ' primitive' furniture (ibid. p. 3), the whole describes a wholesome and practical space, seemingly devoid of refinement. Sitting on a wild moor, its name is, ' descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather.' (ibid, p. 2). The reader enters Wuthering Heights with Lockwood, confronting unusual scenes and characters, later discovering that Lockwood's attempts at interpreting the place and its inhabitants are a failure. As a southern urban ' foreigner,' this world is alien, demonstrated when he loses himself between the gates of his home and the actual house:, ' The distance from the gate to the Grange is two miles: I believe I managed to make it four' (ibid. p. 26). The stricture of his societal values make him unable to negotiate the landscape within or without Wuthering Heights. Through Nelly's evidentiary narrative, we become aware that the introduction of an ' outsider' to the household precipitates events. Heathcliff's arrival exposes the perception of familial harmony as a veneer. The children are aggressive at his arrival and the mother, the symbol of all that is good and benevolent, ' was ready to fling it out of doors: she did fly up—— asking how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house,

when they had their own bairns to feed, and fend for?' (ibid. p. 31). There is no motherly nurturing to a needy child, but a realisation that he can be a threat to her own children. From the first he is termed a " gypsy" (ibid. p. 3, 31, 34,). Later, Mr. Linton recognizes him as "'that strange acquisition ...- a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway'" (ibid p. 44). Mr. Earnshaw's trip to Liverpool introduces the world of trade and commerce and the foreign ' other' to the novel, bringing the public world into the Victorian domestic sphere thus disrupting the ' ideal'. Thrushcross Grange boasts refinement, class and cultivation. Set in the sheltered valley, with a much more formalised layout, the sensibilities of both family and visitors are guarded from the basic practicalities of cooking and other chores by a more formal arrangement of rooms. The first impression of the Linton household is through Heathcliff's eyes in direct contrast to Wuthering Heights: ' ah! it was beautiful——a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables', (ibid. p. 41). The public face of Thrushcross Grange, however, is also a veneer as it conceals the true nature of the Linton family. As the children quarrel over a lap dog, they are exposed as spoiled and selfish by Heathcliff and Cathy. When caught spying, the ' civilised' inhabitants of the Grange also want Heathcliff ejected. As a young lady, Catherine is accepted, as the ' other' unknown quantity, Heathcliff, is not fit for their society. This is the house to which Cathy ties herself in her decision to conform to what society requires of her, rather than follow her heart and be with Heathcliff. It is her arrival at the Grange as the strange ' other' they cannot understand that disrupts this domestic space. Catherine does not feel at home anywhere:, ' heaven 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.' (ibid. p. 71) As is typical in many Victorian novels, e. g. Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Jane Eyre, the characters in Wuthering Heights are all motherless. By removing the mother figure Emily Brontë immediately emphasises the lack of societal model of the mother being the centre of a stable home. Here motherhood equals death. The older Earnshaws and Lintons disappear from the narrative quickly, so all parental control has gone and the patriarchal structure is dismantled. Frances and Catherine die as their children are born and Isabella weakens and dies within a few years of Linton's birth. The stabilising influence of ' mother' which Victorian society saw as a necessity for an ideal home is absent. When Hindley inherits Wuthering Heights he takes over the power and position of his father and he attempts to introduce some culture and civilisation along with a wife and future mother. Making servants stay separate to family members and content in his private world with his wife, he punishes and banishes Heathcliff who is again rejected from society. When Catherine declares,' It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff, now' (ibid. p. 71), her betrayal is the one rejection Heathcliff cannot endure. Heathcliff has no place, socially or biologically, in the society he has been introduced to. On his return, he uses the weapons and values of the very society which rejected him to exact his revenge (accumulation of wealth and property, marriage,). The fact that he is so ruthless strips any romantic sensibility from his character, even though Isabella Linton sees him as a Byronic hero, reflecting the Romantic literature she would have read as a cultured young

lady. His return can be seen as a symbol of the fear of the upper classes at the rise of the dispossessed or disenfranchised, a real fear in society at the time following the French Revolution. He justifies his treatment of others as a sort of ' dog eat dog' mentality. The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him, they crush those beneath them " (ibid. p100) Wuthering Heights was never home to Heathcliff in the sense of a place of rest and comfort, only the place he has lived. He exists outside of the civilised world because of his ambivalent background, what da Sousa Correa calls, ' the indeterminate array of possible origins' (Watson, N. J. and Towheed, S. 2011 Romantics and Victorians, p. 380). In this sense he has only one true home, as has Cathy, the spiritual home — Cathy's real home, her spiritual home, alive or dead, is with Heathcliff,. Earthly homes are closed to them. The wild Wuthering Heights is the home which produces the complex, strong characters of Catherine and Heathcliff, whilst the figures representing convention and culture — the Lintons and their facsimile, Lockwood- are fairly transparent and insipid. In the end the values of Thrushcross Grange prevail in the novel, with the second generation returning there, but it is seems clear that Brontë's sympathies lie more with the passionate and more democratic Wuthering Heights. Over two generations, Wuthering Heights is a subversion of the home as a place of safety and sanctuary. Through her representation of the disrupted domestic space, the effect of the intrusion of the ' other' and the symbolism of the return of the repressed, Emily Brontë critiques the Victorian ideology of domesticity as a private feminine space separate from the public sphere, subverting the patriarchal family ideal and questioning the split between the

private and public worlds and emphasising the danger posed to the family by the intrusion of the ' other'. BrontÃ« breaks through the perception of the idealised Victorian home and in many ways the novel can be seen as a portrayal of the failure of home and domesticity. Coventry Patmore's ' angel in the house' is completely absent here. Word Count: 1563.