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The Sublime

Burke's Aesthetic Theory of the Sublime and its Reflections on 19th Century Novels: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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Introduction

The concept of the sublime is one of the most powerful ever formulated in aesthetic theory. Its origin dates back to ancient Greece, when in the third-century CE, the philosopher and rhetorician routinely recognised as Longinus attempted to put into words a key concept to the Ancients, which had never been treated as a subject matter on its own before. With his treatise *Peri Hypsous*, which literally means 'On the elevated', Longinus attempted to extrapolate the ultimate essence of the power of perfect language, analysing the sublime as a literary style that when applied to discourse and writing, has the capacity of uplifting the soul to greatness. In his analysis, the sublime is something elevated, exceptional and extra-ordinary; nevertheless, its existence was strictly connected to the realm of rhetoric, a realm to which it would be confined for ages until the intervention of the French philosopher Nicolas Boileau in the seventeenth century. With Boileau's translation of *Peri Hypsous* in 1674, Longinus re-entered the literary discussion after having been neglected for centuries. The ability of the philosopher of calling the attention on the sublime decreed the beginning of a new discussion, which soon flourished with hypothesis and speculation regarding the actual nature of sublimity.

Although the notion of the sublime came to eighteenth century critical thinkers still deeply intertwined with Longinian rhetoric, the philosophical emphasis on emotions together with the re-formulations of the sublime offered mainly by John Dennis, Joseph Addison, Mark Akenside and John Baillie proved functional for the final birth of the aesthetic theory of sublimity. The age of sensibility solidly brought the senses under the spotlight, and by seeking to explore the human mind empirically, a kind of rudimentary psychology had been inaugurated. An empirical approach together with the prominent role assigned to the external world, an idea inherited from Longinus's discussion of the mighty power of nature which impels to experience sublimity, ultimately led to Edmund Burke's attempt to offer a detailed study of the sources of sublimity in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757).

Burke's entire aesthetic is grounded on the antithesis between sublimity and beauty, an opposition which respectively originates in the opposing passions of pain and pleasure, which in turn are produced by feelings rooted in the natural urge for self-preservation and the instinct for sociability. To the detriment of the theory of beauty, his formulation of sublimity exerted a much

wider influence in the century to come. Burke's definition of the sublime employs terms such as darkness, obscurity, privation, vastness, magnificence, but most importantly, claims that the emotive response of the individual in the presence of sublimity takes the shape of pain in pleasure, delight in terror. Of all the sources of sublimity, surely nature is among the most powerful: violent storms and raging seas, towering mountain chains, profound chasms etc. are those natural stimuli capable of eliciting astonishment in the subject. His philosophical treatise offers an approach that finds its validity on a psychological and physiological basis, therefore finally bounding together the aesthetic experience of the sublime with the emotional and psychological investigations of his day, consequentially paving the way for the cult of terror to flourish within the literary scene as the century draw to a close. The habit of combining sublimity with terror, the greatness of nature, and a strong emotive involvement, which were all pre-existing concepts, is framed within a strict schematic structure, where the qualities of the objects are explained using a very sharp language that does not admit any erroneous interpretations. The *Philosophical Enquiry* entered the literary scene almost as a handbook with straightforward instructions on how to achieve sublimity, and of this blueprint the Gothic literature will make extensive use.

Hence, this thesis aims at analysing the great influence that this aesthetic theory of the sublime, as proposed by Burke, had on the literary scenery during the first half of the nineteenth century. For the purpose of my final dissertation, I chose to scrutinise the type of response to the aesthetic of sublimity and beauty by taking into consideration two of the most brilliant women writing during the nineteenth century and their unforgettable masterpieces: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). My choice fell upon Mary Shelley as the main representative of the application of the Burkean theory of the sublime during the first half of the century, a re-interpretation best exemplified in the marvellous descriptions of natural sublimities. On the other hand, I intend *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë's sole novel, to serve as an example of the wide influence of the *Enquiry*, which stretches up to the second half of the same century. However, although these novels enrich their narrative with descriptions modelled upon Burke's discussion, each author formulates her own particular response to the sublime differently.

This thesis will be divided into three chapters: the first chapter will explore the development of the aesthetical conception of the sublime, from its literary genesis in antiquity,

up to Edmund Burke's epoch-making theorisation of the sublime and the beautiful. This analysis will be particularly instrumental in understanding how the ideas related to sublimity modified and evolved in relation to the their historical and literary context. In the final part of this chapter a thorough study of Burke's theorisation will be carried out, in order to underline the peculiarities of sublimity and beauty which will consequentially be sought in Shelley's and Brontë's novels.

Chapter two will provide a brief insight into Mary Shelley's life and the origin of her masterpiece *Frankenstein*, giving essential biographical notes and highlighting the main themes of her novel. Consequently, a detailed investigation of how Shelley applies the Burkean theory of the sublime in *Frankenstein* will be presented, with the intention of demonstrating that sublimity is not confined to marvellous and awe-inspiring descriptions of the landscape, yet it can also be found in the conformation of her Creature.

The third chapter will follow the same structure: after having briefly outlined the most meaningful events in the author's life and the interweaving of cultural influences which take shape in Brontë's poetics, a meticulous study will follow, aiming at highlighting the presence of sublimity in her novel. I shall argue that in *Wuthering Heights* Brontë not only formulated a response to Burke's sublime, but she also included instances of the theorisation of the beautiful, so as to create a contrast which has the precise function of exalting by opposition the devastating power of the elements representing the sublime. In this stark polarisation of beauty and sublimity, the contrast is not merely limited to the peculiar characteristics of places, but it is also broadly representative of the main characters.

The entire dissertation, starting from the origin of the sublime and ending up with the aesthetical responses of two of the most creative genius of the first half of the nineteenth century, means to show how this concept, especially as discussed in the *Philosophical Enquiry*, exerted an outstanding and undeniable influence on the composition of two of the greatest masterpieces of English literature, which still nowadays captivate readers all over the world, by making them experience the strongest kind of emotions.

CHAPTER I

1. The Development of the Aesthetical Conception of the Sublime

To write on the sublime style is to write on rhetoric;
to write on sublimity is to write on aesthetic. [1]
-Samuel Monk

1.1 The Longinian Tradition

The aesthetical concept which nowadays is widely recognised as simply 'the sublime' finds its roots in antiquity. The first treatise in history to explicitly deal with the sublime is *Peri Hypsous,* in English usually translated as 'On the elevated' or 'On the sublime'. The Greek noun *hypsous,* even in this treatise, has a variety of meanings: Roberts lists 'dignity', 'elevation', 'eloquence' and 'grandeur' as the most meaningful translations.[2] These all stress the idea of something elevated, exceptional and extra-ordinary.

The authorship is conventionally attributed to Cassius Longinus, a Greek philosopher, rhetorician and literary scholar of the third-century CE.[3] However, in the early nineteenth century, this authorship was called into question. A sole copy of the manuscript dated back to the tenth-

[1] Monk, H., Samuel. *The Sublime, A Study of Critical Theories in XVIII-Century England* [1935], Minneapolis: The University of Michigan Press, 1960, p. 12.
[2] Roberts, W., Rhys. "The Greek Treatise on the Sublime: Its Authorship", in *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 17, London: The Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies, 1897, pp. 209-210.
[3] Heath, Malcolm. "Longinus and the Ancient Sublime", in *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Costelloe, M., Timothy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 11. In his discussion, Heath firmly asserts that the elaboration of the treatise is to be addressed to Cassius Longinus.

century survived, and in the table of contents it reads out "Dionysius *or* Longinus".[4] This Dionysius is thought to be Dionysius of Halicarnassus from the first- century CE, another particularly famous critic contemporary of Caecilius.[5] Today, critics refer to the author of this treatise as Pseudo-Longinus, or 'the author of *On the sublime'*. For the purpose of my work, from now henceforth I will refer to the Greek writing critic of the *Peri Hypsous*, as the tradition demands, by calling him Longinus.

The very same title *On the sublime* is explicative of the function that the author meant for his treatise: Longinus's aim was to write a guide on how to achieve sublimity in discourse and writing, namely both in oratory and literature. The style employed is both "ambitious and idiosyncratic"[6]. His essay figures almost as a handbook; it is primarily concerned with rhetorical and elevated style, in which the presence of an analysis of the numerous figures of speech occupies almost the entirety of the argumentation. The idea of the sublime which transpires from these lines does not only appear as a sterile and static study on rhetoric. In fact, the elaboration he formulates, making use of specific literary sources, characters and content, suggests an understanding of the conception which transcends simplistic stylistic virtues. Exactly this difference from the other treatises dealing with the same topic will make Longinus's work particularly interesting for the eighteenth century critics.

The rhetorical initiation of the sublime style does not coincide with the elaboration of *On the sublime*. The sublime was - even though not directly addressed - already well-known throughout Ancient Greece. In fact, before Longinus's contribution, discussions on the elevated style intended as a means to incite a strong emotional response are to be found in various ancient philosophers.[7] Although both Aristotle and Plato never openly attributed a key value to the stimulation of the emotions merely for their own sake, the two philosophers widely recognised as the founders of the Western intellectual tradition were conscious that the 'grand style' was an essential factor of their rhetoric. Indeed, the awareness that rhetoric occupies a central role in the ultimate success of the literary composition, either of oral or written nature, is firmly established

[4] Donald A. Russell. *"Longinus" On the Sublime*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, xxii–xxiii.
[5] Fincher, Max. "The Sublime", in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, Smith, Andrew, Hughes, William, Punter, David, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 655.
[6] Heath, Malcolm. "Longinus and the Ancient Sublime", p. 14.
[7] Brandy, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy: Aestethics, Ethics and Nature*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 15.

among the ancients.[8] The primary scope of a literary piece is to cause a reaction on the spectator, to move something deep within his/her soul, therefore ultimately aiming to the awakening of the profoundest emotions. Rhetoric is therefore instrumental and functional to obtain an involvement of the emotional kind on the side of the audience. Already from the ancient times, the very inception of the lofty style had as its main goal the emotive response. A good and predictable example of an analogous idea, which sees rhetoric as functional to provoke a sentimental reaction, is to be found in the characterization of the *katharsis* made by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, whereby the beholder achieves the 'purgation' of his soul by witnessing a fictitious scene of a stark emotional involvement. This later culminates in a likewise strong emotional response on the spectator. However, in this ability of creating an emotional link with the beholder lies the bravura of the author, who masterfully uses language, more precisely poetry, to arouse and ultimately move the audience. [9]

Hence, when Longinus started writing his influential essay discussing the sublime style, he was not actually introducing a brand new concept in the philosophical and rhetorical scenery of his day. He was giving a specific name and more definite configuration to an already-existing idea. Monk refers to this subject as being "an old question in rhetoric," adding that Longinus "might easily have repeated the old formulae and illustrated the old figures that were conventionally regarded as being conductive to sublimity".[10] Furthermore, Monk recognises that Longinus's most important value is his acute eye as a critic rather than a real talent as a brilliant rhetorician since this was the characteristic which permitted him to formulate such an innovative analysis on the sublime subject.[11] The novelty lies in the fact that Longinus, consciously or unconsciously, provided the first tools to develop a concept which eventually evolved in a proper theory of aesthetic.

The *Peri Hypsous*'s author never gives a straightforward description of the sublime. In the introductory section, he affirms that his addressees do not necessitate any specific clarification on the subject matter, supposing its meaning to be common knowledge. Already from the beginning, the development of the Longinus's argument assumes a tautological connotation, where the

[8] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. x-xi, quoting from both Plato's *Symposium* and Aristotle's *Poetics*.
[9] Barnes, Jonathan ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 2320.
[10] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime,* p.12.
[11] Ibid.

author instead of providing readers with clear definitions, explanations and descriptions of the literary phenomenon, fills the pages with excerpts taken from other authors. These are supposed to serve as examples of how sublimity has practically been attained and employed by other prominent authors of antiquity. The sublime is neither addressed nor dealt with directly, but only sideways, in a manner which Heath defines "a series of oblique characterizations",[12] adding also that "his preferred expository device is the illustrative example. He mentions or quotes many examples but also furnishes examples of what he describes".[13] Therefore, *On the Sublime* offers as a copious list of instances which, according to Longinus, should clarify the rhetorical mechanisms of the elevated language. By sorting out the sublime through quotations of the sublime itself - exemplifying it with other authors' words - in order to provide an explanation of its true essence, the direct consequence of Longinus's choice makes the *Peri Hypsous* become too inherently sublime in its essence.

In the eighteenth century, this concept was understood more broadly than a simple literary style. The reasons of this 'overestimation' and its consequential huge success in the centuries to come lies in the peculiar treatment Longinus reserves to two pivotal themes. In the first place, even though it is only supposed to be engaged in the accomplishment of excellence in discourse, his analysis takes into consideration the emotive response. As Heath argues, "Longinus draws particular attention to emotion, which Caecilius omitted. [...] Emotion makes its presence felt throughout the treatise"[14]. Secondly, the key role attributed to the experience of nature and art, especially noticeable in the description of the grandeur of nature. These two 'misconceptions' served as points of departure for the development of the eighteen century aesthetical and philosophical theory of the sublime.

In the first section, the author introduces the topic by stating that "the sublime is a certain eminence or perfection of language,"[15] which

[12] Heath, Malcolm. "Longinus and the Ancient Sublime", p. 12.
[13] Ibid., p. 14.
[14] Ibid., p. 15.
[15] Longinus. "On the Sublime", in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Ashfield, Andrew and De Bolla, Peter, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996, p.22.

> not only persuades, but even throws an audience into transport. [...] In most cases, it is wholly in our power, either to resist or yield to persuasion. But the sublime, endued with strength irresistible, strikes home, and triumphs over every hearer.[16]

The description provided by Longinus in the attempt of explaining the workings of the sublime is fundamental, as it emphasises the close relationship between the lofty style and the emotions. Although Longinus's declared intention is the writing of a rhetorical treatise concerned with the 'perfection of language', already some sentences after, the argumentation shifts from the realm of rhetoric to an analysis of how the effects of sublimity impact on the mind. In this sense, particularly important is the word choice the author made: *transport*, *strength irresistible* and *triumphs over* are all words connected more to the emotional sphere than to the different rhetorical devices. Shortly after he adds:

> For the mind is naturally elevated by the true sublime, and so sensibly affected with its lively strokes, that is swells in transport and an inward pride, as if what was only heard had been the product of its own invention.[17]

These excerpts, focusing so much on sentimental reactions, must have been particularly meaningful for the eighteenth century critics and philosophers, for they opened up the possibility of amplifying the rhetorical concept of the sublime, therefore paving the way for a new theoretical approach mostly concerned with the aesthetical qualities of the sublime. Immediately after, Longinus takes a step further into his discussion by enumerating the five indispensable qualities for the creation of the sublime. "The first and most excellent of these is a boldness and grandeur in the thoughts", which is promptly followed by a second quality, the 'pathetic', "or the power of raising the passions to violent and even enthusiastic degree".[18] Longinus refers to the audacity and the nobility of mind, therefore, to the power to formulate great ideas, as the most relevant of the five sources. In fact, "the greatest thoughts are always uttered by the greatest soul."[19]

[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., p. 23.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., p. 24.

However, a great soul cannot achieve sublimity alone: it must be always paired with the capacity of eliciting emotions of the strongest kind. According to the author, these are the two genuine constituents of the sublime, but most importantly, these are gifts of nature which are impossible to attain through the sole employment of rhetorical techniques.

The three remaining qualities are mainly explicative of rhetorical aspects of sublimity and of a minor importance for the development of the concept in later centuries. Nevertheless, they comprehend: "a skilful application of figures" which underpins a proper use of metaphors; "a noble and graceful manner of expression" thus stressing the employment of elegant and embellished style; "the structure or composition of all the periods"[20] where the arrangement of the sentences is crucial for the successful final outcome.

From the eleventh book of the *Odyssey*, the author extrapolates his most famous example of what the sublime is. The two genuine constituents of 'power of grand conceptions' and 'inspiration of vehement emotion' are thus exemplified through the silence of Ajax.[21] His silence is "more sublime than any discourse":[22] it shows the intrinsic greatness of the unspoken thought, while at the same time confirming Ajax's greatness of soul. Here, the emphasis is put on the great mind and its great thoughts, leaving aside writing techniques and lofty style. Given that, the whole attention is not to be merely focused on the choice Longinus made, but rather on the historical implications of this choice with regards to the characterization of sublime. Sublimity is not to be found in the mode of expression, but rather in the content: the style fades into the background while the priority becomes the intense emotion which that specific moment is able to arise in the reader/spectator's mind. What emerges is that Longinus, although never considering emotion as categorically necessary in the achievement of the 'grand' style, he nevertheless constantly presents the two together. This presence of emotion in art marks the first step into the development of the sublime.

The other prominent idea sees sublimity in the external world as having a crucial role. Through his descriptions, not only Longinus pigeonholes and exalts the greatness of nature, but most importantly, he accentuates the innate ability human beings display when confronted with the mighty power of nature. Instinctively, humans respond to the greatness of the external natural world. The sight of nature prompts men to be inwardly moved, and often to enjoy the view before

[20] Ibid., p. 23.
[21] Ibid., p. 25.
[22] Ibid.

their eyes. However, not every element present in nature is liable to excite such reactions in our breasts:

> The impulse of nature inclines us to admire, not a little clear transparent rivulet that ministers to our necessities, but the Nile, the Ister, the Rhine, or still much more, the ocean. We are never surprised at the sight of a small fire that burns clear, and blazes out on our own private hearth, but view with amaze the celestial fires, although they are often obscured by vapours and eclipses. Nor do we reckon any thing in nature more wonderful than the boiling furnaces of Etna, which cast up stones, and sometimes whole rocks, from their labouring abyss, and pour out the whole rivers of liquid and unmingled flame. [23]

Not a brook, not a stream, not even a lake can excite men's feelings as the ocean can. Likewise, a little fire is nothing when compared to the celestial fires, and in the same way, nothing commands men's wonder as the sight of Etna's eruption. According to Longinus, these were the categories with the inherent power to awake both wonder and admiration in human beings. Nature impels mankind to react to these natural sublimities. The ocean, mighty rivers, celestial bodies and magnificent volcanoes had a major role in the configuration of the essential elements which would characterise the eighteenth century sublime.

The way in which the author of the *Peri Hypsous* approaches the subject matter leaves much room for different interpretations; which is indeed what happened centuries later. Addressing these two aspects, Monk writes "Much was read into them – doubtless much more than Longinus meant – and much was taken from them."[24] Speculations rapidly outgrew *On the Sublime*, which even if is - and was back then - widely recognised as the onset of the sublime theory, however, it has never succeeded in being more than a simple leading influence. Despite Longinus's popularity as an authority in a period in which the Ancients were looked upon as the repositories of knowledge[25], his influence was still destined to wane as the century drew to a close.

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[23] Ibid., p. 25.

[24] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime,* pp. 17-18.

[25] Schueller, M., Herbert. "The Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns", in *Music & Letters*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 1960, pp. 313-330. Mostly in France and England, the literary debate saw two opposing factions: the "Ancients" upheld that the models for literary excellence were to be found only in Classical literature of Greece and Rome; whereas the "Moderns" actively put in question the 'alleged' supremacy of the Classical writers. Longinus owes his prominent role in this debate thanks to the publication of Nicolas Boileau's *L'Art poétique* (1674).

Notwithstanding the rhetorical connation intended by the *Peri Hypsous*'s author, theoretical as well as philosophical reflections significantly deviated from the initial idea, inasmuch as with the closing of the eighteenth century, the sublime became a purely aesthetical discussion. This process was set into motion in 1674, with Nicolas Boileau's translation of Longinus.

1.2 Seventeenth Century Sublime

The critical analysis made by Longinus was to lay dormant within the lone and ruined manuscript survived through the ages until the explosion of interest in the eighteenth century. In the seventeenth century, the treatise on the sublime aspect of language, although not completely unknown, was nevertheless overlooked. Especially in England, its timeline observed a strong neglect during the 1600s[26], immediately followed by an abrupt rise to fame in the upcoming century. But before Boileau's translation, which officially upheld the sublime as an aesthetical concept, Longinus lived in the shadows of more urgent political and social upheavals which connote the century.

Three were the editions - all in the original Greek - which reintroduced Longinus's treatise into the literary scene. In 1554, the *editio princeps* of Longinus came out in Basel, published from the editor Francesco Robortello[27]. The following year, Paulus Manutius published the same in Venice. Between 1569-1570 the third edition was published by Franciscus Portus in Geneva.[28] However, despite the fact that *Peri Hypsous* made its return from the ashes of the antiquity, still Longinus had no relevance in the sixteenth century literary discourse. This absence of leverage is so summarised by Gregory Smith: "From Longinus little or nothing has been borrowed."[29] Along the same line, Clark writes "None of the Elizabethan or Jacobean critics (not even Ben Jonson) mention his [Longinus's] name or show any trace of his influence."[30] Only with the second Latin

[26] Costelloe, M., Timothy. *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 4.
[27] Often quoted also as Robertello.
[28] Costelloe, M., Timothy. *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 4.
[29] Smith, Gregory. *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, Vol. I, 1904, p. lxxiv.
[30] Clark, D. L., *Rhetoric and Poetry in the Renaissance: A Study of Rhetorical Terms in English, Renaissance Literary Criticism*, New York, 1922, pp. 62-67.

translation of *Peri Hypsous* in 1612 by Gabriel de Petra a first step towards the establishment of Longinus's reputation is made.[31] Indeed, in 1636 the treatise was translated into Latin by Gerard Langbaine; his version was the first curated by an Englishman and the first to be printed by an English press. The possibility that Langbaine's translation coincided with some sort of request or need for a new rendition of the Greek treatise should not be discarded.[32]

Finding a univocal Latin rendition of the title *Peri Hypsous* proved a challenge for the editors and translators, as well as it demonstrated how malleable the term *hypsous* could be. To convey the same idea, a variety of translations had been employed: Robortello renders it with *de grande, sive sublimi orationis,* whereas other editions only display the adjective 'sublimi', such as Manutius's *de sublimi genere*, Pizzimenti's *de sublimi genere dicendi* or Portus's *de sublimitate*[33]. The most relevant aspect which these translations have in common is "the emphasis that each puts on the sublime (great/elevated) *of* discourse rather than the sublime (great/elevated) *in* discourse."[34] In her essay Éva Madeleine Martin, addressing again the ambiguity in the interpretation of the meaning of the sublime in the early modern period, claims that this distinction played a major role as well as informed the most influential translation: Nicolas Boileau's *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours, traduit de grec de Longin* (1674)[35].

Not even in 1652, when the first English version of Longinus's work made its appearance, the turning point occurred. This translation, made by John Hall, titled *Peri Hypsous, or Dionysius Longinus of the Height of Eloquence rendered out of the original by J.H. Esq.* had the concrete potentiality of initiating something, but as it often happens, the historical and contextual conditions were not ready yet to embrace, let alone embark in a more detailed discussion of an ancient idea: "the time had not yet come for Longinus to gain the ear of the critical world, and we find his name mentioned seldom."[36]

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[31] Rosenberg, Alfred. *Longinus in England bis zur Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Weimar and Berlin, 1917, as quoted in: Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 18.
[32] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 19.
[33] Costelloe, Timothy. *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 4. Pizzimenti's edition which recites that title is a reprint of the 1644, while Portus's title appears in a commentary of 1581.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Martin, Madeleine Éva. "The 'Prehistory' of the Sublime in Early Modern France: An Interdisciplinary Perspective", in *The Sublime from Antiquity to Present*, edited by Costelloe M. Timothy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 77-101.
[36] Blount, Thomas. *The Academy of Eloquence* [1654], Menston England: The Scholar Press Ltd., 1971, pp. 47-65.

