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Final Master's Portfolio

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Final Masters Portfolio

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Submitted to the English Department
of Bowling Green State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts in the field of English
with a specialization in English Teaching

July 7, 2022

Dr. Chad Duffy, Portfolio Advisor

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ENG 6910

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Analytical Reflective Narrative

When I embarked on this master's degree, my primary goal was to build the credentials to teach college level high school English. Though I had a master's degree in international studies under my belt, I did not have the graduate level English courses to meet the requirement to teach dual enrollment courses. The program at BGSU suited my requirements perfectly. Over the past two years I have built my research and analytical skills. I have gained confidence in my writing. Throughout the program, I was able to choose my courses to best suit the areas I wanted to grow as a learner and a teacher. My peers were always gracious and diverse. The professors were knowledgeable and helpful. When I began the program, I had little experience writing research-based analysis. I felt supported in my growth and was able to take risks in my writing and receive useful feedback to improve my work. This is invaluable experience that I will be able to use directly with my own students. Through the writing courses, I was introduced to the practice of labor-based grading. Personally, the practice allowed me grace in my own growth as a writer. Even more importantly, I have worked every day to use these principles with my own students. In the Teaching of Literature course, we were guided through writing our teaching philosophies. This is such an important practice. By grappling with my own values and desires for my students to put these ideas on paper, I am better able to put the values into practice for my students.

Each assignment I worked through in this program, I tried to choose topics that would better assist my own teaching practices and would directly affect my own students. The two pieces of work I chose for this portfolio both represent this practice. Both projects were literature and research based, and both were based on works of literature that I would teach to my own students. By working through each of these projects, I was able to increase my understanding of the literary works immeasurably and understand new ways to engage my students through the teaching of the works.

During the summer of 2021, I had accepted a new teaching position and would be teaching high school freshmen. When choosing electives, I have always chosen those that give me access to read and study literature that interested me and that I knew would occur in curriculums during my teaching career. Dr. Labbie's Dystopian Literature elective course matched these goals perfectly. Our culminating project was to write a formal analytical paper engaging at least one primary text and three secondary sources. Throughout the master's program, we were being trained to work at teaching university level material. It was important to me to always keep my own secondary students in mind. Even though my goal was to teach university level skills, I was still teaching adolescents. Striking a balance between the complexity of skills and the maturity of my students was always on my mind. Therefore, I chose to write about teaching the novel, *The Hunger Games*, and more specifically, I challenged the idea that dystopian literature is inherently morose and gives no suggestions about how to deal with the problems the novels call out in our own societies.

In various courses throughout the degree program, I encountered challenges and opportunities to explore publishing opportunities. Again, I worked to keep my focus on high school aged students. I looked towards NCTE journals for this guidance. When I had the

opportunity to choose my paper format, I would choose to write articles that might fit in these journals. My paper, “Dystopian Literature IS a Call to Action: Teaching *The Hunger Games* in High School,” is written in this same style. I chose to make this paper relevant to other high school English teachers offering *The Hunger Games* to their students. The last part of my paper offers suggestions on ways to engage students to take action beyond the reading and analysis of the novel. While Dr. Labbie did not give explicit feedback on our papers that term (I received an A for the project), through the peer review process in this capstone course, I received some valuable suggestions. While suggestions differed regarding the tone of my paper, much of the feedback suggested that I add to this section on engaging students and then also work on clarifying various ideas, and better introduce my sources. I believe I have improved on this project and am grateful for the feedback from my peers.

In keeping with my focus on my own students, my second work included in this portfolio also centers on literature that my own students might face in their high school careers. Spring 2022, I chose to take Dr. Lapinski’s 6800 course titled Victorian Monsters: Fiction and Film 1837-2021. For our culminating project, we were tasked with writing a well-researched, critical analysis of any text or film studied for this class. The research could include historical background, critical theory, and secondary criticism of the texts/films under analysis and should have at least 5-6 sources. I chose to engage Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and take a deeper look into chaos as monstrous in the novel. Dr. Lapinski made two suggestions in her comments on my paper. The first regards fractals as they relate to chaos theory. She also suggested that E. Brontë’s poetry shares some ideas about chaos. In addition to these two suggestions, I also engaged the feedback from my peers by better defining chaos theory and giving more insight into Brontë’s work. In my revisions, I did work to clarify some of the terms involved in chaos

theory. I also conducted additional research into Emily Brontë's poetry, as it relates to my thesis in this paper.

The two years that I worked through this degree program, I have grown as a reader, and a writer. More importantly, I have gained confidence in my own voice, and I have worked with my peers to support each other in our individual learning paths. During each course and each assignment, I took risks and worked through my own inhibitions. I am happy to present these two papers as evidence of my progress.

Amy Hromiak

Dr. Labbie

6800 Dystopian Literature

July 8, 2021

Dystopian Literature IS a Call to Action:

Teaching *The Hunger Games* in High School

(Teaching-based Project)

Dystopian and utopian literature seems to be a staple of the high school literature curriculum. Though each has their place in the journey of English literature, we often do not consider why we teach them. Valentina Salvatierra, in singing the praises of Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, drew the distinction between the two as this: Dystopian stories "paint the doom that the current political situation suggests" while utopian fiction "forces us to consider what might replace it" (Salvatierra). While this explanation seems reasonable on the surface, it just does not explain the feeling I get when I read dystopias, and it certainly doesn't explain the fired-up feelings I can still recall today of reading dystopias in high school. Teachers will immediately recognize the passion elicited in young scholars when reading the dystopias of Orwell, Huxley, and Bradbury.

Academia sometimes forgets that adolescence is a pivotal time in the development of values and identity. We should not forget that our students experience injustice in a more emotional way than seasoned adults do. This sentiment was highlighted in an article by Wendy Fawthrop from The Orange County Register which highlighted the work of a student, Brittany Goss, who conducted research on the effects of Young Adult (YA) Dystopian Literature on

inspiring student activism. Some of the ideas discussed in the article suggested that characters such as Katniss Everdeen from Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* inspired young people to form their own identities and pursue activism in their own ways. Fawthrop writes, "The protagonists in such [dystopian] tales deal with issues of identity and agency in a heightened version of our reality, where the stakes are higher and uncovering their true self is linked closely with the world around them" (Fowthrop citing Goss). This idea felt right to me. These feelings of motivation, and righteousness resonated with my younger self and my memories of reading dystopian literature as a student. Embedded in these stories of post-disaster social/environmental/governmental ruin were the seeds to motivate young people to define their values, and to help them form their own identities. As I embark on my own journey of tackling teaching a new grade level, I will focus my thoughts on using *The Hunger Games* in 9th grade ELA, to use as a primary text to teach literary analysis, and to guide students through the exploration of their own identities and pursuits of their own purposeful actions.

