



*In the Name of God*



**Vali-E-Asr University of Rafsanjan**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Literature**  
**Department of English Language and Literature**

**The Aesthetic Concepts of the Sublime and the Beautiful in**  
***Wuthering Heights*: A Burkean Study**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of**  
**Master of Art (MA) in English Language and Literature**

**Supervisor**

**Dr. Sohila Faghfori**

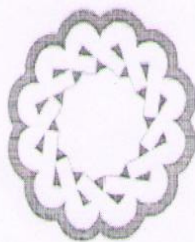
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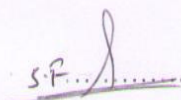


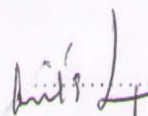
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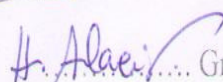
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*Dedicated to My Dear Parents*  
*Whose existence is my hope,*  
*Their presence my heart's strength,*  
*Their health my wish,*  
*And their satisfaction is my everyday trying*

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the application of Edmund Burke's aesthetic treatises *A Philosophical Enquiry into Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. At the time of its publication, *Wuthering Heights* was rejected as a successful novel by Victorian critics and middle class readers. Victorian society was a bourgeois society that glorified order and civilization. However, Emily Bronte oriented towards the Romantic and Gothic dimension rather than sticking merely to the norms and conventions of the Victorian society. She created Romantic and Gothic atmosphere in the novel by the depiction of the tall and gloomy building of Wuthering Heights, the passionate yearning of characters, Lockwood's nightmare, the existence of Catherine's ghost, the bleak moors, howling dogs and the depiction of terror through pains, sickness and death. Hence, *Wuthering Heights* can be studied under the aesthetic context of eighteenth century. Edmund Burke's aesthetic treatise can be a significant starting point and an appropriate means that can function actively in the study of human passions in the novel. This treatise provides a useful context for discussing the *sublime* and the *beautiful* in *Wuthering Heights*. Examining two fundamental passions of the sublime and the beautiful, Burke argued that the ruling principle of the sublime is terror and the ruling principle of the beautiful is love. He introduced some properties as sources and characteristics of the sublime and the beautiful. These sources, identified by Burke, are seen in *Wuthering Heights* which heightens the importance of the novel aesthetically.

**Keywords:** Burkean aesthetics, Sublime, Beautiful



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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

*Wuthering Heights*, published in 1847, is the first and the only novel of Emily Bronte. Unlike other novels which betray their period, *Wuthering Heights* is not related to the fiction of its time. It is outside the literary world of Victorian times. It also transcends the traditional view of the novel which was based on biography or chronicles. The critical reception was unsympathetic at the time of its publication. Victorian readers found it shocking and inappropriate for its representation of passion and violence. Readers accustomed to novels of Jane Austen who portrayed the mores and manners of the English upper class could not accept *Wuthering Heights* that according to Examiner depicted characters “who are savages ruder than those who lived before Homer”. Wheeler stated that “at the time when other English novelists were responding to both the positive and negative effects of technology and urbanization, Emily Bronte wrote out of the Romanticism of earlier generation, drawing on the sublime terror of the Gothic novel and the tragic rebellion of Byron’s dark heroes”(Wheeler 1987: 67).

*Wuthering Heights* deals with the themes of nature, love, passion, cruelty, violence, terror and social position. The story is narrated by two minor characters; Mr. Lockwood and Mrs. Ellen Dean. When neither of these characters can observe what is happening, Bronte describes events through letters or diaries of the main characters. The male lead character of this novel is Heathcliff, an orphan, found by Mr. Earnshaw in the streets of Liverpool and brought to the farm of Wuthering Heights. Everyone scares and gets astonished when they see the dark-colored Heathcliff. He is treated as an outsider and *other* due to his physical appearance. However, Catherine, Earnshaw's daughter, accepts him very soon and they develop a passionate love. They spend their time enjoying and wandering on the moorlands. Finally, in spite of their love, Catherine chooses to marry her more refined neighbor, Edgar Linton of Grange. This decision later on leads to Catherine's delirium and to Heathcliff's revenge upon both the Lintons and the Earnshaws. Catherine's ghost wanders on earth for twenty years after her death and haunts Heathcliff till they join again after their death.