In the dedication, Hall for the first time in the history of English language formulated an idea aiming at the description of the concept of the sublime, which, in any case, seemed to be running parallel to the description provided by Longinus.

> It must therefore have somewhat I cannot tell how divine in it, for it depends not of the single amassing or embroidery of words, there must be in it, excellent knowledge of Man, deep and studied acquaintance with the passions, a man must not onely know very perfectly the agitation of his own mind, but be sure and conversant in those of others. [...] And yet all this, without somewhat which I cannot expresse, is but the smallest part that goes to the building up of such prodigy.[37]

His formulation appears much akin to the one which would change the story of the sublime two decades later. However, Hall's inability of providing a clearer and more systematic definition of this conception proved inevitably decisive. Its being fumbling and faltering at times, in conjunction with a literary and philosophical scenery still not prepared to welcome it, did it so that his words were unable to hit the mark, therefore lacking the capacity of affecting the imagination of his contemporaries inasmuch as to cause speculations on the newly re-introduced subject.

Hence, not until the decisive 1674 did Longinus enter the philosophical and rhetorical discussion in England. Before then, seldom was he quoted, and even though the author of *On the Sublime* was surely known among the literati, still he was far from becoming an authority among the Ancients. The employment of the term signified both physical or metaphorical height, but by then, the meaning never strayed from the realm of rhetoric. The word sublime held a marginal role in Britain, so much so that not even the most sublime of English poets,[38] John Milton, said more than just few words about Longinus, describing him as merely one of the teachers of "a graceful and ornate rhetoric"[39].

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[37] Hall, John. *Peri Hypsous, or Dionysius Longinus of the Height of Eloquence rendered out of the original by J.H. Esq.*, as quoted in: Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, pp. 19-20.

[38] John Milton together with William Shakespeare, will be used *ad nauseam* from authors as the ultimate example of how to achieve the sublime.

[39] Milton, John. *The Prose Works of John Milton*, edited by J. A. St. John, London, Vol. III, 1848, pp. 473-474.

1.2.1 Nicolas Boileau

Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, one of the most prominent literate in the seventeenth century France, is frequently credited with bringing Longinus back under discussion. This is particularly relevant for the English literary landscape, since the close relation between the Anglophone and the Francophone criticism made any literary event occurred in one country of relevance for the other. For this reason, the publishing of such an influential translation could not go unnoticed.

Nicolas Boileau's popularity and prominence as a literary man made each of his recommendation to be favourably welcomed in the literary context, therefore as soon as he uttered his opinion and his reading of the *Peri Hypsous*, Longinus finally re-entered the literary debate of the *siècle* in a meaningful way. It has recently been claimed by modern scholarship that Boileau was not really congenial to the task of translating such a challenging style as Longinus's rhetoric. In fact, the same scholars have held him responsible for taking unwarranted liberties while translating it into French.[40] However, the eighteenth century would disagree with this assessment. Boileau's contemporaries regarded this French rendition as the first translation in a modern language possessing an elegance that could be never outclassed.[41]

The French critic did not come up with this particular concept of sublimity all by himself. In tracing back the 'prehistory' of the sublime, Martin energetically contends that Boileau, while writing his *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours,* was actually relying on an older tradition of translations: Guez de Balzac already rendered the Greek ὕψους (hypsous) with *sublimitè* in 1636, whereas the very first French translation of the manuscript brought together by an anonymous translator working at the court of Louis XVI read out *De la sublimité du discours* in 1644.[42]

Although Boileau is probably much indebted with earlier translators, no objections regarding his authorship on the development of the sublime as aesthetical concept can be raised. Boileau's energetic enthusiasm for Longinus's treatise probably led to a misreading – or, 'over-reading' - of the original idea. In his *Préface,* the speculation regarding the nature of sublimity begins; and before the ending of the introductory section, Boileau had already formulated the

[40] Egger, Ėmile. *L'Hellénisme en France*, (The History of Hellenism in France) Paris, 1869, pp. 144-145.
[41] Smith, William. *Dionysus Longinus On the Sublime*, London: B. Dod, 1743, p. 5.
[42] Martin, Madeleine Éva. "The 'Prehistory' of the Sublime in Early Modern France", pp. 77-101.

definition of the sublime as he understood it from the Greek philosopher. The sublime became a real subject of speculation only after his skilful manoeuvring of its original meaning. Linguistically speaking, the change witnessed the transformation from adjective to noun, which started from the Latin qualifier *sublimis*, and ended up with the neologism *sublime/sublimitè*. However, the true novelty is to be found in the new philosophical understanding the sublime acquired after Boileau's discussion of it, which shapes "as an essence or independent existence expressed *in* and *through* language rather than *belonging to* or *of* language."[43] Boileau's reading of Longinus's sublime is well exemplified in this passage from the preface to the *Traité*:

> by sublime, Longinus does not mean what the orators call sublime style, but this extraordinary and the marvelous that strikes in discourse, and what in a work elevates, ravishes, and transports. The sublime style always concerns elevated diction, but the Sublime can be found in a single thought, a single figure a single turn of phrase.[44]

The terminology employed shows his rejection of an understanding of the *Peri Hypsous* merely confined to the methodological and didactical teaching function of '*le stile sublime'*. Instead, his interpretation of the concept focuses on the investigation of '*le Sublime*', firmly understood as the art of writing. For Boileau the sublime is that extraordinary and marvellous quality which not only strikes in a discourse, but also enables a composition to elevate, ravish, and transport. The elevated diction is a necessary prerequisite, yet the sublime is also to be found in a single thought. This means that an idea could be conveyed through the use of the sublime style, but the sole use of the style does not automatically guarantee its sublimity. If the thought is neither remarkable not outstanding, the sublime cannot be achieved. Clearly, Boileau elaborated from the hint Longinus made at the possibility that a single thought or a single word could potentially

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[43] Costelloe, M., Timothy. *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 4.

[44] Boileau, Despréaux, Nicolas. *Traité du sublime ou du merveilleux dans le discours*, in *Oeuvres completes,* Paris: Firmin Didot Frères, 1837, pp. 316–318.

> The original French:
> par sublime, Longin n'entend pas ce que les orateurs appellent le style sublime, mais cet extraordinaire et ce merveilleux qui frappe dans le discours, et qui fait qu'un ouvrage enlève, ravit, transporte. Le stile sublime veut toujours de grands mots; mais le sublime se peut trouver dans une seule pensée, dans une seule figure, dans un seul tour de paroles.

As quoted in: Costelloe, Timothy. *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, p. 4.

express the sublime. Firstly, especially from the first two of the five qualities enumerated by the Greek rhetorician, Boileau extrapolated the general concept, then he moved forward to emphasise the distinction between a sublime which is concerned with rhetoric and a sublime focused on the content. Historically speaking, this was the revolutionary element introduced by Boileau: the separation of style and content, consequentially positioning them onto two different levels. Focusing on the topic more explicitly and discussing it at greater length than anyone had previously done, Boileau was able to shift the attention from *how* it was written (rhetorical style) to *what* was written (content). The achievement of sublimity, once the prerogatives of elevated diction were fulfilled, required a content capable of provoking an overwhelming sense of vastness and power. In this difference lies Boileau's interpretation of the sublime.

The Longinus presented to the eighteenth century criticism is not the *Peri Hypsous*'s Longinus from the third century CE, but rather the creation of Boileau. The ability of the French literary critic of calling the attention on the sublime treatise led to the overture of an unspoiled space for discussion, which soon flourished with speculations and hypothesis on the factual nature of the sublime. In 1674 the sublime acquired a new status, a new identity which is the offspring of the mixture between the argumentations of such profoundly different minds as those of the Greek philosopher and the author of *L'Art Poétique*. What Boileau bequeathed to the newly born aesthetical tradition of the sublime was not only a neologism, but also a – not entirely new, yet reformulated - subject destined to become of paramount importance in the age of taste.

1.3 From a Rhetorical to a Psychological Conception of the Sublime

Throughout the eighteenth century, the influence of John Locke's empiricism is mostly felt in the literary compositions of British aesthetic. Indeed, the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) had inaugurated some sort of rudimentary psychology by seeking to explore the mind empirically, namely through an analysis based on experience. Hence, during the age of sensibility a new philosophical discussion which solidly brought the sense under the spotlight was introduced, laying the foundation for important thinkers to formulate influential theories on the

subject. The third Earl of Shaftesbury, Anthony Ashley Cooper (1671-1713), who had been educated under the tutelage of Locke, claimed in his *Inquiry concerning Virtue or Merit* (1699) that the ultimate proof of our innate sense of benevolence is to be found in our sense of beauty. Subsequently, what may be considered as the first textbook on aesthetic in English[45] came out from Francis Hutcheson's critical defence of Shaftesbury's deduction about men inherent moral sense (which, for Hutcheson, will correspond the sixth sense). Hutcheson, Irish philosopher considered the founding father of the Scottish Enlightenment, with his *Inquiry into the Origins of our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) enormously influenced the critical thinking of his successors up to Edmund Burke. "This Lockean foundation makes actual objects and their qualities central to many aesthetic theories, in strong contrast to the metaphysical or theological ideas of beauty found in earlier philosophical approaches."[46] The leverage of these philosophers is evident in the discussions concerning the sublime as one of the predominant qualities echoing throughout the age of taste. Nonetheless, it was through the introduction of an empiric approach to the sublime, which ultimately took into consideration the objects and its own qualities that the much-needed shift from style to materiality occurred.

With the incipit provided by Nicolas Boileau, a number of critics rediscovered Longinus's value as well as his versatility in furnishing suitable argumentations for the ongoing quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns. Indeed, within this controversy, the rhetorician featured as an ally of both parties, as he "was used by both sides as a champion, alternately playing the part of the ancient exemplar and of modern usurper",[47] therefore enjoying a general prominent position. As previously mentioned, the sublime re-entered in the literary discussion already during the seventeenth century, but it was never really able to excite a truly interested response. The probable reason for this neglect is the absence of need of "theoretical defence of individualism in art"[48], whereas during the eighteenth century, in the light of the increasingly hasty disintegration of the previously dominant neoclassical standards, the consequential vacant place offered the perfect opportunity for the sublime to flourish. The critical thinkers of the age who

[45] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. viii.
[46] Brandy, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy*, p. 15, referring to Townsend, Dabney. "Lockean Aesthetics", in *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1991, 349–361; Kivy, Peter. *The Seventh Sense: Francis Hutcheson and Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003.
[47] Lamb, Johnathan. "The sublime", in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume IV-The eighteenth century*, Nisbet, H.B. and Rawson, Claude, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 394.
[48] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 26.

unconditionally sustained the destruction of the canons and therefore engaged in a fight against the Aristotelian norms saw *Peri Hypsous* as translated – or better, interpreted – by Boileau as the locus classicus confirming their intellectual righteousness. Moreover, when the sublime made its first appearance on English soil, it was already associated with the natural world, as well as with rhetoric and literature. The concept was already inserted in the aesthetic realm.

Once the theoretical discussion was opened and the importance of the external world firmly established, the philosophical-literary landscape of the eighteenth century was finally ready to sustain a more psychological development of the theory of the sublime. As always happens, the most in vogue theories of the century mirror the overall approach men have towards the reality and the historical context surrounding them, which is why the formulation of the sublime is deeply in debt to the contextual aspects characterizing the age of taste. From a philosophical point of view, the theories elaborated by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Locke and Hume paved the way for a flourishing discussion regarding sentiments. Emotions, indeed, become the main subject of investigation. From a more literary point of view, the most prominent roles have been occupied by John Dennis, Joseph Addison, Mark Akenside and John Baillie.

1.3.1 John Dennis

The first one to take up the idea of sublimity from where Nicolas Boileau left it was the critic and dramatist John Dennis (1658-1734). Before the turn of the century, in the wake of Longinus's *Peri Hypsous*, Dennis explicates his own idea of sublime and thus advances in the inquiry by inserting the specific emotional response of the subject who witnesses the sublime. When Boileau made the attempt to ascertain the peculiar qualities art must possess to be considered sublime, he did not go any further than the description of the general effects produced by these qualities. Instead, Dennis accounts for the necessity of an analysis not only concerned with the nature of the sublime object, but also with subjectivity, namely the effect they incite. His development of sublimity therefore includes those elements which provoke "Enthusiastic

passions" on individuals, which counts: admiration, terror, horror, joy, sadness and desire.[49] These emotions are at their strongest level when their origin roots back to religion. However, the most influential of the aforementioned is undoubtedly the sublimity of terror.

Consequentially, to validate his thesis, Dennis affirms that the very same examples chosen by Longinus are sublime exactly because in possession of the capacity of inciting terror. He then gives a list of the objects held liable for the inspiration of this emotion:

> Gods, Daemons, Hell, Spirits and Souls of Men, Miracles, Prodigies, Enchantments, Witchcraft, Thunder, Tempests, raging Seas, Inundations, Torrents, Earthquakes, Volcanos, Monsters, Serpents, Lions, Tygers, Fire, War, Pestilence, Famine, etc.[50]

Although this list is well enough the reflection of the most famous characteristics which the period connected to the idea of the sublime, the author broadens the number of these sublime elements: many were already associated with sublime, but just as many were to play a key role in the elaboration of following theories. Furthermore, according to Dennis, the more the objects are powerful and likely to hurt, the greater the terror produced.[51] Going back to religion once again, Dennis identifies the most terrible idea in an angry God, meanwhile the capacity of feeling this terror is based on human being's instinct of self-preservation.[52] This elaboration is strongly meaningful in view of the subsequent use that Edmund Burke will make of these ideas within his *Philosophical Enquiry*.

The peculiar emphasis Dennis reserves for the natural world is particularly evident in the description he elaborates in a letter after having travelled through the Alps.

> [W]e walk'ed upon the very brink, in a literal sense, of Destruction; one Stumble, and both Life and Carcass had been at once destroy'd. The sense of all this produc'd different motions

[49] Dennis, John. "From The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry (1704)", in *The sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Ashfield, Andrew and De Bolla, Peter, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996, pp. 35–39, p. 35.
[50] Ibid., pp. 459-460.
[51] Ibid., pp. 450-451.
[52] Ibid., p. 461.

> in me, viz., a delightful Horror, a terrible Joy, and at the same time, that I was infinitely pleas'd, I trembled.[53]

The specific emotion connected to the sight of the mountain landscape he calls 'delightful horror'. What emerges is a sort of pleasure in pain, whereby the emotions of terror and joy are strictly interwoven. Dennis is the first Englishman to explore the positive and negative emotions as no more separated from one another, but when closely related, potentially able to affect the mind inasmuch as to cause the sublime. Additionally, he explicitly links this mixed emotion to the Alps, therefore laying the foundation for the natural sublime, which will be extensively discussed later in the century.

With this interpretation where terror occupies the place of honour and with the fundamental role assigned to the mighty nature, the English and the French conception of sublime ultimately diverge. As Monk convincingly sums up,

> This is an historical fact of some importance, for terror is the first of several qualities that, finding no very happy home in the well-planned, orderly and carefully trimmed domain of neo-classicism, sought and found refuge in the sublime, which constantly gathered to itself ideas and emotions that were to be prominent in the poetry and prose of the romantic era.[54]

[53] Quoted in Nicolson, Marjorie Hope. *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory, The Development of the Aesthetic of the Infinite*, London: University of Washington Press, 1997, p. 277, from Dennis, John. *The critical works of John Dennis 1711-1729*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943, p. 38off.
[54] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 52.

1.3.2 Joseph Addison

Joseph Addison (1672-1719), English essayist and a member of Parliament, contributed to ongoing discussion on sublimity with a number of essays entitled *Pleasure of Imagination* (1712), which he published in his *Spectator*. This is the first time that papers dealing with aesthetic are sustained in England, and through their publication Addison offered an alternative to the Neoplatonic approach to aesthetic proposed by Shaftsbury[55]. Although still influenced by the first ever treatise on the sublime, Addison attempted to take some distance from the traditional formulation. For this reason, firstly questions of taste are treated as closely related to appreciation of nature and art as a whole; secondly, he shifts the entire discussion under the head of imagination, to which he directly links all kind of arts. In his writing, human's perception of beauty is explained within the framework of John Locke's philosophy of psychology.

According to Addison, aesthetic pleasures are pleasures of the imagination, since they originate in "the great, the uncommon and the beautiful"[56]. Possibly because of the traditional association of the word sublime with rhetorical writings, Addison never employs the term sublime, however, his greatness shares the same exact features of sublimity. The "ruder kind of magnificence"[57] which strikes the beholder is to be found in objects which, not surprisingly, belong to the magnificent natural world. The objects having this quality are: "the Prospects of an open Champaign Country, a vast Desert, a huge Heap of Mountains, high Rocks and Precipices, or a wide Expanse of Waters."[58] Furthermore, he contends that mass and space affect the mind as follows:

> Our Imagination loves to be filled with an Object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its Capacity. We are flung into a pleasing Astonishment at such unbounded Views, and feel a delightful Stillness and Amazement in the Soul at the Apprehension of them…[59]

[55] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. viii.
[56] Addison, Joseph. "*The Spectator*, No. 412", in *The sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Ashfield, Andrew and De Bolla, Peter, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996, p. 62.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.

The reaction pursues a common pattern in almost all individuals, and it comprehends the succession of these steps: the yearning of the imagination to grasp the object, the unavoidable failure, the subsequent feeling of bewilderment and finally the perception of both wonder and awe. This mechanism, which Addison theorises as the workings of human mind, is relevant because the aesthetic apprehension of mass and space are destined to be employed extensively in the theories of the sublime to come.

In Addison's formulation, the strongest power is assigned not to art, but rather to nature. In his *Spectator No. 489* the director claims that nothing affects the imagination as the sea or ocean. When calm, this "prodigious bulk of water" inevitably cause a "pleasing astonishment."[60] But when the same scenery is subverted by the strength of a tempest, the emotion perceived is of an "agreeable horror"[61], of which he claims the impossibility of describing. As described by Mr. Spectator, natural objects possess the intrinsic power of the sublime – or, for him, simply greatness – since they are able to elicit intense emotions.

The umpteenth novelty brought forth by Addison in the discourse of sublimity is surely the first rudimental distinction between the sublime and the beautiful. The highlighted contrast witnesses the opposition, even though still not particularly sharp, between the beauty of a garden based on order, regulation and specific design and the greatness of the untamed landscapes, being wild and disorganised.[62]

Joseph Addison provided the philosophical discussion with a wider conception of the sublime through the exploration of a precise aesthetic category directly applied to material objects, whilst leaving aside the rhetorical style. Under his tutelage, imagination gains mental strength and starts to play an active role in experiencing sublimity. From his discussion the first scission between sublime and beautiful occurred, but Addison only outlined the major distinctive features of the two categories. However, the separation of these concepts consistently enriched the discourse of sublimity, influencing a great number of subsequent theories, among which Burke's.

[60] Ibid., p. 69.
[61] Ibid.
[62] "English gardens are not so entertaining to the fancy of those in France and Italy, where we see a large extent of ground covered over with an agreeable mixture of garden and forest, which represent every where an artificial rudeness, much more charming than that neatness and elegancy which we meet with in those of our own country." Ibid., p. 65.

1.3.3 Mark Akenside

In 1744 Mark Akenside's (1721- 1770) long poem *The Pleasures of Imagination* definitely canonised the opposition between the two categories firstly emphasised by Joseph Addison. Not only is Akenside's poem homonymous with the *Spectator* series of essays, but also it confessedly follows the lead previously marked by Addison. As Collins points out, the verses focusing on the topic of the sublime appear to have been selected directly from the thirty-fifth chapter of Longinus.[63] This section of the *Peri Hypsous* is the self-same onto which Addison speculated in order to come up with the leading idea articulated in the paper number 412 of the *Spectator*. Therefore, although Akenside unquestionably draws a lot from the founding father of the sublime, simultaneously he relies consistently on Addison, inasmuch as he directly derives from him the distinction of three categories, "the sublime, the wonderful, the fair."[64]

As Addison treats the great, so Akenside does with the sublime. The both recognised the correspondence between the wild and vast in nature and the sublime. However, where Addison does not delve into, Akenside takes a step further: he specifies the peculiar characteristic of the two abstract entities. Akenside's beauty is thus personified and she becomes a maiden, she is gentle and radiant, she inspires love.[65] This personification is later related with utility, goodness and truth. With regards to the sublime, Akenside insists on the presence of an affinity between the vastness of nature and the soul of men. The soul cannot be satisfied with the petty and the finite, therefore it is relentlessly yearning for the infinite. Uncontentedness provides Akenside with a motive for speculation on the innate predilection men's soul for vastness, which not surprisingly, coincides with the peculiar quality of the sublime. In this predilection, which is the evidence of man's divine origin, the effect of the sublime is outlined: man does not consider a little fire burning, but cannot avoid turning towards the splendour of the sun. The sublime is awe-inspiring because of its energy, magnitude and terror. As virtue, gentleness and softness reveal

[63] Collins, J.C. *Studies in Poetry and Criticism*, London, 1905, p. 216.
[64] Rounce, Adam. "Mark Akenside, The Pleasures of Imagination", in *A Companion to Eighteenth- Century Poetry*, Gerrard, Christine, Oxford: Blackwell, 2006, pp. 237-251.
[65] Akenside, Mark. "*The Pleasures of Imagination"*, in *The sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory,* edited by Ashfield, Andrew and De Bolla, Peter, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996, p. 86.

beauty, so divinity, immorality and infinity exhibit the sublime. Beautiful nature is "serene", while the sublimity in nature is conveyed "in vast, majestic pomp."[66]

In 1772, Akenside released the revised edition of his long poem where the wonderful is finally omitted from the trilogy. The prominence of the two concepts as strongly in contrast with one another is ultimately established. Of this division Burke will make one of the relevant arguments of his *Enquiry*.

1.3.4 John Baillie

A long step forward into the aesthetical formulation of the sublime is taken with John Baillie's (1700-1747) *An Essay on the Sublime*, published posthumously in 1747. Its organization as a critical text would serve as a blueprint for many subsequent aesthetical theories.

Although in some passages Baillie's discussion is tinged with conventional ideas unmistakably Longinian, his purpose is avowedly to clear up the defective interpretation of the sublime as only concerned with the perfection of language. Baillie sees a great deal more than merely rhetoric in the sublime. Hence, after having freed himself from the fetters of the rhetorical tradition, he provides a detailed account of sublimity, in which he primarily sets up a discourse claiming the unquestionable centrality of nature. This absolute centrality is accounted for by referring to the fact that the specific sublime features of poetry and paintings mostly correspond to the descriptions of the characteristics that the natural world possess. The sublime equals to "painting to the imagination what nature herself offers to the senses."[67] This precise approach of gathering our knowledge through the senses from the experience of the external world clearly looks upon Locke's philosophical argumentation. The sensory experience of material objects is analysed with an empirical approach, where information accumulated through the workings of

[66] Ibid., pp. 151-221.