The high school ELA classroom might best be described as a carpenter's workshop full of tools waiting to be used to craft all things spanning beautiful forms to utilitarian functional items. At its best, this workshop has a master craftsperson and apprentices, the former to guide the latter to best employ the tools and building materials. It is this kind of space that I want to explore as a perfect scenario to bring dystopian literature to students. In her 2013 article Melissa Ames describes the popularity of young adult dystopian novels in the post-9/11 climate. The most important points in her article describe the intersection of teaching specific novels in classrooms and the upsurge in consumption of dystopian novels. She suggests that the YA dystopias "present fictional fear-based scenarios that align with contemporary cultural concerns," and that reading these texts in the classroom "may be a small step in the direction of engaging

students in social justice issues and, perhaps, sparking more overt political action” (Ames 4). More importantly, Ames points out that current YA dystopian narratives “play well to teenage audiences because they serve as powerful metaphors for their current developmental stage” (Ames 9). They can feel that they are being watched by authority figures with today’s technology; they feel oppressed by the adults surrounding them.

Dystopian literature is invaluable in its ability to offer a space that is tangible but distant enough for students to be able to discuss difficult subjects but not feel threatened by them. Ames wrote that “teenagers are eagerly consuming these [dystopian] themes [because] they are seeking a safe space to wrestle with, and perhaps displace, the fears they play upon” (Ames 7), fears about relationships, values, and their basic sense of self. In his article, “Waking Up to Orwellian Spaces: Conscious Students and Dystopian Texts,” Michael Soares calls these spaces Orwellian Spaces. He claims that “although dystopian texts address the ills (or speculated future ills) of society, they can be instrumental in helping students understand their world and engage in positive pedagogical practices to counter these ills” (Soares 75). Obviously, Soares is discussing his use of Orwell’s dystopias in his classroom, but he raises an important point. These speculative worlds create a framework for teachers to facilitate important critical analysis by their students. He argues that “dystopian texts are not only positioned to enhance the complexity of reading literature but are urgently needed for students to conceive a brave new world in the high school English language arts classroom” (Soares 74). While the more traditionally taught dystopias (*1984*, *Brave New World*, *Fahrenheit 451*, etc.) center around adult characters, the YA dystopias offer today’s teens characters who are facing issues that they can directly identify with, for example, as Ames suggests, “coming of age rituals, identity struggles, romantic love

triangles, and so forth” (Ames 7). When students relate to the characters or settings they are reading, they are able to dive deeper into the text on multiple levels.

At the same time, others warn teacher/facilitators to tread carefully with the students of today. Many dystopian works are harsh criticisms on the capitalist structures of society. Rachel Wilkinson suggests that “young people love advertising, consuming, entertainment, and technology. If we attack these trappings of modern life, we risk nurturing defensiveness” (Wilkinson 22). She suggests dystopian literature as discussion starters. “Dystopian visions can help students deconstruct their contexts, which is crucial now more than ever... As educators, we should help students question and challenge the social forces that are informing their habits, decisions, and personalities” (Wilkinson 25). Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* is perfectly suited to be all of these things: an “Orwellian Space” for students to explore difficult topics, a discussion starter for critical analysis, and because it is written for adolescents, is more accessible for today’s ninth and tenth graders than some of the more canonical dystopian titles.

We can dip our toes into the pond of teaching YA dystopian literature with the traditional lessons of a hero’s journey. Since Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* is already a staple in many approved reading lists, it is a perfect place to start a character study of the protagonist, Katniss Everdeen, who provides students a headstrong, yet relatable heroine. Using such an exercise of character and story arc analysis, students can begin to see how identity and purpose can help focus their own ideas and find their own causes to work towards.

The Hunger Games is set in a postwar/apocalyptic North American nation called Panem. This fictional nation centers around the affluent Capitol which lords over twelve outlying districts. The Capitol has maintained strict control over the districts for almost 75 years after quelling a rebellion and demolishing a thirteenth district. Ever since the districts lost the

rebellion, the Capitol has used the yearly Hunger Games as one of many ways to hold control over the districts. The story is told by Katniss, who progresses from a gutsy teen living in a poverty-stricken environment who has to fend for her own family, to a struggle for her own identity and values in the context of the larger society. Due to the oppressive forces in her own world, she is forced at the age of 16 to leave her home in District 12 where she is a provider for her mother and sister, to the Capitol where she will be forced to participate in the Hunger Games as a tribute from her home district in a nationally televised fight to the death scenario designed by the Capitol to keep the other districts in check.

In our ELA classrooms, we can introduce the lesson of a hero's journey by tracing the problems Katniss faces and the decisions she has to make. The proverbial "hero's ordeal" occurs when Katniss must choose how to deal with the death of her ally in the games. Katniss must search her own soul to discover that she wants to take action beyond her own small sphere of influence and do something for the greater good; "Rue's death has forced me to confront my own fury against the cruelty, the injustice [the Capitol] inflict upon us... I want to do something, right here, right now, to shame them, to make them accountable, to show the Capitol that whatever they do or force us to do there is a part of every tribute they can't own" (Collins 236-237). In this tracing of the hero's journey, students will also identify with Katniss's feelings of right and wrong, of her impetus to create change. In this seemingly standard lesson of tracing a hero's journey lies the opportunity of the teacher to allow the ELA class of teens to make connections to their own lives and choices, and to hold discussions about the decisions they make in their own lives.

Another standards-based lesson that works extremely well with *The Hunger Games* is studying the language of propaganda. As English teachers, we teach our students to identify bias,

rhetorical devices, and propaganda techniques in the pieces that we read. *The Hunger Games* provides our readers the dystopian world of Panem which is built on and rife with propaganda. The Capitol is the wealthy and powerful center of the nation, and the twelve districts serve the Capitol by providing resources, goods, and services via oppression and extortion. The epitome of this is the yearly Hunger Games which force each district to send two lottery-chosen child tributes to “play” in a to-the-death game of violence and survival. The people of the districts subsist, separated from each other and the Capitol, yet serving and providing for the Capitol in “exchange” for livelihood and protection. As we guide our students through a close read of *The Hunger Games*, in addition to identifying examples of propaganda, we can also begin to facilitate discussions about propaganda in our own lives. As students discuss the disparities between the Capitol and the districts, they can also begin to explore the disparities in their own surroundings. Wilkinson suggests that teaching dystopian literature “which exaggerates our modern context” allows us to challenge it. “[These stories] show how unrestrained industry often relies on manipulation and herd mentality, an unspeakably grim encroachment on the individual” (Wilkinson 22). By using our classrooms as safe spaces “we can meaningfully discuss what it means to be responsible, aware, knowledgeable, and moral consumers” (Wilkinson 22). As students learn to identify and craft purposeful rhetoric, they can also begin to develop their own voices as they advocate for themselves and the causes they care about.