*Wuthering Heights* is a story full of passions, desires and sufferings. It focuses on the hearts, minds and souls of characters. Mathew Arnold claimed that he found qualities in *Wuthering Heights* that he had not seen since the death of Lord Byron. These qualities were "strength, passion, intensity- even to the point of severity- sorrow or suffering" (Arnold 407). The existence of these Gothic and Romantic elements causes *Wuthering Heights* to be considered as a Romantic novel rather than a Victorian one. Therefore, *Wuthering Heights* can be studied under the aesthetic context of eighteenth century which included the Gothic and the Sublime. Edmund Burke's aesthetic treatise provides a theoretical framework to understand this novel from an aesthetic point of view. Aesthetics, from the Greek *aestheta* meaning "perceptible things", is a branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of beauty, art

and taste. It provides the governing criteria for making aesthetic judgment. Many thinkers and philosophers have dealt with aesthetics throughout history. Although Baumgarten, the German Philosopher, was the first to name the subject, he didn't invent the term. Philosophers since antiquity had claimed about the nature of beauty and art but it was in the 18th century that a torrent of writing about beauty and other aesthetic properties notably the sublime flourished. Edmund Burke (1729-1797) was an Anglo-Irish philosopher who contributed a lot to the 18th century aesthetics. In 1757, Burke published a treatise on aesthetics named *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. He offered an empirical and physiological explanation for the feelings of the sublime and the beautiful. In fact, Burke was the first to explain beauty and sublimity purely in terms of the process of perception and its effect upon the perceiver. In other words, beauty and sublimity are defined not in terms of an object's abstract properties but through the effect the object produces on the observing subject. He divided all our passions into two categories of self-preservation and society. Passions that turn on self-preservation are painful and those related to society are pleasurable. These painful and pleasurable passions aroused from different objects, properties and natural scenery are seen in *Wuthering Heights* which make it an appropriate novel for aesthetic study. In spite of its initial critical reception, *Wuthering Heights* is now considered as a work of extraordinary talent.

### ***1.1 Statement of the Problem***

Since the aesthetic aspect of *Wuthering Heights* has not been appreciated, this thesis is intended to do an in-depth analysis of Burkean aesthetics in the study of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Although *Wuthering Heights* is a Victorian novel, it has

some of the most important characteristics of a Romantic novel. Numbers of reviews have considered the Romantic aspects of *Wuthering Heights* and any reader can trace the Romantic and Gothic atmosphere in the novel. The depiction of passionate love, the rebellion of a dark Byronic hero, the appearance of ghosts, the bleak Yorkshire moors, imprisonment, fear, isolation, verbal and physical violence, rejection and alienation make the novel an appropriate one for the aesthetic study. Therefore, this novel can be studied according to the aesthetic theories of Edmund Burke. Burke's aesthetic treatise can be a significant starting point and an appropriate means that can function actively in the study of human passions in the novel. It examines the aesthetic concepts of the sublime and the beautiful in *Wuthering Heights*. Longinus first introduced the concept of the sublime in his essay *Peri Hipsous* which had a great influence on Edmund Burke. Burke distinguished the sublime from the beautiful by arguing that the sublime is based on pain and the beautiful is based on pleasure. Whatever that excites pain can be a source of the sublime and whatever excites pleasure can be a source of the beautiful. Some properties as terror, obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity and magnificence are productive of sublime. He also considered some properties of objects as smallness, smoothness, gracefulness and delicacy to be beautiful. Burke focused on the physiological and psychological responses of the subjects rather than the objects themselves. He argued that while sublime objects arouse terror, beautiful objects arouse love. So, the objective of this research will be a detailed analysis of Burkean aesthetics in the study of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* to see how the novel complies with the aesthetic concepts of the sublime and the beautiful. In order to achieve to this objective, the researcher is going to answer some questions.

## ***1.2 Research Questions***

This thesis is going to examine the following questions:

1. How can *Wuthering Heights* be studied in relation to Edmund Burke's aesthetics?
2. How significant is Burke's aesthetics with respect to Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*?
3. Can the sublime and the beautiful be related to the study of characters in *Wuthering Heights*?
4. Where is Emily Bronte's position in the aesthetic philosophy?

## ***1.3 Methodology***

This study is library-oriented which intends an in-depth analysis of Burkean aesthetics in the study of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Hence, this study demands a comprehensive study of Edmund Burke's aesthetic ideology in order to see how it can be made applicable to the study of *Wuthering Heights*.