[67] Baillie, John. "*An Essay on the Sublime* [1747]", in *The sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Ashfield, Andrew and De Bolla, Peter, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996, p. 88.

the senses and consequentially elaborated in the mind, ultimately result in the expansion of the soul.

It is undeniable that at this point of its evolution the theory of the sublime still hinges upon the influences of its formal creator Longinus along with Dennis, Addison and Akenside regarding the perception of the natural world. However, Baillie almost delves into the uncharted territory of empathy when he describes the feeling at the sight of a vast object, where one is "affected with something which as it were extends his very being, and expands it to a kind of immensity."[68]

Heretofore, there had been a propensity for the exploration of the field of sublimity conceiving the sublime as a direct quality of the object. Yet by 1740s, the site of interest shifts from the description of the objects having objective reality to the investigation of the subject having peculiar subjectivity. With this regard, Baillie well fits into this change of direction, since his argumentation stresses that "the aesthetic perception of sublimity rests wholly upon sensation as it is directly stimulated by the sublime object."[69] The contact with the sublime object directly stimulates a sensation/reaction.

Additionally, Baillie regards vastness as the essential quality of sublime objects.

> We know by experience that nothing produces this elevation equal to large prospects, vast extended views, mountains, the heavens, and an immense ocean – but what in these objects affects us? For we can view, without being the least exalted, a little brook, although as smooth as a surface, nay, clearer stream than the Nile or Danube; but can we behold these vast rivers, or rather, the vaster ocean, without feeling an elevated pleasure? A flowery vale, or the verdure of a hill, may charm: but to fill the soul and raise it to the sublime sensations, the earth must rise into an Alp, or Pyrrhenean, and mountains upon mountains, reach to the very heavens.[70]

Conventionally, Baillie provides a list of objects sublime in their nature. These objects belonging to the external world are claimed to have the capacity of filling the soul. Moreover,

[68] Ibid., pp. 89-90.
[69] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 74.
[70] Baillie, John. "*An Essay on the Sublime* [1747]", p. 88.

Baillie goes deeper into the matter by stating that to reach the 'perfect' sublime, two additional features must be taken into account: uniformity and novelty. The author employs uniformity, widely recognised as a key characteristic of the beautiful[71], as intrinsically sublime. To motivate this, Baillie writes: "where the object is vast, and at the same time uniform, there is to the imagination no limits of its vastness, and the mind runs out into infinity continually creating as it were from the pattern."[72] The more its expansion, the more its infinity, the more its sublimity. Uncommonness, even if not an inherent quality of the objects, is able to heighten the sublime effect: the mind to be struck by an object, needs to perceive it as always new. The objects which become familiar automatically lose their sublimity. These three qualities fill the mind, making the soul experience a feeling of elevation, ultimately reaching the sublime. Particularly interesting in Baillie's *Essay* is the treatment he reserves to 'other' objects. The author recognises a sublime effect also in objects which are neither vast nor grand. To account for this assertion, Baillie takes up the fundamental idea of association, a concept much discussed in his coeval society. Therefore, it is the very idea that the subject associates with the object which makes the 'not naturally' vast object, still sublime.

Another important development Baillie introduced in the discourse of the sublime discourse is emotional complexity. The emotional reaction is not unidirectional, but different passions as well as different sensations can affect the mind simultaneously. "It is strange that a being so simple [...] should at the same time feel joy and grief, pleasure and pain, in short, be the subject of contradictions."[73] Moreover, the coexistence of these emotions often witnesses a strong, almost paradoxical, clash between them. Upon seeing the self-same object, in the same moment in which the soul is elevated and dilated by the sublime, fear is actively contrasting the elevation, sinking it. Baillie explains how the same idea, through association, may lead to antipodal types of sublimity. The idea of a God armed with thunder elicits a sublime terror, whereas the idea of a benign God elicits the joyous sublime.[74] The possibility of experiencing pleasure and pain together will be thoroughly and extensively explored in Burke's *Enquiry* just a decade later.

[71] Traditionally, uniformity is claimed as one of the main features producing a sense of harmony, which in turn is generally necessary for the excitement of beauty.
[72] Ibid., p. 90.
[73] Ibid., p. 97.
[74] Ibid.

In his *An Essay on the Sublime*, the possibility of sublimity in other area of interest, respectively architecture, painting and music, is taken into consideration. By associating ideas of power and grandeur to architecture, a sublime sensation upon viewing a fine building can be achieved. Similarly, the sublimity in paintings can be reached if the subject coincides either with the explosion of strong passions, or with the rendition of grand natural objects, such as mountains etc. While, as far as music is concerned, Baillie underpins sublimity with regards to grave sounds, for they affect the ear in the same way in which vastness affects the eye.

"The profusion of publications in the 1750s devoted to taste, rhetoric and the sublime marks a new stage in modernist readings of Longinus."[75] To the eighteenth century critical thinkers the concept of the sublime arrives still profoundly intertwined with Longinian rhetoric. However, after Nicolas Boileau's influential translation the discussion assumes new facets and a number of unexplored paths are finally ready to be explored. The overall philosophical discussion on sensibility; Dennis's emphasis on the emotions of the subject; Addison's division of the beautiful and the sublime; Akenside's subsequent polarisation of these two categories; all these interpretations converge and mingled together. All are functional to prepare for the *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, the final birth of the aesthetic theory of the sublime.

[75] Lamb, Johnathan. "The sublime", p. 399.

1.4 The Burkean Sublime

1.4.1 Edmund Burke

Edmund Burke, often referred to as 'the British Cicero', was an Irish-born British politician, philosopher and writer, widely considered to be one of the principal ideological forerunners of English Romanticism. The date and place of Burke's birth are conventionally reported to be 1730, Arran Quay, Dublin, Ireland. 'Conventionally' because, as one of his most important biographers Conor Cruise O'Brien explains, in the absence of official documents concerning his birth, customarily his birthdate has been located within the timeframe 1729-1730, meanwhile the birthplace has also been claimed to be the Blackwater Valley of Co. Cork. [76] Son of the Protestant successful solicitor Richard Burke and the Roman Catholic Mary Nagle, Edmund Burke, although educated following his father's wishes and faith, he nevertheless grew up in a very Catholic environment. After attending County Kildare, a Quaker school in Ballitore, he moved to Dublin in 1744 where he became a student at Trinity College. His university career was distinguished[77], and in those years he also founded his own debating society, 'Edmund Burke's Club'. Richard Burke wanted his son to enter the world of law, and obedient to his father's desire, in 1750 young Burke enrolled in the Middle Temple at the Inns of Court, where he began the formal study of law. However, he would never complete lawyer's professional training.

In his first ever work published anonymously in 1756, *A Vindication of Natural Society, or A View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind from every species of Artificial Society*, he criticised the British government treatment of the American colonies, supporting the rights of the colonists to oppose the metropolitan authority. Only a year later in 1757, his second early book made its entrance in the philosophical debate: with the publication of his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, he profoundly contributed to the development of the eighteen century aesthetic.

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[76] O'Brien, Conor Cruise. *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Analogy of Edmund Burke*, London: Sinclair Stevenson Ltd., 1992, p. 14.
[77] Ibid., p. 31.

Although the subject matter of the ongoing discussion is fully concerned with aesthetic aspects, Burke's importance as a political man cannot be completely ignored. He soon made a career as a politician, indeed, for more than twenty years he sat in the House of Commons as a member of the Whig party, opponents of the Tories. Burke's political thought is well summarised in his most famous work, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* published in 1790, where he vigorously claimed that the French revolution was sabotaging the foundation of good society as well as demolishing the traditional institutions of state and society. Bromwich locates the reason of the great success obtained by the *Reflections* on the fact "that it leaves the deepest impression of the crisis of human nature to which all his writings testify. [This work] in a single frame, offers the most comprehensive statement of his politics while drawing on all the reserves of his insight."[78] Particularly relevant is the historical context in which Burke was writing; in fact, in the second half of the eighteenth century, England was involved in a series of wars: the Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the War of Independence of the American colonies (1775-1783) and the war against France (until 1815). It is therefore not a surprise that most of essays of the last decades – included Burke's - were of a historical and political nature.

The *Enquiry* is the sole contribution to aesthetic made by Burke, since his body of works counts compositions primarily committed to questions of political history, political theory and the foundations of the commonwealth.[79] This treatise is usually read with disregard from his political writings. Nevertheless, as Wood argues, these dualistic conception of aesthetic categories, sublime and beautiful, contributed a great deal to inform and shape Burke's fundamental political ideas, that in turn shed light on the socio-anthropological supporting structure of Burke's aesthetic.[80]

On 9th July 1797 Burke died in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, and was buried there alongside his son Richard. However, his intellectual legacy was far from being forgotten in the upcoming centuries.

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[78] Bromwich, David. *The Intellectual Life of Edmund Burke – From the Sublime and Beautiful to the American Independence*, London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 15.

[79] Gasché, Rodolphe. ". . . And the Beautiful? - Revisiting Edmund Burke's "Double Aesthetics*" ",* in *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, edited by Costelloe, M., Timothy, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 24.

[80] Wood, Neal. "The Aesthetic Dimension of Burke's Political Thought", in *Journal of British Studies*, 1964, pp. 41–64.

1.4.2 Into the *Philosophical Enquiry*

Although Burke rose to fame as a politician and a political thinker, he was also the young intelligent Irishman who managed to leave an indelible mark on the British literary scene thanks to his aesthetic study. The writing of the *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* took place between the 1747 and 1756, with its consequent official publication in the 1757. In the preface for the first edition the author states that the study had already been taken to completion four years before, and that during those years he had found no valuable cause to alter the formulation of his theory. Thus, he had already written the whole treatise at the age of twenty-four.[81]

In Burke's approach to the aesthetic experience no overlapping is permitted between the sublime and the beautiful. By thoroughly dividing the two categories, Burke succeeded in giving prominence to an aesthetical form of experience that, given its irrational foundations, had utterly been neglected by classicist sensibility.[82] "Precisely by hardening the distinctions and radically setting the sublime over against the beautiful, the *Enquiry* was able to develop a theory of the sublime whose extremism caught the immediate attention not only of his British but also of his French and German contemporaries." [83]

The timeframe between the years 1740s and 1750s witnessed a period of transaction, but even more of growth in the English literature. Especially during this decade, new points of view start to be taken into consideration, thus provoking the emergence of new discussions, in-depth analysis of existing arguments and finally paving the way for a change of prior values. The perfect harmony and scrupulous balance as the preponderant characteristics of neoclassicism progressively start to crumble. The increasing emphasis on emotions and imagination gains the upper hand and commences the progressive destruction of neo-classical standards of perfection in art. It is exactly in this historical context that young Burke began to write what he intended to be a breakthrough in the formulation of the aesthetical theories made so far.

There is indeed something revolutionary in Burke's writing, which justifies why exactly this work continues to be studied even two and a half centuries after its first publication. Burke

[81] As explained before, the date of birth is uncertain, therefore he could have been either 23 or 24.
[82] Gasché, Rodolphe. ". . . And the Beautiful? *",* in *The Sublime, From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Costelloe, p. 25.
[83] Ibid.

does not want to draw up a theory on the essence of the sublime and the beautiful, but as he immediately clarifies in the word choice of the title, his poetic intention is the examination of the origins of the two categories in the human mind. By doing so, he sets out the overthrow of the entire Western tradition of thought concerning the sublime and the beautiful going back to Plato, Aristotle and Longinus.[84] He does indeed start from this tradition, or better by distancing from it. In the preface to the first edition, Burke declares that the motive which prompted him to the elaboration of the subsequent theory is the confusion and ambiguity existing in the coeval discourse of the sublimity and beauty. Referring to Longinus, he claims that "the ideas of the sublime and beautiful were frequently confounded" since "both were indiscriminately applied to thing greatly differing, and sometimes of natures directly opposite."[85] Acknowledging the absence of "an exact theory of our passions, or a knowledge of their genuine sources", the remedy he proposes is:

> A diligent examination of our passions in our own breasts; from a careful survey of the properties of things which we find by experience to influence those passions; and from a sober and attentive investigation of the laws of nature, by which those properties are capable of affecting the body, and thus of exciting our passions.[86]

This declaration leaves no room for misunderstandings: Burke wants to break from tradition, he intentionally – more theoretically than effectively so - turns his back on the literary compositions of other critics believing them to be too imitative, too traditional and too divorced from factual experience. The *Enquiry* sets out to provide the eighteenth century with an original investigation on the nature of sublimity and beauty. The originality of his work, besides the innovative ideas proposed in the discussion, also roots in Burke's stark and deliberate rejection of the dicta from the past. Particularly this enabled the *Enquiry* to mark a new point of departure in the aesthetic thought. In fact, it is undeniable that Burke's conception of the sublime provided posterity with causes for reflection different from his British contemporaries.

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[84] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. ix.
[85] Burke, Edmund. "Preface to the First Edition" of *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* [1757], Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, p.3. Henceforth all quotations are from this edition.
[86] Ibid.

Notwithstanding his stance, he inevitably draws from several past ideas. His formulation would have never been possible without the intervention on the discourse by his fellow critical thinkers. Nevertheless, it is the *Philosophical Enquiry* which now conventionally embodies the eighteenth century British thought.

From the vagueness of the precedent speculations comes his will of analysing the subject matter in the most meticulous way possible. This precision will characterise his work, but at the same time it will lead him into statements often absurd.[87]

The body of the *Enquiry* counts five parts. In Part I, Burke analyses the formal causes of the aesthetic experience, therefore the passions that the experience of either the sublime or the beautiful arises. According to Burke, human beings are motivated by two principal passions, namely passions for self-preservation and passions for society. The emotions of pleasure and pain are consequentially associated with these two pivotal causes, and which will respectively coincide with the foundation of beauty and sublimity. Hence, the passions that "are conversant about the preservation of the individual, turn chiefly on *pain* and danger, and they are the most powerful passions."[88] On the other hand, the two varieties of beauty are "the society of the *sexes*, which answers the purposes of propagation; [...] more *general society*, which we have with men and with other animals, and which we may in some sort be said to have even with the inanimate world."[89]

Although in the first place both Addison and Akenside opposed the ideas of the sublime and the beautiful, no critic had dared heretofore to formulate such a radical division between these categories. The entirety of Burke's aesthetic system is grounded on the antithesis of the emotions of pleasure and pain, respectively intended as being the foundation of beauty and sublimity. The contrast is outlined also in terms of gender, where the sublime is more or less implicitly linked to masculine traits, whereas the beautiful equals to delicate femininity. The discussion almost seems to take on the characteristic traits of realism when Burke analyses the passions with regards to the physiological reactions they cause in the body.[90] However, this is because Burke honestly desires to ascertain the manner in which the object before our eyes actually affects us, not to merely sketch how it ought affect us theoretically.

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[87] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 86.
[88] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 33.
[89] Ibid., p. 34.
[90] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 92.

In Part II and III the material causes of both sublime and beautiful are thoroughly investigated. The discussion is carried out with an almost scientific accuracy, analysing the peculiar objects and their effects. The catalogue of these properties belonging to specific objects and productive of peculiar kinds of emotions are to be found both in nature and in the artistic representation thereof. These have the power of either delightfully terrorise or positively attract. A more specific discussion on Part II and III will be dealt with later on this chapter.

Part IV has Burke attempting to go beyond the empirical psychology in order to explain the direct effects of the ideas formulated in Parts II and III, therefore taking to completion the definition of the efficient cause of sublimity and beauty. While tackling this, the most modern and original parts of Burke's argument emerge, as he takes a step in the direction of the what is to be addressed as neurosciences only centuries later.[91] The modernity of his thought lies in the kind of analysis aiming to show how passions actually affect the body, strongly emphasising the centrality of physiological aspects in the characterisation of the sublime and the beautiful. The correlation which Burke sees between physiology and psychology is explained in terms of bodily reactions which the individual experiences when confronted with either category. Hence, upon viewing a sublime object, a violent contraction of the muscles with a tenseness of the nerves occur. On the contrary, the experience of the beautiful provokes completely opposite reactions in the body and the mind, thus causing relaxation of the muscles and a consequential feeling of tranquillity. His conclusion is that both sublime and beautiful operate directly on the nervous system through sense impression.

As the *Philosophical Enquiry* unfolds, "in the movement from 'formal causes' to 'material causes' to 'efficient causes' there is a clear progression to internalisation, in which Burke focuses increasingly on the perceiving subject."[92] Since the conception of this aesthetical theory is firmly grounded on sensations and their respective reactions, physiological as well as psychological, the discourse is automatically led to the limitation of the role of reason played in the experience of sublimity and beauty. In fact, throughout the inquiry, Burke derives the mental reaction from the

[91] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. xxi.
He writes: "Written long before the era of contemporary neurosciences or even the grosser association of mental capacities with regions of the brain that was made possible by survivors of head injuries in World War I, Burke's account now seems quite fanciful, yet at the same time it resolves at least one of the problems that has emerged in his argument up to this point."
[92] Ryan, L. Vanessa. "The Physiological Sublime: Burke's Critique of Reason", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 62, No. 2, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001, p. 269.

physical reactions. The minimisation of the mental activity utterly calls into question the well-rooted assumption that the sublime coincides with the elevation of mind, thus undermining the tradition back to Longinus. In this section of his philosophical aesthetical conception, the manifestations of the passions are carried out through precise bodily representations, with descriptions of tortured and suffering visages on the one hand, and faces deeply pleased and relaxed on the other hand. As Boulton writes: "throughout the *Enquiry* Burke is principally concerned with the responses of the human mind to emotive objects and experiences."[93] The increasing interest of the age in the idea of 'sympathy' is reflected in Burke's reliance on emotions as a means of insight. Indeed, in this part Burke provides the explanation for his argument in Parts I and II, therefore, I will examine this part more thoroughly as associated to the material causes.

In Part V for the first time the author openly deals with the 'proper' subject matter of aesthetic: fine arts. Among the arts, e.g. painting, architecture etc., Burke considers poetry as having a considerable share in exciting the appropriate emotions of the sublime and the beautiful. In particular, Burke argues that painted images may undermine the effect of the sublime as they clearly visualise ideas which, for the sake of the evoking of the strongest emotions, are better left obscure. Instead, poetry has the faculty of assembling confused ideas which "transport the reader with delight precisely because they resist any clear presentation to the mind's eye."[94]

In what is chronologically the last past of the Burke's aesthetical work, namely the chapter 'Introduction On Taste' added in 1759 in the second edition of the book, Burke enunciates his ultimate insistence on the centrality of emotions as the human response to the arts. Two months before the publication of the *Enquiry*, the renowned essay *Of the Standard of Taste* by David Hume made its first appearance. The likelihood that this addition sprang as a rebuttal of the Scottish philosopher's scepticism regarding a possibility of establishing a standard in taste has been recognised by a number of critics.[95] Contrarily, Burke's investigation has the purpose of demonstrating the existence of a standard taste which is the same for all human beings. Having taken for granted that "the conformation of their organs are nearly, or altogether the same in all

[93] Boulton, T., James. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958, p. xxx.
[94] Lamb, Johnathan. "The sublime", p. 404.
[95] Boulton, James. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful,* p. xxix.

men"[96], what logically – always according to him – comes is that, being the physical organs in men identical, they all must experience identical sensations.[97] By recognising the source of ideas in sensations, Burke is empirically led to the conclusion that all human creatures must experience the same conceptions.

1.4.2.1 On the Sublime

The entire aesthetic theory is based on the antithesis of pain and pleasure, in fact, Burke chooses to open his inquiry by offering a definition of these two passions. As already pointed out, the overall theorisation Burke proposes finds its foundation on these two emotions, which are in turn linked to the two types of society (of *sexes* and a more *general* society) and to self-preservation; these again are respectively associated with the beautiful and the sublime. However, Burke distances himself from this over-simplistic interpretation and delves into the hint firstly proposed in Baillie's *Essay On the Sublime*, according to which emotions are complex, not merely and always transparent and unambiguous. Indeed, in the first pages of the *Enquiry* a paramount concept for the logic development of the book is outlined: the idea that, when we judge on the grounds of aesthetic, there is a possibility of deriving pleasure even from pain. Burke analyses the aesthetic experience and studies the properties of the objects that elicit those passions, which he later applies in Part II and III. In any case, Burke will not clarify these peculiar workings of human emotions until the fourth part of his inquiry; I therefore will leave the analysis of that section for later.

Already from the first lines,[98] it becomes clear that Burke's whole aesthetic revolves around the role of emotions; more specifically, his sublimity is entirely founded on the emotion of terror. It is exactly because of the centrality terror holds in his formulation that the *Enquiry* will be favourably welcomed in the literature of Burke's day. Starting to be widespread in the art world,

[96] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 15.
[97] Burke writes: "For as the senses are the great originals of all our ideas, and consequently of all our pleasures, if they are not uncertain and arbitrary, the whole ground-work of Taste is common to all." Ibid., p. 23.
[98] In second edition, this same idea is already conveyed in the *Introduction on Taste*, which explicitly declares his poetical intention.

this fascination with terror and horror was already to be seen in the graveyard poetry, in the interest on the supernatural, as well as in primary tropes such as ruined castle, decay etc.[99] What Burke did was a reinforcement and a definite placement of this emotion in the developing conceptions of art, a new precise role which appeared in the literary scenery with the most appropriate timing. In this context, the *Philosophical Enquiry* did much for the firm establishment of the cult of terror, both in art and in nature.

In Section VII of Part I *Of the Sublime* the origin of the relation between pain, self-preservation and sublime is introduced:

> Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say the strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on the part of pleasure. [100]

Anything which has the capacity of exciting ideas of danger as well as of pain, namely anything operating analogously to terror, is simultaneously a source of the sublime. Additionally, Burkean sublime coincides with the strongest emotion the individual is capable of feeling. Nevertheless, as Weiskel argues, Burke does not hold that the sublime *is* terror, but rather that the sublime is either terrible, when connected with something terrible, or when it acts upon the subject in a way akin to the terrible.[101]

From these statements, much can be understood about Burke's conformation of sublimity. In the first place, it is worth noticing how this formulation profoundly breaks with tradition, in fact, in this excerpt no explicit connection with the rhetorical aspect of sublimity is identifiable. Burke soon implements what he believed to be his mission, that is to say, the clarification of the contemporary confusion between the real meaning of the sublime, and the sublime applied to

[99] More about this key connection on the next chapter.
[100] Ibid., pp. 33-34.
[101] Weiskel, Thomas. *The Romantic Sublime*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1976, p. 87.

achieve perfection of language. Utterly in contrast with earlier theories, Burke unfolds a much more "troubled, violent sublime, where a cluster of negative, heart-stopping emotions – fear, terror, astonishment – are involved."[102]

Towards the end of the same section a further clarification is given:

> When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience.[103]

The fundamental prerogative for the sublime to be such and not 'simply terrible' is the need to establish a distance between the individual experiencing terror and the object causing terror. While emphasising this distance, especially when analysing the effects tragedy has on its audience, Burke adds that people "are affected by the feelings of our fellow-creatures in circumstances of real distress [...] we have a degree of delight ... in the real misfortunes and pains of the others."[104] But, as he very carefully reiterates, the person must be – or at least, feel - secure from danger in order to experience the sublime. By formulating this concept, Burke seems to offer a justification for the increasing interest which the Gothic genre will be able to arise in its readership, especially when his argumentation explicates how the sight of someone in distress captures our attention so intensively. Hence, given that passions belonging to self-preservation are based on pain and danger, these will be solely painful whenever they immediately affect the subject; whereas the same will become delightful if they only bring up an *idea* of danger and pain, without any factual circumstances of distress. The pleasure in sublimity coincides with a delight in the realization of pain threatened but avoided, which is liable to be stimulated by any kind of terrifying thing as long as these cannot really injure the beholder. "For terror is a passion which always produce delight when it does not press too closely."[105]

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[102] Brandy, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy, p. 24.*
[103] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 34.
[104] Ibid., p. 39.
[105] Ibid.