Moving beyond lessons focused on reading skills, educators can begin to facilitate in-depth discussions, as well as actions. Ames suggests that “these texts can do more than just prompt students to examine the world—they can be used as the catalyst to incite real action” (Ames 17). *The Hunger Games*, with its sixteen-year-old protagonist, Katniss, its world of Panem with its clear division and discrimination between the Capitol and the districts, its

suppression of the populace via the violent Hunger Games which forces each district to send two tributes to fight to the death, further drawing division between the districts, is the literary catalyst that Ames suggests.

It is at this intersection of literary analysis and action that Brianna Burke examines the introduction of social and environmental injustice to her teaching of *The Hunger Games*. It's in the title. "*The Hunger Games* is perfect for teaching environmental and social justice: it has a gripping plot, it thinly veils the global food system in fiction, making it nonthreatening and visible, and it argues that practicing compassion is the only way to survive a system based on competition" (Burke 53). Burke first clarifies that "Environmental Justice (EJ) is concerned with the unequal distribution of environmental benefits or burdens based on race, class, or gender" (Burke 53-54). This broad topic covers issues of social justice, as well as socioeconomic status. Burke suggests that in teaching *The Hunger Games* through what she considers an Environmental Justice lens, teachers should "start with food, then the political structure of Panem, and then talk about the two together to illuminate how the novel reflects our world" (Burke 55). The book is packed full of food and hunger references. We only need to look at the first pages to feel how completely food and hunger dominate Katniss's daily life, where gifted goat cheese and hard-to-come-by bakery bread make a feast for Katniss and Gale during their foraging. Burke suggests keeping a list of them and reflect on them as a class. Discussions about the effects of food scarcity on the main character, Katniss, can lead to further discussions that effect local communities or those in other parts of the world.

In her article, "Class on Fire: Using *The Hunger Games* Trilogy to Encourage Social Action," Amber Simmons takes the analysis to action in her classrooms by asking her students to create solutions to the problems they discuss. She holds that "social-action projects require

students to take their learning into the community to benefit the greater good through the use of their learned skills” (Simmons 25). She suggests that teachers point students towards local programs such as food banks which often have literature and mechanisms to enable community members to take action by holding food drives or fund raisers. Unless students have faced hardships themselves, it is often difficult for them to conceptualize poverty and hunger. By reading stories such as *The Hunger Games*, “students who have not experienced need can use the text as a reference when discussing hunger, its reality, its causes and its consequences” (Simmons 26). One example that Simmons describes in her article is students tackling a very specific issue that is directly relevant to their own school lives such as wasted food from the school cafeteria. Ames outlines a list of current issues that *The Hunger Games* readily opens for our classrooms to discuss. Whether we read it “as an allegory for the state of both capitalism and educational discrepancies... an ongoing commentary on poverty... economic imbalance... or a critique on social inequality,” (Ames 10-11), our classrooms are the safe spaces for our students to explore their own values and to develop actionable ideas of their own.

Educators like me, who are lucky enough to live in the greater Appalachian area can add an additional framework to study *The Hunger Games*. Suzanne Collins created Katniss’s own District 12 from the post-war remains of Appalachia. Woven into this depiction is the topography, the industry, the music, and the natural medicines of the area. In her article, “Struggles for Life, Liberty, and Land: Appalachian Mining Communities in Children’s Literature,” Tina Hanlon describes,

In *The Hunger Games*, where Appalachia has become District 12 in the futuristic country Panem, Suzanne Collins depicts horrors imposed by a totalitarian regime that takes the coal and persecutes the miners’ families. Katniss’s father died doing dangerous jobs

underground, as miners still do around the world today, and their families live in poverty with no civil rights, much like Appalachian miners' families of the past. (Hanlon 101)

Suzanne Collins has given readers a first-person account of the pride and the ruggedness of adolescents in Appalachia. Katniss gives us a no-holds-barred account of life in her district.

Our part of District 12, nicknamed the Seam, is usually crawling with coal miners heading out to the morning shift at this hour. Men and women with hunched shoulders, swollen knuckles, many who have long since stopped trying to scrub the coal dust out of their broken nails, the lines of their sunken faces. (Collins 4)

Students who live in or are aware of life in current day Appalachia will recognize themselves or at least connect Katniss's life with lives they know.

Very quickly however, Katniss reminds us of the resilience and resourcefulness of Appalachians. She crosses the now-unpowered electric fence that surrounds District 12 and enters the woods to hunt. "Inside the woods ... there are added concerns like venomous snakes, rabid animals, and no real paths to follow. But there's also food if you know how to find it. My father knew and he taught me some before he was blown to bits in a mine explosion" (Collins 5). The book is full of references to herbs, salves, flowers, and songs of the area. Katniss and her sister Primrose each are named for local plants. In her initial outing of the story, Katniss asks her hunting partner, Gale if he wants to hunt, fish or gather. They provide for their families because they know how to live from the land – which is illegal in the districts of Panem.

In Robert Hackey's article, "Folk Healers and Medical Miracles: Images of Health and Health Care in *The Hunger Games*," we get a fuller picture of what Suzanne Collins via Katniss depicts of Appalachia. Katniss's mother is a healer, a daughter of an apothecary, and practices

herbal medicine. Katniss and Gale gather the plants that she uses in her balms and remedies. This knowledge helps Katniss survive the Games. Hackey writes,

The geographic isolation of Appalachia—both in the twentieth century and in the dystopian world of *The Hunger Games*—limits the availability of health providers...In this context, informal caregivers serve as the principal source of care for the working-class coal miners and their families. (Hackey 777)

This is evident in Katniss's homelife. We learn about how her mother and sister nursed an injured goat back to health that would then provide their family with milk for both consumption and profit. We learn how the community relied on Katniss's mother as a healer. "Collins weaves numerous examples of traditional Appalachian healing practices into her description of daily life in District 12, where women learned to practice folk medicine through an oral tradition, coupled with "hands-on" mentoring and teaching" (Hackey 778). While it is Prim, Katniss's sister who follows in her mother's footsteps, Katniss uses the skills to survive in the Arena both by finding food and using plants to heal injuries. Hackey also brings to our attention the juxtaposition of the empowered home healers and the ever-present need for modern medicine. While Katniss is able to fend for herself, it is the modern medicine that helps Peeta's infection, that heals her burns, and that ultimately gives Peeta new leg. "Images of health and health care in District 12 mirror the problems and the possibilities of American medicine, offering readers an opportunity to reflect upon the current state of the US health care system" (Hackey 787).

Again, as Amber Simmons would suggest, it is in our classrooms where students can best navigate this intersection of dystopian literature and real life. She suggests that even incorporating the language of social action into writing exercises can help students articulate their thoughts and opinions. "Writing about complex social issues [allow students to] articulate

their opinions and passion about political issues while fulfilling reading and writing standards... and serve as empowerment, showing students that they have the ability to speak out to support change in their community” (Simmons 25). Guiding our students through the exploration of their own identities, including the traits they own from their own geographical homes, helps embolden their own sense of selves which then strengthens their own values. By connecting the literary study of the novel, *The Hunger Games* to regional studies of Appalachia, students can identify both values and causes calling them individually to action.