## ***1.4 Review of Literature***

An extensive research has been performed on *Wuthering Heights* from the time of its publication till now. Jessica Bomarito in her book *Gothic Literature: A Gale Critical Companion* (2006) studied the Gothic literature and stated that many critics have noted the Gothic elements in Brontë's novel, particularly the spooky architecture of *Wuthering Heights*, the characterization of Heathcliff as a dark, brooding hero, and ghostly wanderings on the moors. She also added that Bronte uses fierce animal imagery and scenes of violence in her novel.

Donald D. Stones in his book *The Romantic Impulse in Victorian Fiction* (1980) studied the romantic setting of *Wuthering Heights*. He argued that Bronte followed the Byronic terrain in creating Heathcliff. Heathcliff is an anarchic force of nature or as Charlotte stated in her preface to *Wuthering Heights*, he has an unredeemed nature. Heathcliff is a mythic figure, a Byronic-derived satanic outcast. Stone resembled Heathcliff to Bertha in *Jane Eyre* who is involved in self – destruction due to his unregulated will. Supernatural occurrences, Romantic landscaped, self-willed characters and a love that transcends death are all evident in *Wuthering Heights* which reinforces the Romantic atmosphere of the novel.

Shiva Maki in her M.A thesis “Romantic and Gothic aspects and the Question of Correspondence in *Wuthering Heights*” (1995) focused on the Gothic and Romantic aspects of the novel. First of all, she gave a history of Romanticism and Gothicism and then stated that *Wuthering Heights* is a representative of the Romantic-Gothic novel. She introduced Catherine and Heathcliff as Romantic-Gothic heroin and hero who share passionate love.

Gender and narration in *Wuthering Heights* have been focused by Beth Newman in his essay, “The Situation of the Looker-on: Gender, Narration and Gaze in *Wuthering Heights*” (1990). Newman examined the relation between the narrative and the visual phenomena as gaze in *Wuthering Heights*. Newman gave the example of Lockwood’s gaze as a mode of telling and showing his inner feeling. Lockwood attained pleasure through his gaze. In fact, his object of gaze was an object of visual pleasure. The gaze of different characters implied something different. Young Cathy’s look towards Lockwood and almost everyone was provoking and imprudent.

Christopher Heywood in his article “Yorkshire Slavery in *Wuthering Heights*” (1987) examined the slavery-based economy of the English western seaboard.



Heywood in this article explained how Emily Bronte depicted “the rural families who formed the hinterland of Liverpool slave trading.” Heywood stated that Emily Bronte was inspired by the Sill family's Dentdale estate who was involved in the slavery. Heathcliff was a product of this slavery. Heathcliff says: “The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him, they crush those beneath them - You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style.”

A large number of scholars have applied a psychological approach to the study of *Wuthering heights*. Melvin R. Watson in his essay, “Tempest in the Soul: The Theme and Structure of *Wuthering Heights*” (1949) examined Heathcliff's complex Personality. He stated that Heathcliff is a man who is torn between love and hate. He is hardened by his surroundings and ill-treatments of Hindley. Then he determines to avenge by crushing everyone who has stood in his way. The evil within Heathcliff is not inherent and springs not from a love of evil but rather from thwarting of love. Although he is silent in appearance but he is cultivating the seeds of vengeance within himself and finally exerts his violence on everyone who has stood on his way.

J. Hillis Miller in his essay, “The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers” (1963) focused on the significance of animal imagery in *Wuthering Heights*. He argued that the animal imagery used in *Wuthering Heights* depicts the spiritual capacity of different characters. Heathcliff is “a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man”, Edgar Linton is a “sucking leveret” and Linton Heathcliff is a “puling chicken”. He suggested that violent verbs which are usually associated with animals like “writhe, drag, crush, grind, struggle, yield, sink, recoil, outstrip, tear, drive, asunder” are attributed to characters in this novel. In fact, the characters return to an animal state

with the transgression of human laws. Hillis added that characters follow their wills and if they fail to do so, they cease their natural continuation of their lives.