The author's account obviously echoes previous theories: as Dennis conceives terror as one of the "enthusiastic passions"[106] and Addison dwells on "a pleasing kind of Horrour" or "agreeable Horrour"[107], similarly Burke does not hesitate neither to associate the sublime with terror nor to recognise a delightful pleasure in the presence of pain. What Burke addresses as delight is not a straightforward pleasure, since its origin can be trace back to pain. The very existence of this idea of a delightful feeling stemming from an experience of the sublime (from the threat of either pain or danger) highlights the presence of a sort of pain in pleasure.

The second body of the *Enquiry* is entirely concerned with the discussion, or more precisely the cataloguing, of sublime objects and their effect on the beholder. As Brandy sums up, "the detailed theory of the subjective passions underpinning Burke's sublime is matched by an equally detailed examination of its objective sources in particular qualities."[108] But before starting his analysis, Burke introduces the primary emotional response to sublimity.

> The passions caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all motions are suspended, with some degree of horror.[109]

Whenever the 'great and sublime in nature' act at their highest level, the inevitable consequence is always the passion of astonishment. In such a state, the mind is "so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it."[110] Therefore, as soon as sublimity reaches its highest degree, it "hurries us on by an irresistible force."[111] Soon after, Burke also accounts for the existence of inferior effects produced by the sublime, namely admiration, reverence and respect.

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[106] Dennis, John. "From The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry (1704)", p. 35.
[107] Addison, Joseph. "*The Spectator*, No. 412", p. 69.
[108] Brandy, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy,* p. 24.
[109] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 47.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid.

After that follows a classification of all the ideas Burke considers as sublime, and they are: terror, obscurity, power, privation, vastness, infinity, succession and uniformity, difficulty, magnificence, light, colour, sound and loudness, cries of animals, bitters and stenches and pain.

The very first source of the sublime which opens Burke's list is terror, which is "in all cases whatsoever, either more openly or latently, the ruling principle of the sublime."[112] This fear, indeed, fully resembles real pain, therefore it so "effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning."[113] Particularly relevant is that under Burke's manoeuvrings, even small objects have the opportunity of achieving sublimity, insofar as they may threaten man's safety. Hence, he includes serpents and poisonous animals in his list, since although small in size, they could potentially harm man.

Contrarily to its predecessors, Burke's analysis does not theorise a restriction of the elements of the sublime solely to grand and vast objects, yet by putting all the emphasis on emotion produced rather than on the specific object producing it, any objects bringing up terror directly acquires the status of sublime. Through association, the human mind connects the idea of peril with what stands before it, activating a mechanism which springs from a natural, innate urge for survival, which leverages on the primary passion of self-preservation. This function of association in aesthetic perception, even though Burke makes a careful use of it, derives from speculations already entertained by Dennis, Hutcheson, Hume and Baillie.[114] However, the difference lies in the fact that in the *Philosophical Enquiry* "irrationality is given what is at least a pseudo-scientific basis, and is passed on to the preromantic period, where it helps prepare the way for the overthrow of what Wordsworth calls 'the meddling intellect'."[115]

An additional novelty introduced by in his inquiry consists in the prominence assigned to obscurity: "To make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary."[116] Darkness, confusion, uncertainty contribute significantly to Burke's theory of the sublime, because it is the impossibility of assessing the actual danger threatening us which pushes our imagination to fear what cannot be clearly seen. This is also the reason why the notions of "ghosts and goblins",[117] of which individuals cannot form distinct ideas, have the capacity of affecting the mind

[112] Ibid., p. 48.
[113] Ibid., p. 47.
[114] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 93.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 48.
[117] Ibid.

so deeply. Obscurity, in combination with specific elements, actively challenges the human being's ability to structure clear ideas. Therefore, it is not a simple coincidence that precisely Gothic literature will make extensive use of these blurred and indefinite entities, taking advantage of the inability of a precise rationalization of them, which inevitably throws the beholder into the emotional state of terror. Furthermore, following Longinus's organisation of the *Peri Hypsous* and aligning himself with the critical debate of the century, to legitimate his assertion Burke furnishes as the undisputable example of the workings of obscurity Milton's description of Satan in *Paradise Lost*, claiming that

> The mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For, separate the, and you lose much of the greatness; and join the, and you infallibly lose the clearness.[118]

Immediately following obscurity, there is power. In previous approaches, power mostly held an implicit role, but for Burke, its presence is so meaningful that he writes that he knows "of nothing sublime, which is not some modification of power."[119] Burke's conception of power implies the presence of a superior force, which great strength impels the mind to experience sublimity, for "pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly. So that strength, violence, pain and terror are ideas that rush in upon the mind together."[120] Clearly, this enormous power derives its sublimity from the terror it instils. As explicative example of his argument concerning the functioning of power, the author positions domesticated animals as opposed to their untamed counterparts, claiming that the former category completely lacks the sublime whereas the latter are the representatives of sublimity. Wild animals seem to acquire an aesthetic importance precisely because they are wild, and since man cannot exercise any control over them, their sublimity connected to their indomitable nature consequentially provoke the arising of the strongest of the emotions.

[118] Ibid., p. 51.
[119] Ibid., p. 53.
[120] Ibid.

Vacuity, solitude, darkness and silence, namely what Burke labels as 'privations', are all sublime because they are intrinsically terrible. These absences obtained by the privation of an entity, e.g. solitude as the privation of company or silence as the privation of sounds, contribute and highly enhance the experience of the sublime.

In line with tradition, Burke cannot but recognise that a pivotal role in the evocation of the strongest emotions is played by greatness of dimensions, either of great extent or grand quantity. Length, height or depth are fundamental to excite the sublime, and Burke, similarly to Baillie, accounts for the presence of different degrees of it, writing that "height is less grand than depth; [...] we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than looking up at an object of equal height."[121]

Burke then proceeds with the description of infinity, which he argues "has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect of the truest sublime."[122] The incapacity of the eye to clearly distinguish the boundaries of the object evokes in the mind an idea of infinity, which actually deceives the beholder, since there are scarcely no objects which are truly infinite in their nature. The idea of infinity is the most amenable to arise delightful horror, a conception that Burke will clarify in the Part IV of his *Enquiry*.

Subsequently, succession and uniformity are discussed, as the source of the sublime which "constitute the artificial infinite": succession consists in "frequent impulses on the sense to impress the imagination with an idea of their progress beyond actual limits";[123] uniformity occurs when, with the termination of an object and the beginning of another, there should be a certain continuity to form the idea of real infinity.

To 'Magnitude in Building' and 'Infinity in Pleasing Objects', follows 'Difficulty'. This source of sublimity comprehends every object which owes its existence to "immense force and labour",[124] such as the Stonehenge, which impresses the spectator because of the great force required to build it. Furthermore, the "great profusion of things, which are splendid"[125] is considered by Burke as the element to achieve the sublime called 'Magnificence'. When looking up at the starry night sky, a sense of grandeur stems from that apparent confusion, thus arising the sublime in men's breasts.

[121] Ibid., p. 59.
[122] Ibid., p. 60.
[123] Ibid., p. 61.
[124] Ibid., p. 63.
[125] Ibid.

This, according to the author of the *Enquiry*, is certainly due to their sheer number implicitly suggesting infinity.

The investigation successively takes under consideration the contribution of 'Light', specifying that not every degree of light is capable of producing sublimity, but only: brilliant light, as extreme as the direct light of the sun striking the eye can be, which completely "overpowers the sense"[126]; a light switching with the utmost celerity, as that of a lightning; whichever rapid transaction from light to darkness or vice versa, from darkness to light. Despite these definitions, Burke is attentive to underline that in any case, nothing is more productive of the sublime than darkness.

In the last sections of his study on the sublime, Burke deals with the sources of sublimity which are no more experienced by the sight, but rather by the other senses, namely hearing, smelling and tasting. In *An Essay on the Sublime*, Baillie had already summarily mentioned the possible role played by music, claiming that grave sounds with their long and deep notes may give origin to an idea of sublime. However, Burke takes a step further in the description of the contribution of other senses. 'Sounds and Loudness' are in fact conceived as independent qualities of the sublime which can be found in several situations, "the noise of vast cataracts, raging storms, thunder, or artillery"[127] only to mention a few. Excessively loud sounds, the sudden cessation of sounds, low, tremulous or intermitting sounds, the inarticulate cries of the animals: these are all signals of uncertainty which lead men to fear that the worst is to come, thus arising the peculiar feeling of terror, descriptive of the sublime.

Ultimately, the *Philosophical Enquiry* deals with the physical sensations received from smell and taste in the achievement of the sublime emotions. Although his argument might have surprised contemporary readership because of this uncommon introduction, Burke actually reserves a little space for the discussion of olfactory and taste senses, indeed taking into account only "excessive bitters" and "intolerable stenches".[128] These senses can produce a state of mind analogous to sublimity, but only if moderated. When stenches are in full force, any sort of delight can be gathered from them, making them become merely painful sensations.

[126] Ibid., p. 65.
[127] Ibid., p. 68.
[128] Ibid., p. 70.

1.4.2.2 On the Beautiful

That Burke had a certain familiarity with the theories of his contemporaries is particularly noticeable in the organisation of third part of his treatise. In fact, before taking on the topic of the beautiful and providing his readers with a list similar to the one drawn up for the sublime, Burke dedicates the first sections to a thorough criticism towards the eighteenth century aesthetic theories where beauty was the undiscussed protagonist. He does so, as many argumentative philosophers had done following Socrates's lead, by discrediting the opposing theories through counterexamples.[129]

For Burke, beauty is "that quality or those qualities in bodies, by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it."[130] Soon after, the author specifies the existence of two different natural emotional responses originating in the individual: love, "that satisfaction which arises to the mind upon contemplating anything beautiful, of whatsoever nature it may be" and desire or lust, "which is an energy of the mind, that hurries us on to the possession of certain objects, that do not affect us as they are beautiful, but by means altogether different."[131] Love in the *Enquiry* is the direct emotive reaction to unspoiled beauty. Indeed the phrase "We shall have a strong desire for a woman of no remarkable beauty"[132] confirms the idea that the principal passion excited by beauty is love; but nonetheless Burke recognises that despite lust affects humanity somewhere else, it often runs parallel and contributes to love. However, chapter III offers an overall explanation of what people should identify as beautiful, without taking into consideration personal preferences. Here, Burke seems to contradict his own discussion in Part I, where he writes that "are attached to particulars by personal beauty"[133], but there is nothing really personal in a list of qualities enclosing a universal standard of beauty.

While writing 'Proportion not the cause of Beauty in Vegetables', 'Proportion not the cause of Beauty in Animals' and 'Proportion not the cause of Beauty in the Human Species' Burke looks down upon the theories of Shaftesbury and that of his academic advocate Hutcheson[134], with the intention of confuting it. According to Shaftesbury, beauty is to be observed whenever we

[129] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. xvii.
[130] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 73.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Wincheln, A., Herbert. "Burke's Essay on the Sublime and its Reviewers", in *JEGP*, XXI, 1922, pp. 656-657.

encounter order, symmetry and proportion in individuals. This contact, in turn, becomes a sort of representative of a much wider understanding of the order and the proportion of the whole universe.[135] Hutcheson, availing himself of Shaftesbury's theory, adds that the sensory response triggered by the experience of the beautiful, even though apparently not comprehensive of any type of conscious reasoning, is in reality dictated by "Uniformity amidst Variety."[136] This is simply another name for the same idea of order enunciated by Shaftesbury.[137] Hence, Burke makes his disagreement explicit by arguing that neither proportion nor symmetry are the actual causes of the passion of love. There is no particular proportion "between the stalks and the leaves of flowers, or between the leaves and the pistils,"[138] nevertheless, flowers are beautiful in "almost every sort of shape, and of every sort of disposition."[139] Likewise, the tail of the peacock is utterly out of proportion with regards to its body, but still the bird is altogether beautiful. No specific recurring proportion ascribable to beauty are to be found even in our own species, nevertheless, "both sexes are undoubtedly capable of beauty, and the female of the greatest."[140]

Burke's attack to coeval theories goes on with the IV Section 'Fitness not the cause of Beauty', more precisely by calling into question the idea that the recognition of utility in an object automatically makes the object beautiful. Burke was probably rejecting Hume's theory proposed in the *Treatise of Human Nature*[141], according to which beautiful experiences most of the times coincide with the perception of utility in what stands before us.

Not even perfection seems to be a constituent of beauty. The argumentation set out to opposed who Guyer thinks to be the German aestheticians Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and Moses Mendelssohn[142], takes a much questionable turn when Burke argues that "Women are very sensible of this; for which reason; they learn to lisp, to totter in their walk, to counterfeit

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[135] Voitle, B., Robert. "Shaftesbury's Moral Sense", in *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 52, No. 1, University of North Carolina Press, 1955, pp. 17-38.

[136] Hutcheson, Francis. *An Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue*, ed. Wolfgang Leidhold, Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2008, p. 28.

[137] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. xcii-xviii- xix.
In his Introduction to the *Philosophical Enquiry*, Guyer discussed in detail all the influences coming from contemporary theories.

[138] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 76.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid., p. 83.

[141] Perinetti, Dario. "Between Knowledge and Sentiment: Burke and Hume on Taste", in *The Science of Sensibility: Reading Burke's Philosophical Enquiry*, edited by Vermeir, Koen and Deckard, Funk Michael, Dordrecht, 2012, p. 284.

[142] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. xviii.

weakness, and even sickness. In all they are guided by nature."[143] Fittingly, as readers from the twenty-first century are disturbed by such a statement, similarly enough the eighteenth century readership charged Burke of sexism, especially uttered at the hands of Arthur Murphy and even more by Mary Wollstonecraft.[144] Motive of equal criticism is the fact that in the analysis Burke does never consider an recognition of the beautiful if not the one of men towards women, therefore completely ignoring homosexuality.

After having stated that "beauty is [...] some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses",[145] the properties of the objects triggering the emergence of the passion of love are listed. Smallness is the first source to be dealt with. In order to validate his thesis, Burke resorts to a comparison with the sublime. Sublimity, being already strictly connected to great and terrible objects[146], simultaneously fulfils the purpose of outlining the characterisation of beautiful objects. Not only beauty in objects is recognisable in the small sizes and their pleasing effect, but the most relevant difference is that "we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us."[147]

If we were to give to a beautiful object either a broken or a rugged surface, the same object would no longer have the capacity of causing a pleasing sensation. This shows how important is for Burke the role of 'Smoothness' in the classification of beauty: if smoothness lacks, automatically beauty lacks. As almost in every object, at a certain point a variation on their external structure occurs, and for Burke, so as to still consider that element beautiful, this variation must be gradual. Therefore, "you are presented with no sudden protuberance though the whole, and yet the whole is continually changing."[148] Once again, his argumentation (tackled from a solely manly point of view, without considering homosexual individuals) falls prey of an over-generalization, as he tries to provide an example:

[143] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 88.
[144] More will be said about the criticism received by the *Enquiry*.
[145] Ibid., p. 90.
[146] Even though, in the first part of the analysis of the sublime Burke claims that even small objects may be sublime whenever they pose a threat to our safety.
[147] Ibid., p. 91.
[148] Ibid., p. 92.

> Observe that part of a beautiful woman where she is perhaps the most beautiful, about the neck and breasts; the smoothness; the softness; the easy and insensible swell; the variety of the surface, which is never for the smallest space the same; the deceitful maze, through which the unsteady eye slides giddily, without knowing where to fix or whither it is carried.[149]

Essential qualities of beauty are appearances of "delicacy, and even of fragility."[150] The most vivid idea of beauty springs from the sight of flowers – from which then he draws a parallelism with women "delicacy owing to their weakness"[151] -: each specimen of the flowery species suggests an idea of temporary duration and frailty, and because of these precise characteristics the mind is drawn to admire all of its beauty.

Taking into consideration colours, Burke claims that they ought to be neither dusky nor muddy, "but clean and fair."[152] Their intensity should never reach too high levels, indeed, most appropriate to the beautiful "are the milder of every sort; light greens, soft blues, weak whites, pink reds; and violets."[153] In addition, beautiful objects are never offering a single colour pattern to the sight, yet a perfect mixture of variegated tones.

The sources of beauty listed immediately after do not seem the mere effect of a sensory response, but rather connected to ideas of posture and motion: gracefulness occurs when there is "no appearance of difficulty"[154], and elegance "When any body is composed of parts smooth and polished without pressing upon each other, without showing any ruggedness or confusion."[155]

Burke's choice always falls on examples which serve as antithetic comparisons to the qualities of the sublime experience, and as Guyer argues, they are functional to strengthen his claim regarding the existence of two types of beauty,

[149] Ibid., p. 93.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid., p. 94.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Ibid., p. 96.
[155] Ibid., p. 97.

> Those connected with our passion for society in general – what makes us want to spend time in the presence of beautiful birds – and those connected with our passion for sexual congress with our own kind – what attracts us (men) in a beautiful woman.[156]

Subsequently, the author of the *Enquiry* adds a clarification concerning the role of 'Ugliness', which, while being the exact opposite to beauty, "it is not the opposite to proportion and fitness."[157] He after considers that ugliness in objects extensively contributes to the formation of a sublime idea, nevertheless, as a quality on its own, it could never strike any terror.

The tradition which, starting from Plato up until Addison, had sought to relate beauty rigorously to the sight is again attacked through the insertion of following sources of beauty: 'The beautiful in feeling', 'The beautiful in sounds' and 'Taste and smell'. Respectively, the feeling triggered by the touch of a beautiful – smooth, soft and delicate – object, systematically provokes the same sensation of looking at a beautiful object; secondly, the ear is pleased whenever the sounds are "clear, even, smooth, and weak"[158] and the sequence of the notes is gradual; thirdly, the importance of tasting and smelling is validated through an analogy, since "we metaphorically apply the idea of sweetness to sight and sounds", however, "the common efficient cause of beauty [...] regards all the senses."[159]

The third part of the *Philosophical Enquiry* had been the most criticised since Burke's publication in 1757. The criticism recognised a number of internal problems in the descriptions provided by the author. First of all, as already mentioned before, the declared intention of focusing on particulars of personal beauty, while instead he provides a full list of what should be recognised as beautiful, without considering personal preferences. On the other hand, the beautiful is always addressed with its counterpart; the analysis approach sees a continuous comparison with the properties of the sublime, inasmuch as while closing the chapter, Burke feels it is necessary to make these differences even more explicit.

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[156] Guyer, Paul. "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, p. xix.
[157] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 96.
[158] Ibid., p. 99.
[159] Ibid., p. 101.

> For sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great, rugged and negligent; beauty should shun the right line, yet deviate from it insensibly; the great in many cases loves the right line, and when it deviates it often makes a strong deviation: beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid, and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure.[160]

Beauty is not really an independent topic of research since its study is carried out merely in terms of opposition with the sublime. In Burke's analysis beauty does not actually have an existence of its own, but rather it seems to be conceived as the theory having the opposing qualities which are needed to ultimately exalt the dominant qualities of sublimity. Beauty would not exist without the sublime, whereas the sublime alone could suffice.

1.4.2.3 The Efficient Causes of Beauty and Sublimity

After a detailed catalogue of the sources possessing the inherent power of triggering either the passion of astonishment or the passion of love in humans' breasts, Burke finally offers the explanation of how these processes are set into motion. The argument, at this point, goes beyond the 'simple' sensations of the body: the working principles of the human organism are transported within the realm of the aesthetic experience, and by leveraging on this context, Burke provides the readership with his own account of the physiology of beauty and sublimity. Having crossed the line between the empirical psychology and factual physiology, the effect these experiences have on the sense organs become the subject matter of Burke's discourse.

[160] Ibid.

The formulation of the fourth section of the *Philosophical Enquiry* suggests that the author had a certain degree of familiarity with the most popular and influential psychological theories of the period. Among all, several critics claimed a perceivable similarity of Burke's theory with the physiological approach proposed from David Hartley in his *Observations on Man*.[161] Hartley[162] argued that the vibration of minuscule particles in the nerves cause the phenomenon of the sensations, in which the effect of moderate vibrations is pleasure, and the effect of violent vibrations is pain.[163] Burke's re-elaborated version of this same physiology shows a level of disagreement with the Hartleian psychology: he refuses to approach the workings of the mind by referring to the aforementioned thesis. Hence, his explanation is carried out through an observation of the innate properties of the objects and their physical effect on human bodies. Consequently, when identifying the cause of pain and fear, Burke writes "that pain and fear act upon the same parts of the body, and in the same manner, though somewhat differing in degree", and roots back the motivation of this statement in the fact that "pain and fear consist in an unnatural tension of the nerves."[164] The only contemplated difference between terror and pain is that

> things which cause pain operate on the mind by the intervention of the body; whereas things that cause terror generally affect the bodily organs by the operation of the mind suggesting the danger; but both agreeing, either primarily or secondarily, in producing a tension, contraction, or violent emotion of the nerves.[165]

At this point of his discussion, Burke tracks down the origin of pleasurable feelings in "that beauty [which] acts by relaxing the solids of the whole system. […] and a relaxation somewhat

[161] This similarity is recognised both by Monk, Samuel, *The Sublime*, p. 96; and by Guyer, Paul, "Introduction" to *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful,* p. xxi.
[162] Hartley, David. "Observations on Man (1749)", in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Andrew Ashfield and Peter De Bolla, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 101–105.
[163] Oberg, Bowen, Barbara. "David Hartley and the Association of Ideas", in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 37, No. 3, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976, pp. 441-454. Oberg explains: "Hartley conceived of vibrations as movements backwards forwards of the infinitesimally small particles, first of the nerve then of the brain. Their movements were initiated by the impression external objects upon any of the five senses." p. 443.
[164] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 105.
[165] Ibid., pp. 105-106.

below the natural tone seems … to be the cause of all positive pleasures."[166] These conjectures are motivated by a meticulous investigation of the corporeal reactions of the individual in the presence of sublimity. The subject experiencing bodily pain

> has his teeth set, his eyebrows are violently contracted, his forehead is wrinkled, his eyes are dragged inwards, and rolled with great vehemence, his hair stands on end, the voice is forced out in short shrieks and groans, and the whole fabric totters.[167]

whereas while enjoying pleasurable sensations,

> the head reclines something on one side; the eyelids are more closed than usual, and the eyes roll gently with an inclination to the object; the mouth is a little opened, and the breath drawn slowly, with now and then a low sigh; the whole body is composed, and the hands fall idly to the sides.[168]

It logically follows that the sublime objects are those which produce this 'unnatural tension' and 'violent emotions'; therefore, whichever object able to elicit this physical uneasiness is simultaneously a source of terror, the ruling principle of the sublime. But as for how this extremely unnaturalness may elicit a pleasurable delight in the beholder, Burke solves the question as follows:

> If the pain and terror are so modified as not to be actually noxious; if the pain is not carried to violence, and the terror is not conversant about the present destruction of the person, as these emotions clear the parts, whether fine or gross, of a dangerous and troublesome

[166] Ibid., p. 120.
[167] Ibid., p. 105.
[168] Ibid., p. 120.