Often, when we are the adult in the classroom, it is easy to forget what our own high school experiences were. This is the age where teenagers are exploring their independence. This can manifest in challenges of authority or actual acts of defiance. It is easy for educators to revert to positions of authority. This is where choosing to teach YA dystopian literature becomes our own call to action. Each ELA teacher should at least explore what contemporary dystopias written specifically for our young adults have to offer, not just our classroom lessons but to our students as well. With careful attention, we can create safe or “Orwellian Spaces” for our students to move beyond reading skills lessons (which are important and necessary), and to make real discoveries regarding their own values, convictions, and personal identities. More than this, however, these safe spaces create a venue for our students to communicate, to collaborate, and to act on their own convictions. As adults, we can all remember the doom and gloom of 1984’s Oceania, or the audacity of the idea that firemen could ever be tasked with burning books. Imagine what it would have been like to compare ourselves with a character of our own age, navigating similar feelings (if not similar settings) that we understand and relate to?

Stories such as Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games* provide educators with the unique intersectional situation, a workshop of sorts, where we can teach our students how to use the

various tools at our disposal and give them the space to create their own pieces, to create actionable situations where they can experience the fruits of their own labors. Michael Soares suggests that “if we regard the dystopian stories urgently in the secondary ELA classroom, we can encourage our students to answer the natural impulse and social call for freedom and to never be silenced” (Soares 80). As a concluding thought, we should encourage our students to use their voices and the language tools we are teaching to pursue their own calls to action as they navigate the exploration of their own identities. Following is a list of ideas for using *The Hunger Games* in secondary ELA classrooms to better facilitate this call to action of educators.

Ideas for Action:

While there are endless resources available to teach dystopian literature; the following ideas struck me as particularly useful to use in guiding our students through Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*, as they craft their own calls to action.

Hero’s Journey – The popular website, CommonLit.org, offers a lesson written by Jessica McBirney that uses Joseph Conrad’s outline of the proverbial hero’s journey often used by story tellers. She then offers discussions on Suzanne Collins’s *The Hunger Games*, and J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* tracking the journeys of each novel’s hero. Extensions to this lesson could be classroom discussions about relating students’ own lives and choices to a hero’s journey or discussing real activists who have made noticeable documented changes in the community or the world.

Propaganda: Identify and Apply – Teachers can start with a general lesson on propaganda techniques such as bandwagon and testimonials, even highlighting these in our current lives in commercials and political ads. Then students can move to identify similar techniques in the novel. The people of Panem’s Capitol are perfect examples, and as readers watch the games

unfold, there are numerous examples of testimonials given by players to the viewers. Teachers can take this idea even further by giving students the opportunity to employ propaganda techniques. One project idea is to create fan or business cards for a tribute or create travel posters for a certain district. Students would purposefully examine a character or location in the novel in detail, and then carefully employ one or more propaganda techniques to “sell” their tribute or district. A gallery walk and quick reflection can provide a culminating assignment to the project.

“What Would Katniss Do?” – Fowthrop discussed a few assignments that Brittany Goss developed as part of her research. This one struck me as being potentially meaningful to students: Put a main character into a real-world situation. Imagine how that character would react to issues that young people are facing today. The inverse can also be engaging; insert a real-life activist into the perils faced in the novel and discuss how they might deal with the dystopian peril.

Exploring Consumerism – Rachel Wilkinson offers two ideas to extend discussions on influences on our consumerist culture. First, she suggests some discussion starters to use prior to reading the dystopian works. “Is life easy for us today? Is it too easy? Give examples of how people escape from everyday life. Is our nation too focused on consumerism? Explain.” (Wilkinson 25). Secondly, she suggests meaningful writing assignments that “identify challenges and look for solutions to life in the “consumer class.” Do not simply condemn modern life. Students are eager to make an impact/ we should call on them to act” (Wilkinson 26).

Taking Action – Simmons gives a quick primer in her article outlining steps that educators can take to lead their students to implement actionable programs. She suggests gauging students’ interest and knowledge before beginning to read *The Hunger Games*. Educators can include real-world examples via articles or advocacy sources to connect what they read to

tangible issues around them. “Introduce ways that outreach groups take social action: letter writing campaigns, public service announcements, bumper stickers, educational posters and pamphlets,” that can be incorporated into the ELA classroom (Simmons 56).

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Amy Hromiak

Dr. Lapinski

ENG6800: Victorian Monsters

April 28, 2022

Chaos is Monstrous in *Wuthering Heights*

(Research-Based Analytical Essay)

Monstrosity exists throughout literature in myriad forms – a malformed man, a specter, and otherworldly being, or a violent version of a normal man. In his discussion of “Monstrosity” in *Victorian Literature and Culture*, James Eli Adams suggests that “monstrosity could be readily extended to cover a range of tensions within a literary text, elicited through a variety of critical approaches” (778). Often what is monstrous to some is perfectly commonplace to others. While studying monstrosity in Victorian literature, my peers and I explored the supernatural as well as the depths of humanity. We studied such titles as Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and HG Wells’s *The Invisible Man*. I was most affected by Emily Brontë’s Heathcliff and the feeling of discord that accompanied him throughout the story of *Wuthering Heights*. To be clear, the ghostly Catherine did not frighten me. The eeriness of the moors did not give me pause. The pious Joseph seemed perfectly placed. To be sure, Heathcliff’s otherness is important to my argument, but it is not the cause of my unease. Heathcliff’s monstrosity is very specific – it is the chaos that surrounds him. It is the feeling that we as readers never quite know what he will do, how he will react, how violent he can be. This uncertainty, against the backdrop of quiet Victorian society, evokes more fear than any apparition or known criminal in other works of the same era. One very specific example of this ill-in-the-pit-of-my-stomach feeling is the scene from the novel when Hindley (well-accepted as vile and therefore not

surprising in his drunken violence) dangles his son over the balcony in a fit of rage. When the baby, Hareton, wiggles free of his father's grasp, it is an unwitting Heathcliff that catches and saves the boy (Brontë 90-91). At this instance is when I felt the raw feeling of unease. Knowing that Heathcliff carries hatred and cunning inside him, we readers are justified in expecting revenge. We know that he could easily cause or at least allow harm to come to the child. Nelly, in her narration, even suggests this, showing us Heathcliff's "anguish at having made himself the instrument of thwarting his own revenge" (Brontë 91). This exact chaotic unease is the monstrosity that gave me the most worry throughout my studies of Victorian monstrosity in this seminar and it is this chaos that surrounds Heathcliff throughout the novel that embodies the monstrosity that is still relevant to readers today.

Readers are first introduced to Heathcliff's aura of discord in the opening chapter when Lockwood describes meeting his new landlord.

