

Death, Myth and Dreaming in *Wuthering Heights*

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I wanted to write a story about a friend, but my mind turned to Emily.

I see her first before morning. She's already awake with her eyes set open, pointed blankly toward the early blue beginning to light her window. Her eyes seem to always open at just the same time, to just the same direction, where she finds herself half-awake looking at the same small spot in the stone windowframe. She stays in this pose, her eyes watching the warbled glass as her mind stirs from the night's dreaming, brought up by the wind over the moors and the noisy birds beginning their day. In a moment, Keeper will wake and stretch and yawn, letting his huge feet and claws scrape over the old hardwood as he readies their routine.

The day is still beyond the hills, and the brightening blue covers them. Keeper runs through the heath, sniffing through the deep greens and browns and reds that Emily reads like a map; her boots are caked in mud, layered like brickwork between the laces from today's trip and yesterday's and each day before it. Time disappears here. Rolling hills. Low clouds. A huge sky overhead. Endless. Patches of snow are visible, scattering white over the discolored patches of bushes and brush, thrown over the ground like an old spotted coat. Emily reaches out with an open palm, letting her fingers touch and talk to the passing harebells. This is more than routine, it is ritual; a repeated conjuring, a trip into the unconscious among a conscious earth.

On this morning, like many others, she comes to know a vengeful boy in her palms, passing in petals and dried brush, she feels a girl in her shoes, a mother sleeping in the earth under her feet, a winter's wind moving in her unwashed hair, twisting it around her hood, the dirt in her fingernails, sweat and spit and a running nose under the cold cloth shielding her face. All of this creates a texture; it induces the feeling of a memory that she may or may not have had, but one she now recalls, and walks within its wet and growing grey. *What is this boundary? Is there a path that can be set to travel there and safely return? How long will the dew sit on that leaf? Will it evaporate with the morning, or will the wind blow it off? What keeps me from the dead? Do they remember me as I do them? How does the whole world not stop when one of us dies? How do we just go on as if there's nothing to be done? Will I really, actually die? Is that the same bird as yesterday? What becomes of us? Will it snow later? What becomes of our time here? Are we all lost?*

As a novel, *Wuthering Heights* seems to consciously confound the reader, intentionally pushing them in and out with repeated names, narratives and events. Reductively, the story follows the staining consequences of love, death, and obsession on the Yorkshire Moors. While the novel is often recognized through the lens of its many cinematic retellings, its events stretch far past the young relationship of Cathy and Heathcliff. In its full length, we come to know the characters as they fall in love, marry for spite, mistreat for heartbreak; we hear them and see them, living and dying among the heath and the harebells, haunting one another beyond death.

As a place, *Wuthering Heights* has consumed me for the majority of the last decade. Like all good obsessions, it seems to have installed itself in my mind, and angrily fends off the other ideas that would move in to take its place. Its weight and influence on me is as incalculable as the novel's contents; I'm not quite sure why it moves me or by which of its sections am I so pulled, but its sum total is constantly new and discoverable. I can re-enter it, walk among it, hear the wind in the grass and feel the very texture of the horrible love the characters keep. I am not alone in this reaction, obviously. The feeling of *place* in *Wuthering Heights* has made it a shared obsession of many, in many languages and many places.

My obsession is largely due to my hunch that the novel is a fantasy, a spectacular and peerless feat of world-building that was intentional, practiced and refined. Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* is not, to me, a retelling of her life in Haworth, but her dreaming herself and surroundings into something else. A new name must be used. She *transposes* her life, and builds a new one atop the other. The title itself (one I am very guilty of attempting to steal) even has the same *visual power* as the place: *Wuthering Heights*. The letters look as though they bend together and the sound sounds so specific as it rolls over the tongue. One is forced to push it out, calling upon the feeling of a small fleeting fit of wind. *How does one make such a thing? Why?* However, *still*, the myth persists that none of this *was* intentional. That she was blameless of this great work, unaware of it, *too wild*.

For me, *Emily Bronte's* wild and unknowable masterpiece is one of the most astounding pieces of worldbuilding that I know. I consider the entire work to be a spell that she cast in the ground around her, transforming Yorkshire and imbuing the soil with something else entirely, whipping her up in the wind and taking it all away. She hasn't created a far off place, she's remade the only one in which she has. That is one of the most profound creative acts that I can imagine, and the reverent dedication with which she accomplished it was something that inspired me daily over the years.

Even in a more technical sense, I think she is transposing her feelings on the earth, personifying something that is incapable of expressing in language- the very texture of love- through trees and rain and 'wuthering' wind. The idea of this so filled and possessed me that it seemed to never age, her place and

people seemed immune to repetition, constantly alive and confounding, living again on each reading. As a work of a Place, that is the highest hope. I can always return to ***Wuthering Heights***- what a gift.

'Wuthering' is **an old Yorkshire dialect word**, characteristic of the regional flavour with which Brontë imbues her work. ... This comes from the now obsolete verb 'whither', which meant 'to blow', and ultimately comes from an Old Norse word 'hvitha' meaning 'a squall of wind'.