> encumbrance, they are capable of producing delight; not pleasure, but a sort of delightful horror, a sort of tranquillity tinged with terror; which, as it belongs to self-preservation, is one of the strongest of all the passions. Its object is the sublime. Its highest degree I call astonishment; the subordinate degrees are awe, reverence, and respect.[169]

Hence, the delight in the sublime is experienced because the nervous system is shaken from its status of indolence. This encounter with sublimity remains pleasurable as long as any sort of real pain is inflicted on the subject. Humans experience whichever occurrence with these prerogatives as 'delightful horror', 'tranquillity tinged with terror', so delightfully sublime. It is on the basis of this that Burke clarifies the reason why great dimensions in objects are so fundamental for their sublimity: the light illuminating an object causes both the tension and the vibration of the retina.[170] If the same object is also vast, this effect of tension is protracted for a longer time, inasmuch as it brings about a state which resembles actual pain, and whenever pain is involved, the object cannot but be sublime. The grand object challenges the capacity of the eye, therefore of the mind, which, not being able to rationalise all its boundaries has no rest. The form is everywhere the same. The retina is compelled to a continuous state of tension, in which it is so intensely struck that it generates the sublime in the mind. This sensation tending to danger is upon the subject or very close to it, however, at the same time the awareness that the object is not actually posing any threat makes the delight possible. Likewise, whenever the subject is engaged in a particular kind of scary reading (which will be the case with Gothic novels), the pleasure coming from it lies in the fact that the danger is experienced by proxy. The mind recognises the situation as threatening, but since the danger is filtered by the consciousness, the subjects is led to a perception and absorption of terror on aesthetical grounds. A panorama of a foggy yard, cemetery in the night with some eerie noises, without any action going on is enough to create the sensation of apprehension, which strikes fear, but never injures.

On the contrary, everything that relaxes the muscles and the fibres of the body produces the passion of love. In the moment in which the eye slides from a small object to another small object, the space elapsing between the two (or more) gives the mind a rest and communicates a

[169] Ibid., p. 109.
[170] This fundamental passage is accurately explained by Monk, Samuel, *The Sublime*, p. 97.

sort of instant relaxation.[171] These perceptions of 'gradual variation' and 'smoothness' produce a pleasing effect on the nervous system, which is never forced out from its habitual routine.

Through this discussion, Burke draws the conclusion that the efficient causes of beauty and sublimity find their roots back to the nervous system, which is brought into play by the impressions of the senses.

1.4.3 The review

Although not completely uncritical, the reception of Edmund Burke's *Enquiry* was generally cordial.[172] But the more the time passed, the deeper the criticism went. Burke initially published his work anonymously, and the reviewers equally answered covered by anonymity. About the inquiry, one of the first article appeared in the *London Chronicles* declared it gave to "criticism a face that we never saw it wear before".[173] Arthur Murphy, the earliest of Burke's reviewers, appealed to some very influential theories elaborated by Burke's contemporaries, from whom, as discussed before, the same Burke draw upon. Founding his critical disagreement on Francis Hutcheson's theory, Murphy defended a much more traditional concept of proportion, therefore objecting the Burkean conception which disconnected beauty from proportionality.[174] Persisting on his defence of tradition, now referring to John Locke, he argued that poetry actually functions by raising images in the mind, thus discrediting Burke's necessity of previously associating the poetical word with an emotion coming from experience. Likewise, Murphy contended the Longinian tradition according to which "whatever fills the mind with magnificent ideas is sublime"[175], nevertheless, he favourably interpreted the role of terror as a valuable addition to the sublime experience.

Along with Murphy openly blaming Burke's view of weakness in women as a source of beauty, which he called "ridiculous"[176], also Mary Wollstonecraft expressed her resentment. Some

[171] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 120.
[172] Wincheln, A., Herbert. "Burke's Essay on the Sublime and its Reviewers", in *JEGP*, XXI, 1922, pp. 645-661.
[173] *The London Chronicles, or Universal Evening Post*, II, 1757, p. 52.
[174] Wincheln, A., Herbert. "Burke's Essay on the Sublime and its Reviewers", p. 646-647.
[175] Longinus. "On the Sublime", p. 23.
[176] Murphy, Arthur. "Review", in *The Literary Magazine 2*, 1757, p. 187.

years later Wollstonecraft published a quite annoyed but totally justifiable response to the author, in which she utterly contended the formulation according to which women are "guided by nature"[177] to make themselves attractive before the eyes of men by underlining their alleged weakness and helplessness, therefore counterfeiting weakness. Wollstonecraft identified Burke's conception as highly impeding (let alone offensive) for women who are "amiable, by the force of those exalted qualities, fortitude, justice, wisdom, and truth".[178]

Witness of the importance and the enormous influence of this inquiry is the fact that for several aestheticians, for instance Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche to name only these[179], the separation theorised by Burke echoed inasmuch as it became canonical. More than a century after the publication of the *Enquiry*, in his *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche highlighted a division between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, which can be clearly regarded as direct descendant of the Burkean distinction between the beautiful and the sublime.[180] Furthermore, his conception of the Dionysian sublime as originating in the emotion of terror is deeply Burkean. In 1790, in his *The Critique of Judgment* Immanuel Kant develops the idea of the sublime by distinguishing between phenomena, namely a world of objects, and noumena, world of ideas.[181] The purpose of this division is a thorough investigation on the relation between the external world and the internal world, the human mind. Although the formulation of the Kantian sublime differs from Burke's in many aspects, still the influence is particularly noticeable.

More broadly, even though the literary piece had been mostly received in a favourable way, the unanimity of the critics saw as Burke's main fault the excessive restriction of the category of the sublime, since he categorically excluded the whole emotional sphere but terror. The subsequent evolution of the aesthetic theory demonstrated how the strict characterisation together with the sharp division which allowed no overlapping between beauty and sublimity, ultimately resulted to be too 'tight'. As a direct consequence of this too-exact pigeonholing, late in

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[177] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 88.

[178] Wollstonecraft, Mary. "A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790)" in *The Sublime: A Reader in British Eighteenth-Century Aesthetic Theory*, edited by Ashfield, Andrew and De Bolla, Peter, Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996, p. 296.

[179] Vandenabeele, Bart. "Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and the Aesthetically Sublime", in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, Vol. 37, No. 1, University of Illinois Press, 2003, pp. 90-106

[180] "The beautiful is an Apollonian feeling of harmony, discipline, and measure: the objects invite us to feel disinterested pleasure. The sublime, on the contrary, originates in a boundless and immoderate scene that threatens the individual will." Ibid., p.98.

[181] For more extensive introduction to Kant's idea of sublimity and beauty, see Guyer, Paul. "Kant's Distinction between the Beautiful and the Sublime", in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Philosophy Education Society Inc., 1982, pp. 753-783.

the century the aesthetic dualism of the *Philosophical Enquiry* was put into question, since it could not account for all the experiences located in-between the beautiful and the sublime. Hence, as a third category in the aesthetic theory felt much needed, the picturesque came into existence with the precise purpose of giving a name to the numerous objects which were neither sublime nor beautiful. The necessity of a new term was filled at the hands of the Reverend William Gilpin, who employed the word so as to describe the landscapes he saw during his tour. The picturesque objects are "those, which please from some qualities, capable of being illustrated by painting", instead beauty in objects "please the eye in their natural state."[182] Needless to say, Gilpin quoted Burke[183] when he located the source of beauty in smoothness, from which then he also deduced the provenance of the picturesque: roughness, which achieves variety by contrasts of light and shade. The sublime, following the convention established by Burke, is expressed through great dimensions, yet no modest sizes are descriptive of the picturesque. Indeed, where the sublime is founded on terror and awe, the picturesque is equally suiting the most cheerful and the grandest landscapes, stressing the characteristic adaptability of the quality laying in-between: "that general, equal gloom which is spread over all nature before a storm… is in the highest degree sublime" however this scenery becomes picturesque when the thunderstorm rends and the wind throws away the clouds into "a thousand towering forms".[184] The picturesque bridged the ample gap between beauty and sublimity, and simultaneously by its very existence, this third category bear witness to the great influence of Burke's theory.

No matter how positively or negatively the critical debate welcomed and discussed the *Philosophical Enquiry*, for almost half a century, a lot has been borrowed from Burke's aesthetic. In his valuable work on English criticism, Monk argues that even though his inquiry often stumbles upon some definitions, especially towards the end where it seems that the discussion slips from his hands, Burke "had provided the age with an idea of sublimity that suited nicely its increasingly sensational taste, and that could easily be comprehended by those who were uninitiated into the deeper mysteries of philosophy."[185] The *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* profoundly and indisputably influenced English – but

[182] Gilpin, William. *Three Essays*, second Edition, London, 1794, pp. 3- 7, 20-21.
[183] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, pp. 222-224.
[184] Gilpin, William. *Three Essays*, pp. 99-101.
[185] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 99.

not only[186] - aesthetic thought. Most importantly, the attention of the theorists and critics is finally put on sensations and on how the aesthetical experience is unquestionably interwoven with psychology, consequentially paving the way for the cult of terror to flourish within the literary scene as the century draw to a close.

1.4.4 Gothic Sublimity

When Burke explained terror as the most sublime and the strongest of the emotions, this conferment did not actually strike the world of art as completely brand new introduction. The terrible was already given a relevant importance by the so-called graveyard poetry in vogue between the 1730s -1750s.[187] This name identifies a group of pre-Romantic English poets sharing the same gloomy meditations on mortality, in the first place brought about by the presence of graveyards or churchyards. The main pillars onto which the poetry of terror is based - including the already mentioned poem *The Pleasures of the Imagination* by Mark Akenside- are therefore ruined castles, abbeys, graveyards, decay, eerie entities such as ghosts etc., namely several elements or entities able to awake uneasiness. Their peculiar treatment "had earlier anticipated Burke's systematic exploration of the various emotions of the sublime." [188] The terror arising from the encounter with the supernatural or the charnel house related symbols is almost never employed alone, instead, this terrible feeling is often flanked with the descriptions of the devastating potency of nature. The association of the destructive force of nature with the recurring elements employed in the graveyard poetry cannot but ring a bell. I shall return to it later. The likelihood that young Burke "shared a fashionable tastes for ruins and melancholy and terror"[189] is claimed in Monk's seminal study, and supported by Burke's own words in a letter dated 25th January 1745/1746 to the close friend Shackleton. Describing a flood in his hometown, Dublin, he

[186] One can only think about the idea of the sublime which would be later formulated by Immanuel Kant.
[187] Clark, Steve. "Graveyard School", in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, Bristol: MacMillan Press LDT, 1998, p. 107.
[188] Fincher, Max. "The Sublime", p. 655.
[189] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 87.

writes: “It gives me pleasure to see nature in these great though terrible scenes. It fills the mind with grand ideas, and turns the soul upon itself.”[190]

The previous literary essays on the sublime and the beautiful introduced several valuable concepts for the further development of theory, therefore, the aesthetic of terror arrives to Burke already having a rather definite shape and identity. The habit of mingling the sublime with terror, the greatness and the power of nature, the strong emotional response as a sign of sublimity are all already existing conceptions. But Burke’s sharp language framed in a very schematic structure, which does not admit any misunderstanding or erroneous interpretations, delivers to the eighteenth century almost a handbook with clear instructions, of which the Gothic genre will make extensive use. “Burke’s treatise is almost a blueprint for the geography of the early Gothic novel, which is often set in remote locations in wild landscapes.”[191]

From the early eighteenth century to the late nineteenth century the term Gothic is mainly descriptive of the specific revival of medieval aesthetic in architecture in Britain. This revival was spurred by the Romantic interest in the Middle Ages and the cultural products from that era, indeed “the gothic is symptomatic of a nostalgia for the past which idealises the medieval world as one of organic wholeness”[192]. The cultural reconstructions mimicking a fantastic version of the past simultaneously lay the foundations for the emergence of the Gothic literary genre. This genre, much likely to what Burke did when stressing the absolute dominance of sublime emotions over reason, threatened the subversion of the paradigms of realism and rationality. Indeed, it is from the Enlightenment convictions that the Gothic received its new impetus in literature, since its characteristic ideas and tropes were actively challenging the widespread over-rationalism of the period, by claiming that “the complexity of human experience could not be explained by an inhuman rationalism.”[193] As a consequence, the Gothic interest took the shape of dark response and developed as a counter-tendency to the tradition of urban and formal rationalism in Neoclassical literature: since “the delicate intellectual walls of neo-classicism could not long endure the pounding of violent emotions; theory had to broadened to include these emotions.”[194] The Gothic novel’s first preoccupation soon proves to be with intense and extreme emotive

[190] Samuels, P. I., Arthur. *The Early Life, Correspondence and Writings of Edmund Burke*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923, p. 84.
[191] Fincher, Max. “The Sublime”, p. 655.
[192] Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 11.
[193] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 2.
[194] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 68.

responses, where fear, violence, torture, insanity, murder accompanied with extreme psychological conditions like various mental disorders or paranoia occupy almost the entirety of the narration. The employment of the supernatural as a stable topos challenged the idea of logic, restraint, accuracy and decorum which dominated English literature from the Restoration until the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 by Wordsworth and Coleridge, historical moment conventionally referred to as the starting point of English Romanticism. Romanticism and Gothicism are not only sharing the same timeframe historically speaking, - the period identified as Romanticism covers from 1789 to 1830 circa – but also some characteristics:

> Romanticism shares Gothic's sustained interest in the borders of human experience: as the range of Gothic motifs produces a symbolic language capable of representing repressed desire, or an obsessive fascination with taboo, so Romanticism takes an interest in that language for its own fascinations with the disturbing power of imaginative or psychic activity.[195]

In their writings, Romantic poets display a certain degree of interest in the external world, which takes shape as a celebration of nature in all its forms. In this poetry, "the self is situated in a relationship of interdependence with nature, not determined by it or seeking power over it, but dwelling in nature, with imagination and emotion deeply affected by natural places and events."[196] Surely the Romantic view suggests a more harmonious type of relationship between the subject/poet and nature, nevertheless, this conception of the hegemony of the nature blends well with the paramount role of Mother Nature's objects in sublimity.

Already at its birth, the sublime had strongly been attached to the natural world. Longinus rhetorical sublime comes from an experience with the external world, in which the soul is elevated at the sight of the greatness of nature, to be found "not a little clear transparent rivulet that ministers to our necessities, but the Nile, the Ister, the Rhine, or still much more, the ocean."[197] The vastness of the ocean as well as the immense height of the mountain range are very apt

[195] Martin, W., Philip. "Romanticism" in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, Bristol: MacMillan Press Ldt., 1998, p. 197.
[196]Brandy, Emily. *The Sublime in Modern Philosophy,* p. 42.
[197] Longinus. "On the Sublime", p. 28.

symbols for the imminent development of the sublime theory. After the standstill caused by Boileau's French translation of the *Peri Hypsous*, where the emphasis on the greatness of nature is temporarily set aside, the aesthetic sensibility of the eighteenth century is finally ready to welcome back the natural sublime and develop it as never before. In England, a country that historically had always been more connected to the natural world than its neighbouring France, this attachment emerged in a meaningful taste for landscapes. This, in turn, is accentuated even more thanks to the boom of the experience named the 'Grand Tour', an early form of tourism that saw a great number of young aristocrats travelling across Europe to acculturate. Not surprisingly, Italy was the most frequent destination. "The slow and painful passage of the Alps gave ample opportunity to those who were so inclined to enjoy the wild and grand in mountain scenery, and the picture galleries of Italy were waiting to show how the artist interpreted the landscape."[198] The experience of these journeys is often brought into artists' creative works in the form of descriptive accounts or perfectly knitted in the plot of their narratives. John Dennis and Joseph Addison were the first Englishmen to attempt a description of the power of the Alps upon imagination.

Not only nature played a fundamental role in the settings of Gothic literature, but also the choice of the characters was crucial. As already hinted, "the roots of the British Gothic can be found in the mid-eighteenth century Graveyard poetry"[199], however, Gothic writers did not only refer to their close contemporaries' works, but drawing from their own national literary tradition, they benefited from the gloomy atmosphere of hidden crimes and guilt already exemplified in Shakespeare's writings and in the Elizabethan revenge tragedies.[200] The eerie appearances of the ghosts in *Hamlet* or the magnetic scene of murder in *Macbeth* as well as Satan's fall from heaven in *Paradise Lost* became examples of sublimity in writing, providing the Gothic writers with themes and descriptions to follow.

The initiator of the Gothic genre is traditionally recognised to be Horace Walpole, who in 1764 published anonymously his *The Castle of Otranto*. The narrative is set in the Southern

[198] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 206.
[199] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 4.
[200] The Gothic "feeds upon and mixes the wide range of literary sources out of which it emerges and from which I never fully disentangles itself: British folklore, ballads, romance, Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy (especially Shakespeare), Spenser, Milton, Renaissance ideas of melancholy, the graveyard poets, Ossian, the sublime, sentimental novelists (notably Prevost, Richardson, and Rousseau) and German traditions (especially Shiller's *Robbers* and *Ghost-Seer*)." In Kilgour, Maggie. *The rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 4.

principality of Otranto, in Italy, during the time of the Crusades. The intricate plot, claimed to have been written after waking from a dream – as Mary Shelley will later do -, is mainly concerned with villainy, strong passions, revenge and murder. The novel enjoyed very positive responses, and as a consequence, gained immense popularity as well as numerous imitators. Walpole inaugurated the literary convention of the castle, where the dungeon and labyrinthine spaces actively conveys a sense of disorientation, both mental and psychological. With the medieval trappings, the damsels in distress, as well the plethora of supernatural manifestations, Walpole pioneered what would develop into the typical topography, conventions, props of the Gothic genre. Along with Walpole, a great contribution to the establishment of a Gothic genre was given by Clara Reeve, Ann Radcliffe, William Thomas Beckford and Matthew Lewis. To them is owed the first formulation of a distinct identity of the Gothic novel. For example, Radcliffe had read the *Enquiry*[201], and much like her contemporaries, she believed that the sublime emotional response is achieved through intense terror. However, it cannot be failed to notice that in these writings a variety of ideas previously theorised by Burke emerge. Very often – if not always – the whole narration happens in a continuous state of terror and apprehension, where the characters must face treacherous and life-threatening situations. Much analogous emotions are experienced by the readers by proxy, and if it is far from being enjoyable on the side of the characters, it is actually particularly enjoyed by readers, whose attention is fully hooked. The reading provokes the arousal of feelings that in Burke's language are sublime, or even better, delightfully sublime, since readers actually experiences a delight while imagining something which elicits the terror in the mind.

This vortex of contrasting emotions is achieved linguistically speaking through representations mirroring the principal aspects of Burke's theory of sublimity. Whenever a Gothic writer wants to evoke fear and anxiety in his/her readers, the description must include a gloomy setting, dim lights, strong sounds, scary characters such as ghosts or goblins, and supernatural occurrences. More specifically, as the narration unfolds, the protagonist undergoes moments in which the impossibility of distinctly seeing what is happening prevents him/her to correctly evaluate the threat, thus leading to an overestimation – arising the fear of death. The presence of grave sounds and the place itself that, through precedent cultural connotations (e.g. graveyards, deconsecrated Churches) haunts the mind with the worst ideas possible. The tension and the fear

[201] Radcliffe, Ann. *A Journey Made in the Summer of 17944: through Holland and the western frontier of Germany: with a return down the Rhine: to which are added Observations during a tour to the lakes of Lancashire, Westmoreland, and Cumberland*, Dublin: William Porter, 1795, p. 421.

increase with the awareness that an event not rationally accounted for is taking place, and to bring this sentiment of uneasiness at its highest, the author only needs to fill the narration with demons, wild animals, ghosts or cruel villains. The main character is relentlessly chasing a way out of it, while the reader is relentlessly turning the pages to read what is coming next.

Either consciously or unconsciously following the various examples provided in the *Philosophical Enquiry*, Gothic writers recognise that the terror originates in a peculiar setting displaying precise characteristics. It is no coincidence that the very first Gothic novels are set in secluded places, away from the eighteenth century everyday life. Isolated places, ruined castles or abbeys with secret vaults and dungeons, dark forests, spectacular mountain regions populated by robbers, bandits and the like were the most recurrent. Under the strong influence of Romanticism, the prominent role of the external world in evoking sublimity is evermore stressed. More often than not, these natural objects are the same quoted *ad nausem* in the essays on the sublime: mountains, ocean, stormy weather etc. The protagonist of the Gothic novel who finds himself before a mountain scenery – or the ocean - is overwhelmed by sublime emotions, that is to say by terror, astonishment, awe, reverence and respect[202], since the immensity of the landscape cannot be accounted for by the eye. A hill with its gentle curves does not possess the same inherent power, it is instead beautiful. But if the reader by proxy has to face the solemnity and hugeness of the Alps, as the sun goes down and the darkness envelops the panorama, while the cries of wild animals fill the air: this cannot but elicit sublimity.

Burke's attempt of founding the sublime on a process where aesthetic and physiology are inextricably interwoven also foregrounds the significant relationship between the text and the reader. Unintentionally, with the *Enquiry* Burke provides artists with a list of elements capable of exciting the passions of the readers, but not only mild passions, but the strongest they can experience. The writers' task becomes the incitement of grandeur, awe and terror, so as to shake the souls of the readers deeply. As Sage argues, the strong sensations are "the psychological effect that the readings of such authors is supposed to have had on the audience, which links it directly back to the tradition of the sublime"[203], that from its very beginning always aimed at provoking strong sentiments.

[202] See Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 109.
[203] Sage, Victor. "Gothic Novel", in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature,* Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, Bristol: MacMillan Press Ldt., 1998, p. 86.

Hence, this literary mode was given philosophical support by theories that specifically explored the boundaries between thoughts and emotions. Not surprisingly, one of the most significant intellectual influences upon the development of Gothic literature was indeed the investigation of the conception of the sublime[204], especially as discussed in the *Philosophical Enquiry*. The innovativeness of Burke's discourse on the sublime lay in his refusal of following the already widespread formulation of sublimity as intended from Boileau backwards to Longinus. Instead, he approached the question in the most realistic way possible for him, therefore attempting to carry out his analysis within a strictly psychological and physiological discussion. It must be recognised that the *Philosophical Enquiry* is certainly not the most brilliant work coming from the philosophical and aesthetical context of the eighteenth century. Notwithstanding this, amid the superficiality and blurriness of some passages, Edmund Burke offers a profounder analysis of the conception of the sublime, more detailed than any other preceding author had ever offered. The idea of pain as an integral part of the desire impacted on the actual concept of beauty itself. The horrid, far from sharing any characteristic with the category of the beautiful, eventually became one of the essential elements in the achievement of sublimity, progressively turning the beautifully horrid into the horribly beautiful. Pleasure in pain, therefore the feeling of the delightful horror, is in fact the pivotal emotive reaction sought by Gothic writers. In this context, the role assumed by Burke's treatise is divalent: on the one hand, Burke puts into words a concept of sublime that the age of taste is soon to exploit at its fullest, namely the sublime of terror; on the other hand, the theory proposed by the author runs parallel to the characteristic development and specific facets of the aesthetic of the century, inasmuch as the sublime itself shows to be a symptom of the historical literary context. Clearly, terror owes to the *Philosophical Enquiry* much of its popularity during the second half of the eighteenth century.