Mr. Heathcliff forms a singular contrast to his abode and style of living. He is a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman: that is, as much a gentleman as many a country squire: rather slovenly, perhaps, yet not looking amiss with his negligence, because he has an erect and handsome figure; and rather morose. (Brontë 4)

As readers, we are set on the path of always attempting to understand but never quite being able to grasp the character of Heathcliff. We are given another example of the chaos that surrounds Heathcliff when Lockwood experiences the encounter with a ghostly Catherine at the beginning of the novel. As stated before, it is not the apparition or Heathcliff's gruffness that evokes the unease of the reader, so much as it is Heathcliff's unexpected reaction. Lockwood narrates his turbulent sleep in Catherine's old bedroom, and we learn that upon his turbulent waking from his ghostly nightmare, not of Heathcliff's irritation or vengeance, but of Heathcliff's uncontrollable

grief. “There was such anguish in the gush of grief that accompanied this raving, that my compassion made me overlook its folly” (Brontë 34). We are left to wonder if Heathcliff will resort to violence, mischief, or complacency. Readers are soon given yet another narrator to the story in Nelly Dean. Between Lockwood’s narrow view of societal rules, and Nelly’s assumed authority over the history of the tale, we readers are given a great deal of speculative perspective over the situation, and yet, from the beginning of Nelly’s telling, we understand just how little she knows. When Lockwood asks her of Heathcliff’s history, she replies, “It’s a cuckoo’s sir –I know all about it; except where he was born, and who were his parents, and how he got his money, at first” (Brontë 41-42). It is here evident that Heathcliff’s mystery is to leave us perpetually speculating at his every move and motive.

Because chaos is the word that resonated most clearly in my study of *Wuthering Heights*, I feel it is important to dig further into the idea of chaos in literature. My own feelings about this idea were based on the most basic definition of chaos as the absence of order. But I wanted to explore beyond my own ideas about Heathcliff’s monstrosity. My initial research brought several articles written following the publishing of Katherine Hayles’ *Chaos and Order: Complex Dynamics in Literature and Science*. Her book attempts to link the relatively recent emergence of chaos theory in the latter half of the 20th century to literature. There has been a good deal written on the subject. Evan Kirchhoff and Carl Matheson took on Hayles’s ideas in their 1997 piece, “Chaos and Literature” explaining that Hayles attempted “to establish a parallel between chaos theory and various poststructuralist positions... and that clearly, the idea of chaos theory has application outside of science” (Kirchhoff 29). In defining in most basic terms, the idea of chaos theory, they discuss three basic principles:

First, the differential equations used to model them are nonlinear, while the history of mathematical physics is largely devoted to a treatment of linear differential equations...

Second... a sensitively dependent system has the property that even tiny errors in our description of its initial state will result in catastrophic errors in our predictions of its mid- to long-range behavior... A third feature common to some chaotic systems is their fractal nature. (Kirchhoff 29-30)

It is important to study the research that discusses chaos theory and its application to Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* in order to isolate not only a definition of chaos but to determine if chaos theory defines chaos as monstrosity.

Richard Nemesvari took ideas from Hayles and attempted to apply them directly to Brontë's work in his piece, "Strange Attractors on the Yorkshire Moors: Chaos Theory and *Wuthering Heights*." He suggested that "chaos theory's concepts of sensitive dependence on initial conditions, strange attractors, and fractals can be used to demonstrate that Brontë's vision of society is itself aperiodic and nonlinear" (Nemesvari 16). He works hard to suggest that Brontë, in her carefully constructed setting of The Grange and Heights, has created a dynamical system whose "stability is revealed to be an illusion with the appearance of Heathcliff" (17). In Nemesvari's analysis, set in tandem with his studies of chaos theory and Frank Kermode's reading of the novel, the trajectories of Catherine, Hindley, and Nelly "in relationship to Heathcliff are 'initially close together,' but one of them has 'diverged rapidly,' and unpredictably, into a completely different relationship with its attractor [Heathcliff]" (Nemesvari 18). He goes on to explain that while this type of behavior is inexplicable in a linear interaction, in a "nonlinear dynamical system, such deflections are not only understandable but even, to a certain extent, 'predictable'" (Nemesvari 18). This analysis would suggest that there is

calculation or at least logic in Brontë's weaving of seeming chaos. We get a hint of this when upon Heathcliff's sudden return from abroad, we learn that he has returned to Wuthering Heights. Nelly speculates,

Mr. Earnshaw invited HIM! and HE called on Mr. Earnshaw! I pondered this sentence painfully, after he was gone. Is he turning out a bit of a hypocrite, and coming into the country to work mischief under a cloak? I mused: I had a presentiment in the bottom of my heart that he had better have remained away. (Brontë 118-119)

Though society requires Nelly to act with candor, her knowledge of the characters and history of Heathcliff and Hindley as well as her own disposition, create an immediate unease for the reader.

The pairing of scientific study and literature offers some promising explanation. Barri Gold took on the subject of nonlinear reasoning in his article, "Chaotic Fictions: Nonlinear Effects in Victorian Science and Literature." While his article focuses on Dickens and Tennyson, he more widely is discussing "what [he calls] chaotic fictions in Victorian literature and science" (Gold 183). His work looks to find some meeting or continuity between the physical and social worlds. He states, "'familiar things' actually have a 'romantic side,' that the portrayal of such a romantic side may be 'substantially true,' and, moreover, that this kind of truth inheres both the physical world and the social" (Gold 182). He aspires to find a common thread among the scientific discoveries and the literary leaps of the time. "Where continuity is assumed, principles flow across length and time, even across disciplinary boundaries, such that the novelist and the scientist converge in their social and moral, as well as scientific, speculations" (Gold 183). However, for all the work to align the scientific and the social, Gold concludes with the observation, "this sudden and disconcerting involvement of the reader draws us into an immediate experience of chaos. It is, however, the immediacy of the experience, rather than its

nonlinearity, that distinguishes it from the broader chaotic universe” (Gold 194). Though Gold is describing the happenings in Dickens’s *Bleak House*, the sentiment resonates with the stark changes in Heathcliff’s countenance throughout Brontë’s novel.

For example, mid story, when Heathcliff has both Hareton and Linton under his care, he seems to delight in the ill treatment of both, and for very different reasons.

Don't you think Hindley would be proud of his son, if he could see him? almost as proud as I am of mine. But there's this difference; one is gold put to the use of paving- stones, and the other is tin polished to ape a service of silver. MINE has nothing valuable about it; yet I shall have the merit of making it go as far as such poor stuff can go. HIS had first-rate qualities, and they are lost: rendered worse than unavailing. (Brontë 269-270)

Readers of Brontë’s story are consistently faced with the unexpected vileness of Heathcliff’s conclusions. When we suspect that he has ambitions of gaining status, he surprises us by purposefully creating negative and often hurtful conclusions.