Marxist approach has been applied to *Wuthering Heights* by a large number of researches. One of these researches is Meredith Birmingham who in his essay “Marxism and Bronte: Revenge as Ideology” (2006) argued that Heathcliff’s intention of taking revenge can be explained through Marxist approach. Heathcliff’s method of taking revenge on his enemies is to degrade them socially and dominate them economically. After reaching to power and wealth, Heathcliff achieves hegemony. He addresses the Lintons and the Earnshaws and even his own child with degrading and humiliating terms. Birmingham added that Heathcliff uses his son as a commodity to reach to more wealth and a better financial situation. He also deceives Isabella by pretending to love her and therefore attains her wealth after marrying her. Heathcliff sees everything in the light of economic power. However, after becoming the master of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange and torturing his enemies, he no longer enjoys the vengeance. Heathcliff has fooled himself that vengeance would satisfy him.

*Wuthering Heights* has been studied from the view of vampirism by Gillian Nelson. He in his article “Vampiric Discourse in Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights*” (2009) considered Catherine and Heathcliff as vampires and provided textual evidence for his claim. He argued that there are two kinds of vampirism; one is symbiotic and harmless as the time Catherine and Heathcliff are children. The second kind of vampirism is the monstrous vampirism as the time Catherine and Heathcliff mature and become monstrous vampires and hurt themselves and the others. Nelson claimed that the relation between Catherine and Heathcliff is not that of love but of vampirism.

Sandra. M Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their essay, “Looking Oppositely: Emily Bronte’s Bible of Hell” (2000) believed that although Bronte made no reference of Milton or his *Paradise Lost* but *Wuthering Heights* is haunted by Milton’s Satan. Heathcliff is reminiscent of Milton’s Satan. Isabella asks Nelly weather Mr. Heathcliff is a man. If so, is he mad? And if not is he a devil? Catherine’s question about what is hell and what is heaven has long urged critics to consider *Wuthering Heights* a novel about heaven and hell. That *Wuthering Heights* is about a fall has also been suggested. Catherine’s description of herself as an exile or outcast suggests the exile of Adam, Eve and Satan.

Lorraine Sim in his essay “Wuthering Heights and the Politics of Space” (2004) studied the Romantic and Victorian aspects of *Wuthering Heights* through the representation of space. He identified three spaces of the domestic, the natural and the liminal. By the domestic space, Sim showed how Bronte rejects the Victorian ideal of domesticity. By the natural space, he showed how Bronte’s representations of nature engage with eighteenth century aesthetic theories of the sublime and the picturesque and finally by the Liminal space, he referred to the sites of transcendence within the novel. Although Lorrain Sim has briefly referred to aesthetics in the second part of his essay, but it is not an in-depth study of aesthetics.

### ***1.5 The Significance of Study***

*Wuthering Heights* is the one and the only novel of Emily Bronte. The fact that it is a masterpiece in English literature is unquestionable. Many books and essays have been written on this novel reflecting romantic, gothic, sociological, and psychological aspects of the novel but the aesthetic aspect of the novel has been left out. By applying Edmund Burke’s aesthetic ideology to Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* to

see whether it fits or deviates from Burke's aesthetics, the purpose of this thesis is to study the aesthetic aspect of *Wuthering Heights*, the two human passions of the sublime and the beautiful in *Wuthering Heights* and to study the psychological effect of the objects of the sublime and the beautiful on the perceivers. Since this study is a new one, it opens ways for further studies in aesthetic grounds. Novels, poems, dramas, movies and other works of art can be studied under the light of aesthetics. In fact, this thesis helps us pay more attention to the significance of aesthetic philosophy.

This thesis intends to examine Burke's aesthetic concepts of the sublime and beautiful in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. In the introductory chapter a brief outline of the thesis is presented that takes into account the research questions and the overview of the methodology for the readers. The second chapter is a detailed study of the theoretical foundations of aesthetics. It encompasses the aesthetic tenets of the classical theorists such as Longinus, Plato and Aristotle to the aesthetic theories of Francis Hutcheson and Joseph Addison. Then a detailed account of the aesthetic theory of Edmund Burke is brought to the front because of the significance it holds for the present project. In fact, Edmund Burke's *The Philosophical Enquiry into Origins of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* forms the theoretical basis of this thesis. The researcher is going to discuss the Burkean ideology of Aesthetics in relation to artistic creativity of Emily Bronte in the formation of *Wuthering Heights* through the third and fourth chapters. The third chapter deals with the feeling of the sublime and the fourth chapter encompasses the application of the feeling of the beautiful in Bronte's novel. Chapter five gives a conclusion to this thesis. The aesthetic elements within the novel will be identified and its relevancy will be evidenced by the appropriateness to the context of the thesis.