This does not mean that Gothic writers faithfully applied the ideas in Burke's theory without questioning them. Indeed, Gothic authors did not merely copy from the *Enquiry*, but they actually "respond to [Burke's] formulation of terror, seeing in it a language for representing fear, and a debate about the role that the imagination plays in generating emotionally heightened states."[205] Most of the times, their novels conform to Burke's ideas when it comes to concepts such as obscurity or terror, but just as many are the episodes in which new solutions are offered. In

[204] Fincher, Max. "The Sublime", p. 655.
[205] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 12.

either case, almost any Gothic writer fails to show the influence of this treatise. For instance, Walpole's response[206] is to set his Gothic story (how he defines it in the second edition) in an isolated castle, reminiscent of a feudal past and of an oppressive patriarchal system, where the threat of the destruction of the values of civilization is ubiquitous. The female characters are subjected to constant distress and violence at the hands of the villain, meanwhile the plot is disseminated with supernatural occurrences. In his work, the aesthetic of sublimity and the aesthetic of nature are not yet fully blended, however, the Burkean sublime can be traced back to the descriptions of the sinister and perilous settings: cliffs, cells, castles and towers.

For the purpose of my final dissertation, I chose to analyse the kind of response to the aesthetic of the sublime, as theorised by Edmund Burke, by taking into consideration two of the most brilliant women writing during the nineteenth century and their unforgettable masterpieces: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). I intend Mary Shelley to be the representative of the application of sublimity during the first half of the century, which famously culminates in her particular formulation of the natural sublime. On the other hand, although not exclusively Gothic, *Wuthering Heights* demonstrates that the influences of the treatise on the sublime stretches up to the second half of the same century. Of this novel, I shall argue that the qualities of the sublime are so strongly impacting on the readers mostly because these are set in a stark opposition with instances of pleasing beauty.

[206]Walpole's connection to sublimity can also be recognised in his personal life: He was so fascinated by medieval history that in 1749 he had a castle built, which he called Strawberry Hill House. This building was one of the earliest examples of the Gothic revival in architecture. Its fine details, such as towers and parapets, aimed at the creation of a sense of darkness, the obscurity so typically gothic. In Strawberry Hill, Walpole housed his precious collection of antiques.

CHAPTER II

2. The Sublime in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*

Invention, it must be humbly admitted,
does not consist in creating out of void, but out of chaos.[207]

-Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Villa Diodati, June 16, 1816. The incessant pounding of the rain hitting the roof, the lightning rhythmically tearing apart the night sky, the crashing thunders causing the windows to tremble. The imperious wind forcing centuries-old trees to bow down to its will. This was the night in which the Frankenstein myth was born.[208]

Because of the raging storm striking the land, the not-yet spouses Shelleys, Mary and Percy, were unable to return to their lodging in Chapuis. Hence, Lord Byron invited the young couple to stay at his beautiful villa overlooking the lake Lemano for the night, together with Mary's half-sister Claire Clairmont and Byron's personal physician, John Polidori. Short on amusements, the group starts reading from J.-B. B. Eyriès German anthology *Fantasmagoriana* (1812) a number of scary novellas translated into French. The owner of the house is so enthusiastic about the reading that soon after he launches the idea of a contest[209] in which every participant should compose a terrifying story following the model of the ones just read, therefore providing the very well-known

[207] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* [1818], Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1999, p. 3. The text used in this book is the revised third edition produced in 1831 by Mary Shelley and includes her own introduction. Henceforth all quotations are from this edition.

[208] "The eruption in 1815 of Mount Tambora on Sumbawa [...] has filled the earth's upper atmosphere with volcanic ash, blocking out the sun and creating a volcanic winter." Sampson explains why that was the most 'wet, ungenial summer'; bad weather forced Mary Shelley and the rest of the group to stay in many times. Sampson, Fiona, *In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl who wrote Frankenstein*, London: Profile Books, 2018, pp. 118-121.

[209] In the Introduction added to the third edition of the 1831, Mary Shelley narrates the circumstances under which the key idea of the novel was conceived. The author discloses some of the most evident and important influences in the writing of her masterpiece, which will soon be dealt with.

pretext for the genesis of Mary Shelley's first novel. What happens next has entered the legend of horror literature.

Lord Byron commenced the writing of a vampire story*, Fragment of a Novel* (1819)[210], of which he got bored not even five days after. The same idea was subsequently taken up by his personal physician, who during the contest only managed to compose a particularly tedious little story filled to the brim with Gothic clichés.[211] The incipit which Byron provided Polidori with would be later re-elaborated and expanded into the proper novel, *The Vampyre* (1819), which is conventionally recognised as the point of departure for the development of vampirism in the literary landscape.[212] Percy Shelley, as would be admitted also by his wife, has always been "more apt to embody ideas and sentiments in the radiance of brilliant imagery and in the music of the most melodious verse that adorns our language, than to invent the machinery of a story."[213] Indeed, Shelley put together a fragmentary narration based on his own early life experience, *The Assassin*, which would remain unfinished.[214] On the contrary, at the beginning Mary struggled a lot to imagine a story apt to the task. Two were the episodes which significantly contributed to the awakening of Mary's dormant imagination. Firstly, Byron's reading aloud of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem *Christabel*, (Mary Shelley knew Coleridge personally since he was one of the many literary figures often attending the literary salon of her father, William Godwin) a composition so deeply intense, that with its combination of horror mingled with eroticism, it terrified Percy Shelley to the extent that he ran away with the hands in his hair.[215] Secondly, her attendance as a listener to (not actively participating) the conversation between Lord Byron and Percy Shelley with regards to a passage from the *Allemagne* by Madame de Staël, arguing about the possibility of reanimating the dead through the application of the so-called galvanism. The discussion, protracted long after the "witching hour"[216], profoundly stroke her imagination and set into motion a real creative process in her mind. At that point, the embryo of the story probably still needed to get rid of the clichés coming from the reading of the supernatural events in the

[210] Also known as *The Burial: A Fragment*.
[211] Shelley writes: "Poor Polidori had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady", Shelley, Mary, "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein*, p. 3.
[212] Rieger, James. "Dr. Polidori and the Genesis of Frankenstein", in *Studies in English Literature*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1963, pp. 461-463.
[213] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein,* p. 3.
[214] Sampson, Fiona. *In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl who wrote Frankenstein*, p. 127.
[215] Ibid., pp. 127-128. Polidori writes on his diary with regards to this episode. Sampson explains that, probably drunk, he had an hallucination where he saw Mary Shelley having eyes instead of nipples.
[216] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein*, p. 4.

German anthology: it is uncertain whether it was exactly that same night after listening to the eerie scientific conversation or some nights after that Mary Shelley had the renowned nightmare which provided the incipit for the fifth chapter of *Frankenstein*.

> My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the usual bounds of reverie. I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision – I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half-vital motion. [217]

Upon waking up completely terrified by the vividness of the nightmare, Mary talked about it to Percy Shelley, who although deeply shaken and horrified, nevertheless encouraged her to expand the narration into a full-fledged novel.[218]

The story of the birth of the Frankenstenian myth is doubtlessly fascinating and intriguing, even more because it is representative of the same key elements which characterise the literature of terror. The darkness of the night relentlessly shaken by stormy weather; the group forced to confinement in a special place, almost perceived as sacred, since only a century before it had given shelter to the most sublime poet, Milton, who probably had composed the exploits of Satan and his demons in battle with their Creator in the exact same villa.[219] The very essence of the story had been delivered to the author during the night, in an oneiric state, as a terrible and frightening nightmare that made her open the eyes in terror. The charm of villa Diodati's events surely exerts a certain influence on readers; however, *Frankenstein* is not merely based on a dark night and a fearsome bad dream. The novel actually rests on much more solid foundations than simple literary competitions, scientific conversations or restless nights. What makes *Frankenstein* so enduring a myth, a unique prose widely recognised among the greatest masterpieces of universal literature is the complex network of correlations to the author's contemporary culture, the rapid scientific

[217] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein,* p. 4.
[218] Bennett, William Holmes. *An introduction to the Gothic language*, New York: Modern language association of America, 1980, p. 30-31.
[219] Clark, S., William. "Milton and the Villa Diodati", in *The Review of English Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 41, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935, pp. 51- 57.

progress, the philosophical discussions and political ideas of the nineteenth century as well as auto-biographical reminiscences: "Mary Shelley's fiction is embedded within her philosophical Enlightenment heritage."[220] For the drafting of her first literary composition, it was thus inevitable for a nineteen-year-old young woman to seek after solid footholds in the general knowledge she managed to accumulate so far, while simultaneously relying on her own experiences of life, which, although brief, intensely lived.

2.1 Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: A Life

An immense mountain covered with a shining green turf is nothing,
in this respect, to one dark and gloomy;
the cloudy sky is more grand than the blue;
and night more sublime and solemn than day.[221]
-Edmund Burke

Born in 1797, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was the daughter of "two persons of distinguished literary celebrity",[222] namely the author and radical philosopher William Godwin and the author, political campaigner and mother of the feminist movement Mary Wollstonecraft. The mother died of puerperal fever, a complication directly related to the birth, only ten days after giving birth to Mary Shelley[223]. Godwin, among his other publications, especially managed to catch his peers' attention with the hypothesis articulated in the treatise *Enquiry Concerning Political*

[220] Wright, Angela. "Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft", in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, Smith, Andrew, Hughes, William, Punter, David, Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 619.
[221] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 67.
[222] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein,* p. 1.
[223] Sampson, Fiona. *In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl who wrote Frankenstein*, pp. 20-21.

Justice (1793), which offered a possible social reform openly set against Burkean conservativism. On the other hand, much of the literary fame enjoyed by Wollstonecraft was correlated to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), her critical discussion where she firmly established the demand for women's emancipation. It is worth noticing that both Shelley's parents not only knew Edmund Burke's works, but also, according to their own interests, they both formulated an argumentation against his writings. Godwin attacked Burke on the grounds of politics, whereas Wollstonecraft, as discussed in the previous chapter,[224] vigorously contested the vision of women in the *Philosophical Enquiry*. The probability that Mary Shelley directly approached the reading of the philosopher is therefore very high.[225] Moreover, there is an affinity between Shelley's conception of monstrosity and Burke's: as Baldick argues, Burke was the "first [who] recognised and named the great political 'monster' of the modern age."[226]

Much of Mary Shelley's knowledge of her mother came from Wollstonecraft's previous writings and from the biographic work Godwin wrote and published short after her death. With the *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1798) all the details of the controversial private life of the writer were disclosed with uncommon frankness, providing information concerning each phase of Wollstonecraft's unorthodox career. Although the first intention was the praising of his wife's unconventional uniqueness, contemporary readers were startled by the portrayal of a woman completely out of the rigid eighteenth century schemes: the unfiltered biography "documented her friendship with the married artist Henry Fuseli, her residence in revolutionary France, her liaison with the American merchant Gilbert Imaly (to whom she bore a child, Fanny), her two attempts at suicide, her domestic 'experiment' with Godwin, and, finally her slow, painful death."[227]

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[224] See "1.4.3 The review".

[225] In her essay, Clemit argues that "Mary Shelley and her lover embarked on a shared, intensive course of reading, which included all of Godwin's and Wollstonecraft's works, documenting their progress in a collaborative journal designed to emulated the intellectual reciprocity of Mary Shelley's parents." In Clemit, Pamela, "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", in *The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley*, edited by Schor Esther, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 30.

[226] Baldick, Chris. *Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstruosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987, p. 20.
Craciun similarly writes: "Shelley's internalisation of political debates creates an original and more complex political dynamic, in which the monstrous Jacobin imagine by Burke [...] are entangled with their monstrous progenitors, the men of privilege like Victor." In Craciun, Adriana. "*Frankenstein*'s Politics", in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, Smith, Andrew, p. 86.

[227] Clemit, Pamela. "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", p. 26, quoting from Godwin, William, *Memoirs*, p. 106.

The subsequent marriage with the widow Mrs. Clairmont in 1801 brought two children from the woman's precedent union, the newly born son the couple had, Mary Shelley and her stepsister Fanny Imaly to live all together under the same roof. Inevitably, the household became overcrowded, and Shelley "often felt side lined by her stepmother, and grew to idealize her dead mother."[228] The admiration for the mother, fuelled by discord within the familiar environment and the idealization of such a singular personality, would bring Mary Shelley even many years after Wollstonecraft's death to lie on the grave in St. Pancras Churchyard, reading Godwin's *Essay on Sepulchres*[229]. Not only that was the place in which her father taught her how to read by spelling the letters of Wollstonecraft's name[230], but it was also "on this hallowed burial ground that Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin and P. B. Shelley conducted their transgressive courtship."[231]

Percy Bysshe Shelley was one of the many acolytes in Godwin's family home. In July 1814, the sixteen-years-old Mary Godwin eloped to the Continent with Shelley, despite Godwin's vehement opposition. The scandal was twofold, since not only was Percy Shelley still married, but also because of the inclusion in the elopement of Mary Godwin's half-sister Jane (later, Claire) Clairmont, who was initially involved in a relationship with Lord Byron, but who later would reportedly be claimed as Shelley's mistress. The official union between the two occurred on December 1816, in the wake of Harriet Shelley's suicide[232]. That same year, another unpleasant news reached the Shelleys: Fanny Imlay tragically committed suicide by taking an overdose of laudanum.

In her classic essay *Frankenstein*[233], Ellen Moers notes that less than eighteen months earlier to the magic night in Villa Diodati, in 1815 Mary Shelley had given birth to her first born. The loss of Shelley's first illegitimate daughter within only eleven days from her premature birth has been recognised by a number of critics as a crucial passage for the comprehension of Shelley's first novel.[234] In her *Journals*, Mary Shelley writes:

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[228] Wright, Angela. "Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft", p. 619.
[229] Mulvey-*Roberts, Marie. "Shelley, Mary (1797-1851)", in The Handbook to Gothic Literature,* Mulvey-Roberts, Marie Bristol: MacMillan Press LDT, p. 212.
[230] Sampson, Fiona. *In search of Mary Shelley: the girl who wrote Frankenstein*, p. 27.
[231] Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. "Shelley, Mary (1797-1851)", p. 212.
[232] Glynn, R., Grylls. *Mary Shelley: A Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941, p. 74. The exact date is 30th December 1816.
[233] Moers, Ellen. *Literary women,* Garden City: New York, Doubleday and Co., 1976.
[234] Jansson, Siv. "Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* [1818]*,* Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1999, p. viii.

> Dreamt that my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived. Awake and find no baby. I think about the little thing all day. Not in good spirits.[235]

Not even a year before the famous waking nightmare, the young woman dreamt of rubbing her infant back to life. Although at an unconscious level, the idea of a dead organism returning back to life had already crossed her oneiric sphere. The event left an undeniable mark on her, so much so that, when she was put in the position of having to invent the plot for a horror story, the incipit came exactly from her saddest life experience. Furthermore, the adversities tackled with regards to childbirth were even more exacerbated by Percy Shelley's neglect of parental duties.[236] In 1816, she gave birth to her second child, William, whose untimely death three years after "is foreshadowed in *Frankenstein*, when the creature murders Victor's young brother William, and pins the blame on the family servant, Justine Moritz, who is wrongly executed for the crime."[237] Once again, Mary Shelley suffered another bereavement with the death of the third little girl she had, Clara Everina, after a year from the birth in 1817. Of four pregnancies, only one had a positive epilogue. Percy Florence was the only child who survived to maturity.

From 1812 to 1822 the young couple mostly led a nomadic life, continually travelling between England, Switzerland and Italy, until the tragic boat accident that caused Percy Shelley's death in 1822. A few years after, she also learnt about the death of her dear friend Lord Byron. From that moment onwards, Mary Shelley was obliged to earn a living for herself and for her beloved son through writing: she published five more novels *Valperga* (1823), *The Last Man* (1826), *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835) and *Falkner* (1837). Shelley's last years were heavily marked by illness: from 1839 she suffered from severe migraines and strokes in various parts of the body; this condition prevented her both from reading and writing. On 1st February 1851, in Chester Square, Mary Wollstonecraft died at the age of fifty-four from what was identified later as probable brain tumour.

Starting from the 'ill-fated' day of Mary's birth which caused her mother's death, Mary Shelley's life was heavily marred by loss. Mulvey-Roberts acutely observes that "Death, mutability

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[235] Feldman, Paula R., and Scott-Kilvert, Diana. *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814-1844*, California: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 70.
[236] Sampson, Fiona. *In search of Mary Shelley: the girl who wrote Frankenstein*, p. 115.
[237] Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. "Shelley, Mary (1797-1851)", p. 213.

and abandonment are the Gothic themes that permeated not only Shelley's life, but also her fiction."[238] Although there is no doubt that Shelley's biography significantly contributed to the development of *Frankenstein*'s key themes, such as abandonment, a sense of guilt, literary inadequacy and fear of maternity just to mention a few, it would be too simplistic to confine this novel to a mere auto-biographical analysis.

2.2 *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*

The form of the novel is epistolary and multi-layered, comprehending stories-within-stories.[239] The structural succession of the narrative is symmetrical: the novel has as its first narrator Robert Walton, immediately followed by Victor Frankenstein; at the core of the book, the narrating voice becomes that of the Creature, again followed by Frankenstein's; at the end, Walton is eventually restored as the sole narrator. Jansson describes this narrative pattern as 'triangular': "each of the three main characters has important conversations with the two others, and this triangular pattern also marks the exclusion of all the other characters from the story."[240] Neither an omniscient narrator nor other types of explicit guidance are provided by the text. Shelley probably wanted her readers to actively participate in the understanding of the controversies of the story, by absorbing the events, deeply dwelling on them and ultimately drawing their own conclusions autonomously.

The novel opens with a series of letters where Robert Walton, captain of a ship heading towards the North Pole, reports back to his sister Margaret Walton Saville (whose initials M. W. S. coincide with the author's) about the progresses of the perilous mission he had embarked in. Having reached a dead end of his improbable discovery, when completely surrounded by impassable ice, over the whiteness of the horizon Walton glimpses a man travelling by a dog-drawn sledge. The captain approaches him, welcomes him aboard the ship, nurses him back to

[238] Mulvey-Roberts, Marie. "Shelley, Mary (1797-1851)", p. 212.
[239] Newman, Beth. "Narratives of Seduction and the Seductions of Narrative: The Frame Structure of *Frankenstein*", in *ELH*, Vol. 53, No. 1, California: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, p. 144.
[240] Jansson, Siv. "Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* p. xiv.

health and consequentially gets ready to hear his unbelievable tale of the creation of a monster. The man goes by the name of Victor Frankenstein, "by birth a Genevese."[241] After a joyous childhood spent in the company of Elizabeth Lavenza (in the 1818 edition, his cousin, whereas in the 1831 revised edition, his adopted sister), his family and his dear friend Henry Clerval in Geneva, Frankenstein moves to Ingolstadt to attend natural philosophy and chemistry at the homonymous university. His years as a student are in the name of a meticulous and demanding self- imposed study, with the ultimate purpose of discovering the secret of life. Frankenstein's promethean pursuit is to grasp the principle of life from nature, openly challenging the most unconvertible rule of nature. Once the proto-scientist realises he has unravelled the intricate tangle containing the secret of immortality, he begins the experiment in order to bring a dead organism back to life. In the absence of prime matter (and by doing so, ascribing the novel even more to Gothic literature) protected by the darkness of the night, Frankenstein prowls in cemeteries, digs up the corpses from their graves, and steals the body parts needed to assemble his Creature.

After stitching these together, his unnatural progeny is given the 'breath of life' through an electric shock: the Creature lives, but only seconds after its controversial 'birth', his 'father' realises the monstrosity he had created. His sight profoundly horrifies him, inasmuch as the flees in terror. In the streets of Ingolstadt he comes across Henry Clerval; accompanied by the friend Frankenstein goes back to his apartment just to discover that the monster is gone. As a consequence, the protagonist falls into a feverish illness, where he keeps on perceiving the gloomy spectre of his Creature looming over him.

Deeply shaken and wracked with remorse deriving from his reckless action, Frankenstein decides to return to his family home to seek for some inner peace. However, before his arrival in Geneva a letter from his father reaches him, bearing the terrible message of the tragic death of his little brother, William, strangled under mysterious circumstances. The first encounter between creator and Creature occurs as Frankenstein is passing through the woods where the lifeless body of his brother had been found. The sight of his creation in the murder site convinces him that the assassination happened at the hands of the monster. Meanwhile, the gentle Justine Moritz, who was adopted as a child by the Frankensteins, is wrongly accused for the murder, stands trial, is

[241] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 26.

found guilty and is eventually sentenced to death. Although Frankenstein knows she is innocent, his cowardice in refusing to tell the truth leads the young woman to certain death.

At this point, the deaths caused by Victor Frankenstein's nefarious monster amounts already to two; and the main character, even more devastated and despondent, seeks a modicum of relief surrounded by the majestic and untamed nature in the Alps. The second encounter with the Creature occurs there, in the enormous glacier. The narrator's voice becomes that of the monster, who has the chance to explain his reasons to act as he did. Cleverly, Shelley puts "the Creature's narrative, which is the heart and centre of the text [...] *literally* at its heart, expressing the key themes of abandonment, responsibility and the effect of environment."[242] After having been cruelly abandoned by his creator, the Creature has to learn how to survive in the hard way, without any guidance. Each of his encounter with the human being ends with the same denouement, where the Creature is badly drifted away with violence and shrieks of terror upon seeing his hideous external appearance. Extremely lonely and forlorn, the monster begs his startled 'father' to provide him with a companion of equal nature, so as to relieve his solitude and sadness.

Although reluctant, Frankenstein accepts the monster's request. He moves to Scotland accompanied by his friend Henry, and there, secluded in a little island some kilometres away from the centre, he starts the procedure to infuse the 'sparkle of life' anew. As the process is almost accomplished, a sense of guilt overwhelms him. As a consequence, Frankenstein destroys the female monster. The Creature, who was attentively observing the improvements of the creation, gets enraged and brutally vows revenge on Frankenstein's wedding night. The destruction of the female creature brings about two more violent deaths. The fury of the monster already strikes that same night, causing Henry Clerval's death. Frankenstein gets arrested for the crime and once again, falls ill and is kept in prison until his full recovery.

Almost the end of the narrative, the vowed revenge takes place. Victor Frankenstein misunderstands the intentions of the monster, thinking that he himself would be the target of his wrath. Instead, the monster kills his new bride Elizabeth Lavenza, while he is away trying to protect her.

The last section of the book sees an overturning of the roles: now it is Frankenstein who swears revenge and vows to devote his life to the quest of finding the monster and killing him.

[242] Jansson, Siv. "Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* p. xiv.

The change in the balance of power between the two protagonists strongly points toward the complete dominance of the Creature, in fact, "the Creature dominates the relationship, leading Victor across wilderness, leaving food, markers and messages for him. This new dynamic also, however, reveals a mutual dependence."[243] Chasing the monster leads Frankenstein to the extremes, both metaphorically and physically: the last episodes take place in the icy world, the North Pole. There the creator almost reaches his creation, but he ultimately fails. At this point, the narration temporally catches up with the beginning of the novel, when Walton glimpses the silhouette of a man from afar.