Nemesvari takes this analysis yet a step further, discussing fractals, another component in the study of chaos theory. As he describes it, “the key characteristic of fractals is self-similarity; that is, the fractal image can be scaled up or down, but its basic shape remains the same” (Nemesvari 18). This is how he understands Heathcliff. Upon Heathcliff’s return, it is suggested that he has been transformed.

He had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man... his upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr. Linton’s; it looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. A half-civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed brows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified. (Brontë 117)

However, we are soon enlightened to the fact that “though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable and unchanged” (Brontë 123). Nemesvari holds that “it is the other characters who are forced into indeterminate relationships with the attractor [Heathcliff] that dominates the system they inhabit” (Nemesvari 18). He sees this as proof that the novel is indeed fractal and that this only deepens the novel’s ability to be read through the lens of chaos theory.

Kirchhoff and Matheson suggest that “although the behavior of chaotic systems is entirely predetermined, such systems are unpredictable in practice” (Kirchhoff 30). They are careful to separate discussions of chaos and disorder. “In general, one should beware of the assumption that every occurrence of the words “disorder” or chaos” in any discipline is necessarily related to chaos theory” (Kirchhoff 32). In their conclusion, they hold “that chaos has had little effect on the way nonscientists think about the world” (Kirchhoff 43). The question remains, are these analysts suggesting that Victorians were successfully writing chaos theory into their stories, or are they simply trying as the Victorians were, to FIND order in chaos? For my own purposes, I do believe that the scientific understanding of chaos theory has little to do with the monstrosity that embodies the chaos that Heathcliff carries with him. Therefore, I dug further to understand how this disorder could create such ill feelings in readers today.

The chaos that Fred Mensch discusses in his article, “Anticipating Nietzsche: Culture and Chaos in ‘House of Usher’ and *Wuthering Heights*” comes closer to this feeling of chaos that approaches monstrosity. He holds that while the “sense of dislocation and impending doom would not be philosophically articulated until Nietzsche did so with his first publications in the early 1870s,” (Mensch 2) that Brontë (and Poe) each created “a world in which there appears to be a complete misalignment of the rational and the passional, a world in which this lack of balance leads to catastrophic results” (2). At this point, it is unclear the depth to which Mensch is

discussing. For example, when Heathcliff has returned and has taken up residence in Wuthering Heights, and begins to frequent The Grange, there begins to be continuous discord between Catherine and Edgar, as well as Catherine and Heathcliff. The two men come near to blows. Edgar accuses Heathcliff of having a “miserable, degraded character” and his presence “a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous” (Brontë 140), before turning Heathcliff out of his home for good. As the three continue to argue, and before Heathcliff can exit the home, it is Edgar rather than Heathcliff that resorts to violence, as Edgar “quickly sprang erect, and struck [Heathcliff] full on the throat a blow that would have leveled a slighter man” (Brontë 141).

Mensch’s discussion of finding Nietzsche in Brontë follows more a path of discussing the setting rather than the characters.

The symbolic opposition of the windswept Heights to the sheltered Grange in *Wuthering Heights*, the first the home of chaos, cruelty and uninhibited passion, and the second the sheltered, carefully cultivated abode of reason, introspection and a paralyzing inability to take action, is exactly the opposition between the extremes of Dionysian and Apollinian forms of worship Nietzsche would later see as requiring balance for a healthy and equitable culture to exist. (Mensch 2-3)

However, in my previous example of the disagreement between Edgar, Heathcliff, and Catherine, where it is Edgar that resorts to violence, the trouble occurs at the Grange, which is why it seems that much more troublesome. Mensch holds that the terror in the story “results from the irreconcilable nature of these polarities within a culture dominated by its focus on rationalism and linear progression” (3). He holds that “Heathcliff, Catherine and Hindley are driven by violence, vengeance and chaotic passions, while Mr. Lockwood and Edgar Linton display modernist paralysis of those who run from passion and hide from life in the shelter of libraries,

depending on cultural values for protection” (3). But again, this makes linear sense and the chaotic terror that I feel is when the opposite occurs – when we feel that Heathcliff will create violence and instead a less expected action occurs, like Edgar striking Heathcliff.

Mensch comes closer to discussing this chaotic violence as he works through Nietzsche’s discussions of repression and violence.

Whether defined as an ‘enclosing consciousness,’ repressive superego, or a cultural miasma, the fantasies of the culturally repressed are the voyeuristic representation of the nausea of the ineffectuality that in Nietzsche’s terms outweighs any motive for action, yet ultimately results in perverse eruptions that provide a frightening vision of a cultural abyss. (Mensch 4)

One of the scenes that Mensch discusses in this capacity is when Edgar and Catherine eventually become engaged. The scene begins with Edgar watching Catherine physically assault Nelly. “His horrified fascination with Catherine’s violent temper masks an intense sexual excitement, and he further provokes Catherine’s attack on himself as he tries to rescue the baby Hareton from her rage” (5). It is after this episode that they eventually become closer and become engaged.

Mensch continues his interrogation of *Wuthering Heights* with the observation that Catherine’s attempt “to negotiate between a normative and primal world destroys her” (8). She attempts to separate herself from her “primal” home by marrying Edgar Linton, but

soon discovers that the primal relationship will not be subordinated. Caught between opposing forces—her infantile relationship with Heathcliff and her growing awareness of social class and values that drives her to Edgar—she is unable to reconcile reason and elemental passion. On Heathcliff’s return, her refusal—or inability—to choose between the two men and their worlds ultimately leads to madness and then death. (8)

In this we see the chaos that surrounds Heathcliff. He and Catherine are bound so tightly that neither of them can escape the tumult. Mensch holds that Heathcliff “never attempts individuation, and condemns Catherine for doing so... Heathcliff also recognizes that Catherine has initiated a process that involves willful destruction, murder, and self-murder” (8). In fact, Catherine and Heathcliff each act violently in these situations. While Mensch focuses on Catherine’s “inability” to choose, she actually does choose to inflict pain on all parties. “If I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend—if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I’ll try to break their hearts by breaking my own. That will be a prompt way of finishing all, when I am pushed to extremity!” (Brontë 143). Instead of Catherine “finishing all,” it is at this moment in the story that Heathcliff steals away with Edgar’s sister, Isabella, creating further chaos in the house.

Mensch goes into great detail about the “irremediable paradox of living simultaneously within the non-compatible dimensions, with madness and dissolution the inevitable result [which is] the form of apocalyptic chaos and dissolution that Nietzsche later viewed as the encroaching result of the incompatible forces governing the social and political structures of his time” (12). Mensch uses a continuum of examples of Catherine and Heathcliff’s spirits moving beyond the body and the grave to exemplify this possible connection to Nietzsche. It is possible that the examples speak to Brontë’s purpose on their own without stretching to explain the political world. One example of this chaotic confusion of time and body is Catherine’s dream of separating from her own body and moving over the heath. She explained a dream to Nelly of being unhappy in heaven; “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” (Brontë 98). Catherine seems to believe that she will stay at Wuthering Heights whether she is body or soul.

Mensch goes even further by expressing Catherine and Heathcliff's bond as beyond the realm of the living.

Heathcliff's hold on Catherine's body through his call for her to haunt him and his repeated visits to her grave, including two incidents of actual disinterment, make a tangible union between the world of the living and the chthonic realm of the underworld, integrated through a psychic awareness that dissolves the ultimate boundary and may be characterized as "cosmic totality." (Mensch 11)

In his analysis he suggests that Brontë created a "virtual elimination of the boundary between life and death, an indication of the mythic and hence recurrent rather than the rational linear perspective of time" (Mensch 11). Whether or not Brontë's dance with life beyond death foretells Nietzsche or rather suggests her own questions about the afterlife, the intensity of the bond between Heathcliff and Catherine creates a discomfiting chaos for all the characters of the story as well as the readers. Mensch questions whether Brontë was "more convincing in diagnosing the cultural disease than at proposing a solution" (13). More than likely, it was the question she was suggesting.

There is research to suggest that similar questions arise in Emily Brontë's poetry. In his article, "Ecological Apocalypse in the Poetry of Patrick and Emily Brontë," Simon Marsden looks at the difference between the understandings of death and apocalyptic themes in Emily Brontë's poetry and that of her father. We can understand that having an Evangelical clergyman as a father greatly influenced Emily's own beliefs. What is evident in their poetry is that they wrote about death and resurrection in very different ways. Marsden suggests that Emily "saw little appeal in the prospect of a disembodied afterlife. Instead, she found in the Christian apocalyptic tradition a language in which to imagine the renewal of the created world and a

vision of an eschatological future in which nature would participate with humanity” (Marsden 2). He suggests that this differs greatly from her father’s writing which suggests that “a properly theological imagination always sees present reality in the light of its imminent end” (Marsden 3). Marsden suggests that Patrick Brontë supported his daughters’ inquiry of faith and religion. In his study of Emily Brontë’s poem, ‘No coward soul is mine’ (1846), Marsden suggest that she sees that “Mortality and destruction remain facts of temporal existence, but nothing is truly lost in death because all things are held together by God who is the source of all being and in whom all existence is eternally contained” (7). Similar ideas can be found in Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* in the previously mentioned scenes involving Catherine’s dance between life and death.

Though Marsden gives us an idea about Emily’s beliefs about death, we must still consider the idea that the chaos itself is the catalyst driving fear and curiosity as we readers experience the discord in the novel. In his piece, “Foucault and the Enigma of the Monster,” Luciano Nuzzo discusses “the monster [as] the materialization of a space of experience in which thought tests its own limits. To think of the monster and to think through the monster means to think of an experience of the limit and to think departures from such an experience” (56). In this capacity, we can begin to experience chaos as monstrosity because chaos is the experience beyond what we consider normal or acceptable. As readers enter Brontë’s world on the moors of northern England in the early nineteenth century, we can create a picture of assumed society and understand her characters in their place. Each instance of discord immediately sets us off from this assumed norm and creates a chaotic unease in the reader. Nuzzo suggests

In the first place, the monster is a threat for thought, an unveiling of its limit, of its inadequacy. But at the same time, it is enigmatic, and therefore it represents a challenge,

i.e. a limit that must be overcome by adequate knowledge, truthful knowledge... that is capable of matching itself to the challenge presented by the monster. (57)

In this manner, Heathcliff embodies monstrosity each time he deviates from the expected, and in truth, so does Catherine.

In his nuanced approach to monstrosity, Nuzzo suggests that “classical metaphysical thought will seek to neutralize the threat of the monster... by denying it and excluding it. But despite its exclusion and marginalization, the monster continues to interrogate thought” (57). Common thought would bring us to Heathcliff’s otherness here, but the real monstrosity comes when Brontë doles out small bits of questionable behavior from the first pages of the novel. Lockwood gives us our first impression of Heathcliff as he “beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows... and... his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat” (Brontë 1). As Nelly recounts her first experience with Heathcliff to Lockwood, she consistently uses the pronoun, “it” to describe the toddler, as “dirty, ragged, black-haired child... gypsy brat” (Brontë 44). But for certain, as readers, though we are to know Heathcliff is different or othered, we also understand that this is at least not yet a comment on his own countenance. It is a bit later in Nelly’s story that we get the first inkling that Heathcliff himself acts harshly. She explains, “he complained so seldom, indeed... that I really thought him not vindictive: I was deceived completely, as you will hear” (Brontë 48). It is evident that Brontë wants her readers to feel unease when Heathcliff is concerned.

Nuzzo continues his discussion of the monster as thought. If we consider the example of Heathcliff as monstrous, then we begin to understand Nuzzo’s example:

The monster as difference or as that which is produced outside of the discourse is captured in a discourse that declares its monstrosity and in so doing inscribes the issue of

the outside to its own inside... The monstrosity is, then, a conceptual place that never remains completely accessible to the transparency of thought, but which at the same time forces thought to open itself toward its own not-thought. (Nuzzo 59)

Heathcliff's monstrosity exists in the limitations that we as readers place on what we consider normal behavior, and more exactly, normal behavior within a Victorian story. One early example is during Nelly's accounting of Catherine's first calamitous visit to the Linton's Thrushcross Grange. In Heathcliff's words, he explains the excessiveness that he sees there, "I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange—not if I might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley's blood!" (Brontë 59). In this one very brief window into young Heathcliff's mind, we understand his feelings of otherness, envy, and violence. We understand that though his partner, Catherine, is in some peril, he speaks of his own mistreatment, his own vengefulness, and seemingly *passé* violent nature. This moment passes quickly, and the reader has only a moment to notice it before the story moves on and away. The moment serves to plant a seed of discord and disconnect regarding Heathcliff's character.

Nuzzo attempts to analyze the work of Michel Foucault on the ideas of monstrosity. Though I can only give brief service to it here, the work is important to my discussion. His analysis goes as follows,

Reading a text of Jorge Luis Borges in a "Chinese encyclopedia" Foucault says that he laughed and at the same time felt a certain uneasiness. From that laugh and uneasiness was born his text. The fantastic taxonomy of Borges is monstrous, says Foucault because "espaces commun des rencontres" between the things that are enumerated is subtracted. The language that names and explains the elements that constitute the taxonomy

paradoxically deny it as taxonomy because it renders it unthinkable as a space in which the enumerated things can be allocated. That which then emerges from that impossibility is the limit of our thought. (Nuzzo 60)

Brontë consistently creates this same phenomenon throughout the story of *Wuthering Heights* by first suggesting the acceptable Victorian setting and then creating occurrences that challenge this norm. For example, in the same occurrence of Heathcliff and Catherine first experiencing The Grange – a place that we readers assume is more proper than the Heights, we face the “othering” of Heathcliff compared to Catherine. He is shunned while she is eventually treated with poise and care. However, it is not this binary that is surprising, in fact it is expected.