"The ensuing, confused pursuit binds the two together and tears them apart in a dialectic of desire… Excluding all other relations, this polarisation of self and other is so absolute that it can only end in death."[244] And in fact, it is exactly in death that their obsessive desire for revenge ends. As Frankenstein exhales his last breath, the Creature makes his last appearance, lamenting his loss with a cry of pain and agony. The death of the creator seems to metaphorically give rest to the Creature, however, there no certainty of it. Mary Shelley writes "he was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance".[245]

2.3 The Main Influences of the Novel

As the literary heiress to two of the most prominent personalities in the cultural landscape between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century in England, predictably enough, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin thought of writing very early in life.[246] The young Mary Godwin was not brought up to live in the shadows of her parents' legacy or notoriety, instead, already as a child she had been taught to share their belief with regards to the central role

[243] Ibid., p. xiii.
[244] Botting, Fred. "Frankenstein and the Language of Monstrosity" in *Reviewing Romanticism*, edited by Martin, Philip and Jarvis, Robin, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992, p. 55.
[245] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein,* p. 170.
[246] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction", p. 1. "As the daughter of two persons of distinguished literary celebrity, I should very early in life have thought of writing."

of the intellectual, who has the duty of engaging in the public debate, whether of moral, social or political nature.[247] She was home-tutored; her education was much influenced by the presence of a great number of intellectuals frequenting Godwin's house.[248]

The oneiric genesis of the novel goes hand in hand with the intricacies of Mary Shelley's own creative process, as well as with references to her contemporary context and the readings which shaped her own intellectual life. With *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley responded to the literary and philosophical influences of the nineteenth century Great Britain in various ways. "Like the creature, who is the product of gather material, the novel itself is a palimpsest of Mary Shelley's own reading."[249]

Literary Influences

The most apparent roots in the literary genesis of *Frankenstein* are unequivocally disclosed in the subtitle *Or, The Modern Prometheus* directly pointing towards a reference to the classical antiquity. In her *Journals*[250], she reports that from April to May 1815 she was immersed in the study of Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. The story of the rebellious titan Prometheus[251] struck Mary Shelley's imagination, leaving such an important mark that she would, just a year later, build a narrative revolving around its same core concept. Ovid's Prometheus, ignoring the will of the King of Gods, created man by kneading his body with clay, shaping him in the image and likeliness of a God.[252] Through fire, the Titan ultimately breathed life into the inanimate statue. Drawing a comparison between Victor Frankenstein and Prometheus seems far too obvious: both created living beings from lifeless matter, utterly going against the natural order of things. "In the figure

[247] Clemit, Pamela. "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", p. 28.
[248] Sampson, Fiona. *In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl who wrote Frankenstein*, p. 38.
[249] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising Sources", in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, Smith, Andrew, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 26.
[250] Feldman, R., Paula and Scott-Kilvert, Diana. *The Journals of Mary Shelley 1814-1844*, California: John Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 20-23.
[251] Percy Shelley and Lord Byron were fascinated by Prometheus' myth as well, and they both translated this admiration into words in their writings, with the publication in 1816 of a lyric on the Titan by Byron and the re-reading of the myth entitled *Prometheus Unbound* in 1817 by Shelley.
[252] In Aeschylus' version, - another very-well known version of the same myth common in classic Greece - not only does the Titan disobey Zeus' will, but he intentionally steals the fire, a sole prerogative of the Gods, to gift it to mankind who before that moment did not know of its existence.

of Victor Frankenstein, Shelley innovatively problematizes the moral conflict between Zeus and Prometheus",[253] and since both Prometheus and Frankenstein will 'break the law', they will have to pay for their violation: the former by serving a sentence that has him tied to a cliff while an eagle devours his entrails for all eternity, the latter by witnessing the deaths, one after the other, of all the people he loves.

The suggestion of a second connection grounded on literary sources is made explicit in the epigraph added in the 1831 version, bearing an excerpt from Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost*. Shelley's Creature shares many aspects of the Miltonic creature: Satan was created by God following the ideals of perfection; analogously, Frankenstein declares that the Creature's " limbs were in proportion, and [he] had selected his features as beautiful"[254] therefore picking only the best parts from the desecrated corpses. The parallelism with what happens later is even more straightforward, since the creatures, once repudiated and expelled from the grace of their creators, decide to assume the role of adversaries against those responsible for their ill-fated origin.[255] By doing so, they counteract their 'fathers' by hurting those closest to them, namely Adam in the case of God and the Frankenstein family in the case of the scientist. In Chapter X, it is exactly the Creature who renders this comparison explicit by stating: "I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed."[256] With this statement the monster is crying out for the recognition that his humanity is wholly unheeded and that, no matter what, he will always be seen as the "fiend", the "wretch", the "filthy daemon"[257] despite his excruciating loneliness and the suffering resulting from it.[258] In this, the Frankenstenian Creature differs from the Miltonic one, since Satan will share his burden with his fellow demons, whereas the Creature will never be granted any sort of companionship.

In her writing, the literary influences coming from the familiar environment were fundamental too. The Godwin family was inextricably connected to the intellectual sphere of the period, of which both were particularly active members.[259] The author herself in a letter dating

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[253] Hustis, Harriet. "Responsible Creativity and the "Modernity" of Mary Shelley's Prometheus", in *Studies in English Literature*, Vol. 43, No. 4, Houston: Rice University, 2003, p. 846.
[254] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 45.
[255] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising Sources", p. 36.
[256] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, pp. 77-78.
[257] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, respectively pp. 71, p. 46, 60, p. 60.
[258] Jansson, Siv. "Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* p. xi.
[259] "William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft are two of the most politically, socially and intellectually sophisticated people in London, and, by extension, among the most sophisticated in the Europe of their day." in Sampson, Fiona, *In search of Mary Shelley: the girl who wrote Frankenstein,* p. 16.

September 1827 to her Scots friend Frances Wright[260] confesses how deeply her vision and thought had been shaped in the wake of the political and social ideas claimed in the writings of her parents. Though Shelley published her first novel anonymously, the primary intellectual allegiance is to be found in the dedication of the 1818 edition. The absence of a stated author together with the dedication to Godwin helped to lead the reviewers to recognise many similarities between the novel *Frankenstein* and Godwin's other works, so much so that its authorship was traced back to one of the intellectual's own affiliates, namely Percy Bysshe Shelley, his son-in-law.[261]

Unmistakably, *Frankenstein* is imbued with some of the political ideas at the core of Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Manners* (1793). However, the most meaningful connection between father's and daughter's works is to be recognised in the way in which Mary Shelley assimilates certain aspects and narrative techniques from him.[262] In the first place, similarities are to be found in the cosmopolitan historical novel *St. Leon,* where Godwin seemed to have paid tribute to Wollstonecraft's influence on him.[263] The novel revolves around the story of a fallen aristocrat, who although having found the philosopher stone and having obtained immortality from it, nevertheless derives nothing but disgrace and sufferings from these gifts. In a similar way, Victor develops an interest for alchemy; in an even more similar way, from his 'victory over death' he will gather nothing but disasters. "In *St. Leon* as in *Frankenstein*, overweening public ambitions, symbolized by secret occult practices, lead to the breakdown of family life."[264] In the second place, mostly as far as the structure of the novel is concerned, the events narrated in *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams* (1794) provided Mary Shelley with an excellent blueprint for her plot.[265] At its core, the novel has the

[260] "[My Mother's] greatness & my father high talents have perpetually reminded me that I ought to degenerate as little as I could from those from whom I derived my being… my chief merit must always be derived, first from the glory these wonderful beings have shed [around] me, & then for the enthusiasm I have for excellence & the ardent admiration I feel for those who sacrifice themselves for the public good." As quoted in Clemit, Pamela, "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", p. 26.

[261] Robinson, E., Charles. "Frankenstein: Its Composition and Publication", in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, Smith, Andrew, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 19.
In *the Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, Walter Scott suggested that *Frankenstein* had been written by Percy Shelley rather than Mary Shelley.

[262] This topic is discussed at length in the second chapter of the *Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley edited by Esther Schor*.

[263] Clemit, Pamela, "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", p. 32.

[264] Ibid.

[265] Ferguson, Frances. *Solitude and the Sublime: Romanticism and the Aesthetics of Individuation*, New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 98- 105. Ferguson analyses both *Caleb William* and *Frankenstein*.

complex bond of angst and fascination between the two protagonists, the aristocrat Falkland and his servant Caleb. This relationship is convicted to an incessant succession of bondings and separations.

Shelley builds her own novel on the frenetic rhythm of reciprocal escapes and persecutions which also characterise the unique relationship between the creator and the Creature. As highlighted in the previous chapter, from the start Frankenstein is the victim of the monster he has created, who hunts him down and kills his family. By the end of the novel, it is the monster who is chased down by whom had previously been his prey. In this persecutory game, the roles often tend to swap, while at the same time indissolubly binding together the two protagonists in a relationship of such a profound interdependence that it irremovably ties them to the same destiny. The hunt is doomed to find no solution; the monster, initially the executioner, becomes a victim. As "Caleb is cast as a "monster" for daring to challenge Falkland's social authority", analogously in *Frankenstein* "the abandoned creature returns to confront his "monstrous" father, and the pair act out a drama of enticement and threat leads to widespread social destruction."[266]

The influences coming from Mary Shelley's bond with Mary Wollstonecraft, the mother she has never met, can be identified both on a literary and a biographical level. On the literary front, the peculiar and strange relationship established by the daughter with the unknown mother may be considered at the origin of a distorted and 'monstrous' vision concerning birth.[267] The creature 'born from death' suggests a parallelism with the birth of the author, which coincides exactly with the death of her beloved mother.

Within the novel, several explicit references are made which underline the intertextuality of *Frankenstein* with other contemporary writings. The source of inspiration for the characterisation of Robert Walton is suggested to the ears of a very young Mary Godwin by the very lips of its literary creator. Among the regular visitors welcomed in Godwin's house, Samuel Taylor Coleridge was one of the most influential, and Mary Shelley is said to have had the opportunity[268] to be present at the very reading of the original manuscript of *The Rime of the*

[266] Clemit, Pamela, "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", p. 32.
[267] Rubenstein, A. Marc. ""My Accursed Origin": The Search for the Mother in "Frankenstein"", in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 15, No. 2, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. 165-194. "Her identification with her mother was at best a conflicting and troublesome sense of destiny, with which she never fully made her peace." p. 167.
[268] Sampson, Fiona. *In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl who wrote Frankenstein*, p. 51. As a child, Mary Shelley is said to have hidden behind the sofa to hear her father's friend recite the famous ballad of *The Ancient Mariner*.

Ancient Mariner performed by author. The reference is made explicit by the self-same captain when he, writing a letter to his sister, affirms that even though he is heading "to the land of mist and snow", he "shall kill no albatross."[269] Although Walton explicitly rejects the possibility of becoming 'the ancient mariner', he nevertheless does play the same role of the wedding guest to Frankenstein's recounting his tale.[270]

As the Creature learns the language by listening to the cross-cultural communication he overhears between the lovers in the De Lacey's house, Mary Shelley refers to the three books functional to his vicarious instruction, which are particularly important to him as well as for the readers' understanding of the novel as a whole. Volney's *The Ruins; or, A Survey of the Revolutions of Empires,* an influential Enlightenment critical analysis of both ancient and modern forms of government[271], where the author accuses the governmental institutions to be intrinsically tyrannical while being supported by religious fraud.[272] Mary Shelley uses the reading to give to the monster an insight of mankind's duplicity and of the society stark inequality, in fact, he comments: "Was man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and magnificent, yet so vicious and base? [...] I heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid poverty; of rank, descent, and noble blood."[273]

Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther* and Milton's *Paradise Lost* ultimately take to completion the historical synopsis by putting more emphasis on individual morality as presented in distinct phases of Western civilization, "ranging from the politics of classical heroism, to the theology of Christianity, to the virtues of feeling and the domestic of eighteenth-century sensibility"[274]. Especially the reading of Milton pushes the monster to curse his creator as a tyrannical God, while simultaneously blaming him for having denied his humanity and abandoned him: "I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous."[275]

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[269] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 18.
[270] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising Sources", p. 29.
[271] It was one of the favourite works of Percy Shelley, from which he took inspiration for his philosophical poem *Queen Mab*. Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising sources", p. 32.
[272] Clemit, Pamela. "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", p. 35.
[273] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, pp. 92-93.
[274] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising sources", p. 34.
[275] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 78.

Philosophical Influences

The philosophical influences of *Frankenstein* coincide mostly with the theories in vogue between the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, all concerned with the formation of human nature. David Hartley[276] was convinced that the experiences gathered through the senses were functional in shaping human personal identity; and rejected his fellow-philosophers optimistic notion according to which benevolent morality is innate, claiming it to be the offspring of the association of ideas arising as a consequence of each individual's experience. Analogously, the founding father of British empiricism John Locke describes human intellect at its birth as a *tabula rasa,* - a white slate in which ideas impinge and leave a mark - therefore neither naturally good nor naturally evil.[277] The same is consequentially modified and enriched as a result of individual experience. Famously, Locke believed that all that enters our reasoning must have been in the senses before being processed by our understanding. Man's understanding without external experience (senses) would indeed be a white slate. The description of the first steps made by the Shelleyan Creature in the world highlights precisely this Lockean idea: the Creature is like a *tabula rasa* since as soon as he is brought to life, he can hardly perceive his surroundings, he has no idea of how to get food or how to protect himself from bad weather, and it is only after scorching his hand with hot coals – therefore, through experience - that he understands how to properly use fire.

Following this line of reasoning while keeping in mind the evolution of the plot, the influence of Rousseauvian ideas advocated in the *Discours sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité parmi les hommes* is to be found in the very nature of the Creature. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues with decision that inequality does not originate in the 'state of nature', instead it has been generated along with the formation of society, and that it is both illegitimate and detrimental to the morality and well-being of humanity. The contact with society equals to the loss of the inherently benevolent natural state[278], and the monster exactly personifies this process.

[276] Hartleian's philosophy has already been discussed in this thesis as connected to Edmund Burke's ideas claiming a physiological effect of the sublime and beautiful. See "1.4.2.3 The Efficient Causes of Beauty and Sublimity" pp. 51-52.
[277] "Lock rejected the idea that understanding is innate and argued instead that knowledge is produced empirically, derived from individual experience." Jansson, Siv, "Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* p. xii.
[278] "Rousseau attributed evil to the effect of society which perverted the natural state of man: he believed that to avoid such effects, it was necessary to banish the artificial constrictions of society and listen, instead, to inner instinct." Ibid., p. xii.

Frankenstein's Creature displays all the characteristics of the 'good savage': he comes into the world untainted and initially prone to performing good actions and he cannot account for the egotism and the treachery he sees in human beings. Only after a number of awful rejections and brutal abandonments, he also becomes the bringer of cruelty and horrible crimes. In addition, Mary Shelly seems to include Rousseau biographical references in the novel: both Rousseau and the fictional character of Frankenstein are guilty of the same crime - parental abandonment.[279] The philosopher was infamously notorious for having abandoned his five children by Thérèse Lavasseur at a Paris orphanage, an action from which he repeatedly tried to take distance in his *Confessions*. Mimicking Rousseau's own attempt to justify his doing, Frankenstein too excuses his parental negligence by portraying his creature as a malicious 'devil'.[280]

The influences described so far reveal themselves to be even more essential when the narration reaches its climax as Shelley allows her Creature to tell his story unfiltered. In fact, "in contrast to Frankenstein's melodramatic outbursts, the creature's measured eloquence reflects Rousseauvian sensibility, tempered by Godwinian logic."[281] Masterfully arranging language, Mary Shelley portrays the sufferings endured by the Creature, described a with vividness which could only be achieved by someone who had suffered the same painful experiences.

Frankenstein resists cataloguing, for "its uniquely flexible mythic core and the circumstances of its composition"[282] provide an infinite number of allegorical possibilities. One more key influence coming from the eighteenth century philosophical discourse needs to be analysed, namely the application in the novel of the sublime as discussed in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*. This topic will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Scientific Context

The eighteenth and early nineteenth century contemporary scientific context is crucial for the development as well as for the understanding of *Frankenstein*. Not only does Mary Shelley

[279] Hogle, E., Jerrold. "Romantic Contexts", in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, Smith, Andrew, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 46.
[280] Clemit, Pamela. "*Frankenstein, Matilda*, and the legacies of Godwin and Wollstonecraft", p. 34.
[281] Ibid.
[282] Wright, Angela. "Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft", p. 621.

account for, but also makes possible the very creation of the monster by taking into consideration science.[283] Firstly, she shapes her main character as a scientist, or better, a disciple of Natural Philosophy[284] His early studies are significant as well: the pursuit of the sixteenth century alchemists is exemplified in the occult philosophies of Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus, whose vital purpose of obtaining the elixir of life prefigures the young man's attempt to create life out of death.[285] However, the plot does not merely hinge upon alchemy; Shelley expands the possibilities of her narrative by grounding it on the coeval scientific discourse widely discussed back in her days.

Like Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley was deeply interested in the contemporary scientific developments and experiments, and among these, three are essential for the understanding of how such a young mind could come up with the hideous idea of bringing life out of death. Although it may appear as a very singular theme of interest, Great Britain was actually absorbed in discussing the feasibility of reanimating dead matter. The first link can be found in the person of Humphry Davy, the first president of the Royal Society of Science, as well as one of Godwin's friends.[286] Davy was engaged to explore the possibility of the application of electricity in science, so much so that in 1801 he delivered lectures on galvanism at the Royal Institution.[287] There are some connections with Davy's pamphlet *A Discourse, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry* (1802) in the characterisation of Professor M. Waldman[288], the terminology employed by Shelley and most importantly in Victor's belief that "the 'master' chemist is one who attempts."[289]

The second scientific influence is overtly claimed by both the opening lines of Percy Shelley's *Preface* to the first edition in 1818 and in Mary Shelley's Introduction of 1831. Erasmus

[283] In her 1831 Introduction, she writes: "Many and long were the conversations between Lord Byron and Shelley, to which I was a devout but nearly silent listener. During one of these, various philosophical doctrines were discussed, and among others the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated." Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction" to *Frankenstein*, p. 4.
[284] Addressing Frankenstein as such would be quite anachronistic, given that the term was coined in 1834.
[285] Smith, Andrew. "Scientific Context", p. 69.
[286] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising Sources", p. 34.
[287] Smith, Andrew. "Scientific Context", p. 70.
[288] Crouch E. Laura. "Davy's 'A Discourse, Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry: A Possible Scientific Source of "Frankenstein' ", in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 27, 1978, pp. 38-39.
[289] Mellor to explain the meaning of 'master chemist' employs Davy's words: "to modify and change the beings surrounding him, and by his experiments to interrogate nature with power, not simply as a scholar, passive and seeking only to understand operations, but rather as a master, active with his own instruments." Mellor, K., Anne. "Making a "monster": an Introduction to *Frankenstein*", p. 18.

Darwin, grandfather of the more famous Charles Darwin, in his *The Botanic Garden* (1791) and *The Temple of Nature* (1803) theorised for the first time the existence of a botanical as well as biological evolution through sexual selection.[290] At the same time, he was a fervent believer of the positive applications of electricity, experimented in his laboratory by infusing electrical stimulations on a piece of vermicelli "til by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion."[291] Shelley's Frankenstein not only challenges nature with an asexual reproduction of life, but he also "moves down rather than up the evolutionary ladder, suturing his creature from both human and animal body parts."[292] Frankenstein intervenes on the 'natural' process of giving life in the attempt of creating a "new species".[293] Moreover, "an interplay of quotations from Darwin and Davy is woven into the discussions Frankenstein has with M. Krempe and M. Waldman at Ingolstadt before he isolates himself in his 'workshop of filthy creation' "[294], thus highlighting even more the importance of these two scientific thinkers for the understanding of the genesis of Mary Shelley's idea.

From galvanism, Shelley derived the very experiment.[295] The procedure taken to completion by Victor Frankenstein is modelled upon Luigi Galvani's firm belief that electricity can be a potential source of life: "the followers of galvanism believed in the presence of animal electricity which lurked within the body and which could be stimulated by contact with an external electrical force."[296] By infusing electricity to dead frogs' legs Galvani seemed to have brought back mobility to the dead tissue. In 1803, Galvani's nephew Giovanni Aldini carried out an experiment, which was later widely reported in the British press and not only, where he tried to restore life though electrical impulses on the body of the recently hanged criminal Thomas Foster.[297] In this particular case, any explicit parallels with the novel would be superfluous.

The novel was conceived and given to its contemporary society in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, an historical period characterised by a very marked self-confidence of humanity in its own ability, to the extent that the assertion of mankind's own supremacy often

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[290] Smith, Andrew. "Scientific Context", p. 72.
[291] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction", p. 4.
[292] Mellor, K., Anne. "Making a "monster": an Introduction to *Frankenstein*", p. 18.
[293] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 43.
[294] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising Sources", p. 32.
[295] For a more extensive discussion of the application of Galvanism in *Frankenstein*, see: Rauch, Alan. "The Monstrous Body of Knowledge in Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein"", in *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 34, No. 2, California: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 227- 253.
[296] Smith, Andrew. "Scientific Context", p. 72.
[297] Mellor, K., Anne. "Making a "monster": an Introduction to *Frankenstein*", p. 18.

witnessed man attempting to play 'the role of God'. Through all the knowledge gathered thanks to the new sciences, man seemed to have (or thought to have) the power to transform his surroundings at his will. Victor Frankenstein well fits into this context, indeed, he seems to be the perfect representative of this reckless quest for the acquisition of knowledge. In addition, the technologies and the discoveries allowing man to do so were in constant and incessant evolution; and this great excitement touched the field of medicine as well, inasmuch that the demand for cadavers to be dissected in the name of scientific studies far exceeded the supply, therefore pushing the devotees to rob in morgues to match this demand.[298] Flaming debates concerning the possibility of using unclaimed paupers' bodies for scientific purposes were on every day's agenda, and ultimately culminated in 1832 with the enactment of the Anatomy Act, which granted the right to use these corpses for medical reasons.[299] Shelley shaped her 'monstrous' romance in this social climate, where the exaltation of progress was mixed with the anxiety of the possible perilous consequences directly connected to this same progress and the palpable probability of losing the control over it. For this reason, *Frankenstein* has often been interpreted as a warning against the rapid advance of scientific progress, so sudden as to be uncontrollable.

2.4 The Sublime in *Frankenstein*

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century England, ever-more obsessed with the question of parliamentary reforms as well as shaken at its foundation from the call for a rethinking of the basis onto which the society was built, the abrupt subversion of the social order in France produced intense responses, generally identifiable in a strong feeling of anxiety. This apprehension was due to the increasing awareness of possible uprisings equal to the ones occurred in the neighbouring country. The possibility of a contamination coming from abroad terrified the

[298] "Traditionally the scaffold had provided subjects for dissection, but as demand grew the medical profession was forced to find new sources. The bodies of hospital patients were acquired and graves were robbed." In Knott, John. "Popular Attitudes to Death and Dissection in Early Nineteenth Century Britain: The Anatomy Act and the Poor", in *Labour History*, No. 49, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1985, p. 2.
[299] Jansson, Siv. "Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* p. xx.