The surprising part is the baseness of the Linton family themselves. We learn from Heathcliff’s surprise at the children’s’ audacity,

Guess what your good children were doing? Isabella - I believe she is eleven, a year younger than Cathy - lay screaming at the farther end of the room, shrieking as if witches were running red-hot needles into her. Edgar stood on the hearth weeping silently, and in the middle of the table sat a little dog, shaking its paw and yelping; which, from their mutual accusations, we understood they had nearly pulled in two between them. The idiots! That was their pleasure! to quarrel who should hold a heap of warm hair, and each begin to cry because both, after struggling to get it, refused to take it. We laughed outright at the petted things; we did despise them! (Brontë 58)

Heathcliff’s musings cover the entire Linton family. From his own description, we learn that whom we readers assume are the norm of society, we are to question. The entire Linton family cross the lines of assumed propriety. Mr. Linton exclaims, “Don’t be afraid, its but a boy—yet the villain scowls so plainly in his face, would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at

once,” or Isabella crying, “Frightful thing! Put him out at once, papa. He’s exactly like the son of the fortune-teller that stole my tame pheasant,” or Mrs. Linton’s remarks, “A wicked boy, at all events, and quite unfit for a decent house!” (Brontë 60-61). Under Nuzzo’s thinking, if monstrosity lies beyond our own assumed limits of understanding, then perhaps Brontë is actually suggesting that each reader explore their own understanding of monstrosity.

Again, Nuzzo suggests that monstrosity is not in the person, but rather in the action, “in order to be monstrous... it is not enough to be simply infirm or defective. It is necessary instead that the transgression of nature be such as to refer to the transgression of an interdiction present in law” (Nuzzo 65). Such monstrosity arises in *Wuthering Heights* as the relationship between Heathcliff and Isabella begins to take shape. As Catherine and Heathcliff begin to discuss Isabella’s fancy of Heathcliff, they each speak the callous words that foreshadow the ill treatment of Isabella. When Catherine suggests that she likes Isabella too well to allow Heathcliff to play with her emotions, he responds, “And I like her too ill to attempt it, except in a very ghoulish fashion. You’d hear of odd things if I lived alone with that mawkish, waxen face: the most ordinary would be painting on its white the colours of the rainbow, and turning the blue eyes black, every day or two” (Brontë 130), expressing his suggestion of violence against the girl.

At this point, the reader can only speculate the level of violence that Heathcliff is capable of. However, soon after, he moves on this suggestion and creates yet another level of discord to upset the reader. He has no qualms expressing his intent,

As to you, Catherine, ...I want you to be aware that I KNOW you have treated me infernally - infernally! Do you hear? And if you flatter yourself that I don't perceive it, you are a fool; and if you think I can be consoled by sweet words, you are an idiot: and if

you fancy I'll suffer unrevenge'd, I'll convince you of the contrary, in a very little while!

Meantime, thank you for telling me your sister-in-law's secret: I swear I'll make the most of it. And stand you aside! (Brontë 137)

The reader knows that not only will Heathcliff marry Isabella both out of spite and for his own gains, but the reader also knows that he will unapologetically resort to violence in the process. This double wrong suggests a monstrosity far beyond a monstrous body – it is monstrosity within the confines of civil society.

Nuzzo's most compelling suggestion as he discusses monstrosity, is the suggestion of how monstrosity is defined. "Monstrosity is defined by conduct. Conduct is monstrous because it breaks social order. And breaking social order and its laws implies a denial of interest in peace and security. The moral monster, then, is characterized by the irrationality of interests which motivate its conduct" (Nuzzo 65). Brontë's tale is riddled with examples but the ill treatment of Cathy upon the death of her young husband, Linton, is a prime example. She was locked in and abandoned to mind the failing boy on her own. When he finally passed, Heathcliff asked her feelings and her response was, "'He's safe, and I'm free,' she answered: 'I should feel well - but,' she continued, with a bitterness she couldn't conceal, 'you have left me so long to struggle against death alone, that I feel and see only death! I feel like death!'" (Brontë 361). Heathcliff's callousness creates an atmosphere within his reach of unfeeling, and moroseness.

Perhaps the final illustration of this version of monstrosity is in Heathcliff's departure. Mensch's analysis of the novel's resolution suggested that Brontë's "insight into the characters of Heathcliff and Catherine is in such stark contrast to the social norms of the period that the portrait of Hareton and the second Catherine at the end of the novel appears contrived" (Mensch 13). He suggests that this resolution "breaks through all social hegemonies to present a vision of

a future in which heteronormative restrictions have been eliminated” (Mensch 13). If we interrogate Nemesvari’s conclusion, we speculate that Brontë “perceives chaos as a force for social diversity and regeneration, and thus as an empirical, historically reprehensible quality” (Nemesvari 20). The resolution to the story seems at first contrite. The young couple has found happiness either because of or in spite of Heathcliff’s demise. Nelly offers up religion to Heathcliff in the search of some respite for his suffering.

Upon Heathcliff’s death, the world between the Grange and the Heights, full of fear, and hate, and binary, and discord, becomes calm, and simple, and happy and light. In the end, it is James Eli Adams’s words that stick with me.

Monsters are always with us. Whatever obscure psychic needs and anxieties monsters address, monstrosity more obviously helps to define the manifold meanings we attach to the idea of the human: monstrosity is incarnated in those bodies and forces that delimit or threaten or defy that norm. (Adams 776-777)

Nelly Dean’s concluding thoughts allow the readers to feel a calm peace as well. She is given plenty of lead to take off on grand ghost stories. We are told that young Catherine and Hareton will take up at the Grange. We could read into this that they have chosen, as Mensch described, the home of reason. Indeed, Lockwood asks Nelly if they are shuttering Wuthering Heights and leaving it “for the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it” (Brontë 414). We learn though, that even though Lockwood still feels discontent with the stories of Heathcliff and Catherine, as well as with their heirs, Nelly considers the calm. She professes that she believes “the dead are at peace: but it is not right to speak of them with levity” (Brontë 415). Of the young couple, Lockwood grumbles “they are afraid of nothing... together they would brave Satan and all his legions” (Brontë 415).

The reader is left to question not only the monstrosity that affected us, but how it has been lifted. If it was the land that was haunted, or if it was the family that was cursed, we are left to question what exactly set them free? If Heathcliff who embodied discord was the catalyst, then his exit signaled their release. While we may interrogate Nietzsche and Foucault, perhaps it in the end is up to the reader to find their own peace. Adams suggests, “as we conjure up monsters both to enforce norms and to resist them, it seems the only thing that could dispel monstrosity would be the death of normativity itself” (779). Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* allows the reader to set their own norms and to express the monstrosity and the norms. Some will call it a ghost story, and others will discover a socioeconomic commentary. There can be no doubt, however, that Brontë meant for us to be uncomfortable and to search for discord’s remedy.

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