English people, even more because England's nearness and affinity with France made the consequences of such a brutal upheaval almost palpable. However, the paranoia did not only originate in the gloomy presence of a feasible near future, but also in the spectre of the country's own past: the Civil War and the Glorious Revolution.[300] This sentiment of uneasiness emerged also in literature: "The gothic displaced anxieties at home onto places geographically and temporally remote, at the very time that, inversely, the British were reading the Revolution of 1789 through the Revolution of 1688, understanding the foreign present in terms of the domestic past."[301] While the British were occupied with the reinterpretation of their own history and the anxious projection of their imminent future, the sentiment which became the most representative of the French Revolution spread like a wildfire. This fear was not merely confined within the political and social sphere, yet it spilled over into the literary scenery, and not surprisingly, "the terror proved fertile for a literature of terror."[302]

Although the readings of *Frankenstein* are countless and the novel still nowadays continues to prove its infinite allegorical possibilities, a frequent aspect in its interpretation coincides with the incitement of feelings of uneasiness, preoccupation, dread, which could be well summed up in the most representative word of the period – terror. The literature of terror – of which Shelley is recognised as one of the pioneers – clearly did not hesitate to embrace, incorporate, interpret and translate such a powerful sentiment, so much so that terror became the principal motif and simultaneously the final aim of Gothic writers.

That Mary Shelley would respond to Gothicism is therefore not surprising, all the more given the literary legacy of her parents[303]; but in the same way, it is not unexpected that she would respond to Romanticism as well, given her sentimental bond with the Romantic poet Percy Shelley and her acquaintance with Lord Byron. The novel indeed displays a "strong dependence on Gothic conventions"[304], particularly evident in the narrative techniques employed, the treatment and the choice of the topics. But if the influence of Gothic literature is so straightforward in *Frankenstein* to make it universally recognised as the Gothic Novel *par excellence*, it would be a mistake to think that the novel depends on these conventions alone. Gothicism and Romanticism are inter-related,

[300] Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, London: Routledge, 1995, p. 23.
[301] Ibid.
[302] Ibid.
[303] Milbank, Alison. "The Sublime", in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, Bristol: MacMillan Press Ldt., 1998, p. 230.
[304] Martin, W., Philip. "Romanticism", p. 199.

and this connection is to be found in Shelley's work, which combines "a strong Gothic mode with an examination of the Romantic ego."[305]

The affinities between their characterising themes, the high valuation of strong emotions as well as the shared interest in the psychological perception of the external world led these two literary movements to formulate a response to the aesthetic of the sublime. If on the one hand Gothic writers make extensive use of sublimity with the principal aim of eliciting the strongest emotive response on their readers, on the other hand, Romantic writers do not fall short, with the difference that the use of the sublime in Romantic works is inextricably linked with the subject matter they hold the dearest – nature.

At a time when the concept of the sublime had not yet reached its definite development, Burke analyses sublimity empirically, basing his reasoning on psychological and physiological grounds. It is precisely the blurriness surrounding the concept which prompts the philosopher to embark on a more detailed formulation: before Burke, the sublime and the beautiful were perceived as distinct but not opposed. In the *Philosophical Enquiry* these two concepts are clearly separated and analysed antithetically. The great impact that his theorisation had owes much to the historical and contemporary context of his day: in a social context where the centrality of terror is unquestionable (one can only think that the period following the first phases of the French revolution is called the Reign of Terror), Burke's work makes its appearance in the philosophical scenario as an attempt to rationalise the preponderant feeling of *fin de siècle*. His approach to sublimity literalises this widespread anxiety, thus establishing the sublime as an aesthetic theory. The Burkean sublimity appeared exactly in the moment in which it was needed the most, thus providing a literary model to look upon.

In his epoch-making *Enquiry*, Edmund Burke enriches the aesthetic theory of the sublime and starkly opposes its characterisation to the beautiful. Nevertheless, even though Burke discussed sublimity and beauty together, the argumentation regarding the passions grounded on self-preservation soon proved to be the most influential of the two. Under Burke's tutelage, the sublime becomes an aesthetic effect "productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling."[306] Consequently, the source of this intense emotion is located in whichever object that is either terrible or conversant to terror, as it throws the beholder in a state of tension

[305] Ibid.
[306] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 33.

– also visible in bodily reactions - provoked by the awareness of a possible threat jeopardising the subject's self-preservation. His list presents an analysis of the various sources of the sublime expounded as the stimuli able to trigger the beholder's sensibility to an extreme emotional condition. Among these, the most meaningful for the literature of terror are: terror, pain, obscurity, infinity, uncertainty, death, power. It logically comes that, by assigning such an essential role to terror, inevitably Gothic writers would have found Burke's theory functional for their productions.

Although the sublime is one of the most discussed and applied concept during the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the tradition of sublimity dates back to antiquity and its meaning has spanned the centuries undergoing a number of changes. The application of this concept differs even within the Gothic tradition: early writers ascribing their works to the literature of terror employ the sublime differently from writers writing during the middle of the nineteenth century. The early Gothic perception of sublimity is reminiscent, to some extent, of Longinus's discussion regarding the sublime. Undoubtedly the Burkean sublime is the most appropriate key to interpreting the Gothicism of the novels of this historical period, however, in the distinction between terror and horror formulated by Ann Radcliffe in *On the Supernatural in Poetry* (published posthumously in 1826) the argumentation of the literary father of sublimity can still be recognised. Radcliffe, one of the leading exponents of the Gothic novel, justifies the superiority of terror by saying that it "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life", while horror "contracts, freezes and nearly annihilates them."[307] The effect of terror on the subject, as Radcliffe argues, is articulated in terms of elevation of the spirit. By doing so, she connects the peculiar ability of Longinian rhetorical sublime - elevation of the soul - with the intrinsic characteristic of Burkean sublime - terror. It is significant then, that Radcliffe, to elaborate this opposition, drew upon Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry*.[308] Besides this, very little of the sublime as a rhetoric grand and lofty style remained in nineteenth century reinterpretations. Certainly, for both Longinus and Burke, its capacity of triggering the strongest emotions in man remains central. But the idea of the 'strongest emotion' changes according to the historical period in which the theory is being elaborated, therefore, Longinus recognises as the most powerful emotion the sentiment which arises upon hearing a

[307] Radcliffe, Ann. "On the Supernatural in Poetry", in *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, N. 16, Vol. I, 1826, p. 149.
[308] Wright, Angela. "The Female Gothic," p. 110.

"certain eminence or perfection of language";[309] whereas Burke recognises in the sublime a latent fear of death which excites astonishment. The employment of rhetorical techniques serves the purpose of elevating the subject spiritually, however in the nineteenth century the important emotional reaction become awe, reverence, and respect: these are the reactions of the subject who experiences the Burkean sublime.

Another essential legacy of Longinian theory concerns the role of nature. Even though originally the sublime was mainly concerned with the power of lofty diction and the greatness of soul, already in the writings of John Dennis, Joseph Addison and John Baillie nature starts to enjoy a very prominent position. Following the incipit provided from Longinus, according to which nature impels mankind to admire "not a little clear transparent rivulet that ministers to our necessities, but the Nile, the Ister, the Rhine, or still much more, the ocean"[310], eighteenth century writers saw much more than what the rhetorician meant with these words, and started to elaborate on humanity's perception of the greatness of nature and the consequent emotive reactions. This growing emphasis on the natural objects triggering sublime feelings culminated in Burke's attempt of providing a straightforward classification of these. The attention paid to the role of nature in this process of arising awe finds fertile ground in Romanticism too, which shows its interest whenever nature is taken into consideration: "for the Romantics, encounters with particularly dramatic aspects of nature are sublime because they stimulate the imagination and enable the subject to transcend the everyday world of duties and responsibilities."[311]

The profound impact that Burkean theory has had on the Gothic is also evident in the reasons why this literary genre has enjoyed such a strong - albeit extemporaneous - success. In his essay, Sage argues that the sublime in the *Philosophical Enquiry* is "founded on an aesthetics of process, foregrounding the affective relationship between the reader and text" which proves as a crucial connection to Gothic writers, and then adds that "Burke's treatise is a blueprint for an aesthetics of terror and horror, laying down a set of conditions for the excitement of the reader's passions. The writer's task was to evoke fear, grandeur and awe in the soul of the reader."[312] The recognition of a sense of delight in the emotion of terror bounds together the feelings of pain and pleasure: human beings at the presence of sublimity not actually threatening their safety

[309] Longinus. "On the Sublime", p.22.
[310] Ibid., p.25.
[311] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 42.
[312] Sage, Victor. "Gothic Novel", p. 82.

experience a sort of delightful horror or tranquillity tinged with terror.[313] In this feeling of 'pleasurable uneasiness' the origin of the emotional connection between the readers and the Gothic novel can be found: providing that to experience delight, the objects of the sublime must not press to closely, Burke adds that thanks to the innate sympathy that the human beings feels for their fellows-beings, the delight in terror can be experienced not only personally but also by proxy, which is exactly what happens with the literature of terror. Readers are captivated by terrifying stories because they can experience strong emotions without ever being actually in danger. Moreover, sympathy, for Burke, "is most wanted in the distress of others",[314] therefore man is automatically prompt to react to situations of great distress experience by others even more. By introducing the possibility of experiencing pleasure in pain, "Burke provides a psychological justification for the Gothic tale of terror."[315]

Burkean theorisation of sublimity had a great impact on both Gothicism and Romanticism, the former, being more focused on the terrible aspects of the sublime, while the latter more concerned with the magnificence of sublime nature. However, this does not mean that Burkean sublime has been applied without ever being questioned: "the early Gothic does not passively assimilate pre-existing concepts [...] but actively interrogates these concepts."[316] Mary Shelley indeed assimilated the Gothicism modelled upon the *Philosophical Enquiry* and responded to it both accepting and rejecting its major themes.

Mary Shelley shapes sublimity in her first novel by both exiting terror and inserting majestic descriptions of nature: she wants her story to "speak to the mysterious fears of our nature and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look around, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart"[317], and she does so by setting the incidents of the plot in very specific natural environments, those which are known for their intrinsic ability of inspiring feelings of awe, astonishment, grandeur and terror – the sublime.

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[313] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 109.
[314]Ibid., p. 39.
[315] Milbank, Alison. "The Sublime", in Mulvey-Roberts, Marie, *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*, Bristol: MacMillan Press Ldt., 1998, p. 227.
[316] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 42.
[317] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction", p. 3.

2.4.1 The First Encounter between Creator and Creature

As the dim and yellow moonlight forced its way through the obscurity of the room, for the very first time Victor Frankenstein lays his eyes on his creation. This section of the narration exactly coincides with the famous genesis of the novel, when the nineteen-years-old Mary Godwin opens her eyes in terror in the middle of the night, after having dreamt about a "student of unhallowed arts"[318] kneeling before his monstrous creation. Shelley introduces terror in the narration by degrees, and she starts from an unsettling nightmare. The 'scientist', exhausted both by mental and physical fatigue, dozed in the room converted into a secret laboratory, but his sleep is tormented:

> I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.[319]

The waking nightmare, similarly to what happened to Shelley, is so terrifying that the protagonist suddenly wakes up in horror. His imagination, almost foreshadowing what will happen in the imminent future, portends the tragic epilogue of the novel, with the first – although imagined, still much felt - of the many deaths which the protagonist will suffer at the hands of his own creation. The suddenness with which the sweet dream of his lover Elizabeth turns into a nightmare is meant to shock and terrify Frankenstein as much as the readers. What initially feels as a pleasant moment, abruptly turns to be a ghastly vision: when Frankenstein imprinted his lips on hers, these became deathly grey, and while recoiling in horror, he realised that in his arms he was holding the dead body of his mother as she was being devoured by the grave-worms. This permeating sense of anxiety is achieved through Mary Shelley's application of what Burke

[318] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction", p. 4.
[319] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 46.

identifies as 'conversant' to the terrible: the actual emotion of terror has not yet been achieved but merely hinted at. The nightmare is representative of terror since it is characterised by embodiments of death: the greyness of the lips, the corpse of the mother, the shroud and the worms of the tombs. All these elements are instances of objects operating "in a manner analogous to terror"[320]; however, these are still perceived as a relatively distant threat, because they are confined to the oneiric sphere. The fact that the encounter with death occurs in a nightmare guarantees a certain safety to Frankenstein, because the distance between the terrible object and the experiencing subject is that of two clearly separated spheres, dream and reality. Despite this distance, which for Burke is an imperative for the sublime to be experienced, the terror gripping Frankenstein's mind has also physical implications: "I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed."[321] Shelley masterly describes how the terror originating within the dreamlike sphere spills out from mind to body: horror takes on a tangible physical conformation in Frankenstein's bodily reactions. The manifestation of this overwhelming emotion takes into account not only the mental reaction of the subject in front of the disquieting representation of death - a decomposing corpse devoured by worms -, but it is also described through physical reactions. The restlessness and the strong agitation which are gripping his mind are translated on a physical level with the sweat wetting his forehead, the teeth chattering and the nerves so tense as to cause spasms. Significantly, physiology occupies a pivotal role in Burke's discourse of the sublime. The philosopher dedicates the entirety of his fourth section to the analysis of the efficient causes of sublimity (and beauty), and through a meticulous investigation of individuals experiencing sublimity, he concludes that the sublime causes corporeal reactions such as chattering teeth, wrinkled forehead, vehemently rolled eyes etc.[322], all very similar to the ones Shelley employs to describe Frankenstein's emotional state.

The prospect of death envisaged in the unsettling nightmare becomes real with the apparition of the monster. But before laying his eyes on his Creature, Frankenstein offers to the readers a description of the room: "by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the windows shatters, I beheld the wretch - the miserable monster whom I had

[320] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 33-34.
[321] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 46.
[322] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 105.

created."[323] The scene which Shelley skilfully constructs for the 'reverse birth' of the Creature draws its imaginative power from sublimity: darkness reigns supreme in the room, the sole light present is that of the moon, both yellowish and not strong enough to properly illuminate the environment, therefore only allowing a glimpse on the Creature barely visible. As Burke theorises, obscurity is essential for the excitement of the emotional response of terror, precisely because this fear originates in the subject's inability of rationalising and therefore evaluating the factual danger threatening his well-being. Darkness consequentially leads to confusion and uncertainty, and as the sight becomes annihilated, the mind is left alone in the process of understanding. For Burke, human beings' imagination is naturally inclined to overestimate the threat and fear the worst.[324] This happens because, whenever even the mere doubt of possible personal harm crosses one's mind, man's innate sense of self-preservation prevails. At this point, as terror, obscurity, uncertainty rush upon his mind at the same time, Frankenstein, fearing for his own safety, flees.

Significantly, it is the sight of his Creature that forces Frankenstein to run. The physical description of the monster is crucial to the understanding of how Mary Shelley formulates her response to the sublime of terror. As the Creature stumbles over his own footsteps and struggles to articulate even a word, Frankenstein's gaze is unable to see more than a "wretch – the miserable monster" in that body. The Creature is clearly an explicit reference to the argumentation in the *Philosophical Enquiry*, as his characterisation "appears to embody Burke's theory of terror."[325] In this sense, Frankenstein's account of the features of the monster is particularly important:

> His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

[323] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 46.
[324] "It is our nature, when we do not know what may happen to us, to fear the worst that can happen." Burke, Edmund, *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 69.
[325] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 44.

The yellowish skin is so thin that the movements of the muscles underneath are clearly visible, the thick black hair together with the pearly white of the teeth exacerbate even more the strong contrast with the watery eyes and the black lips. Even "a mummy again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch."[326] Moreover, the size of his body far exceeds that of ordinary men. His very existence actively challenges the laws of nature, as it is simultaneously natural and unnatural: natural because undoubtedly he is alive and his features resemble that of human beings; unnatural because his being alive is oxymoron since his life spurs from death, from the stitching together of dead parts. The Creature resembles more a corpse than a living being, thus utterly resulting in an aesthetic failure.[327] In this liminal state between the living and the dead, the sublimity of the Creature lies. His very existence seems to make him an emissary of death, since his life is brought about by death, being his body the result of assembling dead membrane. Burkean conception of terror revolves around the idea that the strongest feeling elicits an overwhelming impact on the subject because he/she perceives a life-threatening quality in the object before the sight, and nothing could ever exceed the terror which originates in the direct encounter with death.[328] Shelley's monster is the tangible embodiment of human beings' worst fear. Indeed, death, Burke argues, is the 'king of terrors'[329], and the description of the Creature's external appearance is reminiscent of all the elements that the human mind naturally – almost involuntarily – links with death.

The perception of his monstrosity is not simply confined to his outward aspect. Throughout the novel, Frankenstein repeatedly describes the Creature as a "devil", "fiend", "wretch", "monster": even before knowing the true nature, thoughts, emotions, character of the Creature, his creator condemns him, without ever taking into account his humanity. Seconds after his unnatural birth, the Creature becomes the villain or the 'Romantic brute' made of flesh. His mere presence undermines the tranquillity of the subject who has the 'misfortune' of crossing his path.

The redundancy with which Frankenstein addresses the monster as a demon has the function of denying his humanity. The alienation of the Creature from humankind is accomplished

[326] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 46.
[327] Smith, Andrew. "Scientific Context", p. 77.
[328] Burke writes: "death is in general a much more affecting idea than pain; because there are very few pains, however exquisite, which are not preferred to death: nay, what generally makes pain itself, [...] more painful, is, that it is considered as an emissary of this king of terrors." Burke, Edmund, *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 34.
[329] Ibid.

at the hands of his creator through the repetition of the word 'species'.[330] Even before creating him, Frankenstein already thinks of his monster as a member of a new species: "a new species would bless as its creator and source."[331] However, upon seeing him, Frankenstein automatically perceives his racial diversity as threatening, and reads his hideous deformity as a sign of his detachment from the human world. Such is the Creature's monstrosity that Frankenstein considers that also his female companion "might turn with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him, and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being deserted by one of his own species."[332] His clear separation from mankind is also emphasised by the monster, who having been denied of his humanity repeatedly, ultimately seeks companionship in a being "of the same species" with "the same defects."[333] By characterising the monster through his distance from mankind, Shelley applies the Burkean theory according to which anything that cannot be properly rationalised is automatically perceived as dangerous. In his discussion Burke provides the examples of goblins and ghosts[334], entities whose nature is unaccountable for; analogously Shelley's Frankenstein creates a Creature whose nature cannot be expressed in rational terms.

The question which automatically arises in the readers' mind is "is the Creature actually a monster?". Shelley's answer becomes clearer and clearer as the plot unfolds. Smith argues that "If Victor's take on the sublime merely serves to mark out the sublime as little more than egoistical projection, the embodiment of Burke's sublime rests on a false perception of the creature as a terrifying monster."[335] Mary Shelley thus implies that the whole perception of the 'monster' actually rests on misperception. By making use of the Burkean discourse of terror to build her main character, Shelley criticises this same conception from within, and proves how this association of the Creature with pain, terror and death only based on his hideous external appearance is actually erroneous. The encounter between the Creature and the blind Mr. De Lacey is the proof that his sublimity is rooted in a misjudgement induced by the eyes: the old man,

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[330] Brantlinger, Patrick. "Race and Frankenstein", in *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*, Smith, Andrew, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 128-142. In his essay, Brantlinger analyses the way in which the racial component emerges in Shelley's novel.
[331] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 43.
[332] Ibid., p. 127.
[333] Ibid., p. 111.
[334] Burke, Edmund, *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 48.
[335] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 45.

deprived of sight, is able to judge the Creature not by his appearance but by his speech, which proves to be a much more limpid and less arbitrary yardstick of judgement on his true nature.

As the main protagonist is drawn to wrongly ascribe the terrors of monstrosity to the Creature on the grounds of his visual misperception, another key discussion formulated by Burke in the *Philosophical Enquiry* emerges. When Shelley introduces her monster for the first time in Chapter V, Frankenstein says: "I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! Great God!"[336]In Burkean terms, the opposite of beauty is sublimity. In the third part of the *Enquiry*, the philosopher claims that beauty possesses an intrinsic social component, which plays an imperative part in human relationships as well as in the constitution of society. He writes: "I call beauty a social quality; for where women and man [...] give us a sense of joy and pleasure in beholding them ... they inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons."[337] Significantly, Shelley stresses the monstrosity of the Creature by opposing the descriptions of the other characters[338]: William is "a beautiful child"[339], Elizabeth is "the beautiful and adored companion of all [Frankenstein's] occupations and [his] pleasures."[340]

In the *Philosophical Enquiry*, beauty is considered a necessity for the co-existence of the individuals in the same society. Being beauty a distinctive and unfaltering prerogative of societies, from Burke's discussion Shelley extrapolates and interprets the absence of external beauty as an automatic exclusion from society. The Creature possesses none of the qualities of the beautiful listed by Burke, whereas he displays almost each of the qualities of the sublime. Not only does his deformity underline his diversity but it also forces him to social isolation. The lack of beauty condemns the monster to be an outcast, repudiated and shunned by human society, which fears him because he embodies all the features exciting ideas of terror. In the characterisation of her Creature, Shelley simultaneously applies and criticises Burke's theorisation: the description of the monster is clearly moulded on Burke's discourse of terror, however, Shelley exposes the arbitrariness of the concept of beauty in a veiled way as she lets her monster speak about the sufferings endured at the hands of human beings. Humans, inherently beautiful because characterised by sociability with their fellows, prove their meanness by harshly rejecting the

[336] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 45.
[337] Burke, Edmund. Ph*ilosophical Enquiry*, pp. 36-37.
[338] Brantlinger, Patrick. "Race and Frankenstein", p. 133.
[339] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 109.
[340] Ibid., p. 29.

Creature, therefore demonstrating the faltering ideological ground onto which this same concept is built: it is the treatment received from human beings that leads the Creature to act like monster. At first glance the creator himself flees in terror from the "demoniacal corpse"[341]; this same physical characterisation hands Frankenstein an explanation – or better, an excuse - for the abandonment of his Creature. All characters in the novel assume that the Creature's outer appearance "is a valid index to his inner nature"[342], without ever questioning the possibility that physiognomy and character might not be correlated. Yet, although Shelley's monster is undoubtedly sublime, he is also beautiful in Burkean terms, since he repeatedly looks for companionship. It is the absence of external beauty which confines him to extreme solitude. Within the Creature, the Burkean conception of the sublime and the beautiful incessantly battle: his inner self is inherently beautiful because he actively looks for society i.e. he saves the drowning child, he helps the De Laceys and desperately wants to establish a relationship with them; however, being his outer self irredeemably terrifying, life-threatening and monstrous, society rejects him. The violence and exclusion mankind subjects him to decree the victory of his sublimity, and paves the way for the violent deaths and the desperate longing for revenge over his creator who had condemned him to this miserable life.

2.4.2 The Second Encounter in Geneva

While Victor Frankenstein is heading towards his hometown, the tragic news of the death of his young brother William reaches him through a letter. Once arrived at the environs of Geneva, he finds the gates of the city already closed, and he is obliged to pass the night in a nearby village. Not being able to rest, he decides to visit the place where the murder of his brother occurred. Before that the narrative climax is reached with the face-to-face encounter between Creature and creator, Shelley begins to insert small contextual details which largely contribute to mount the tension as the narration progresses, therefore creating a feeling of uneasiness and heightening

[341] Ibid., p. 46.
[342] Mellor, K., Anne. "Making a "monster": an Introduction to *Frankenstein*", p. 20.

preoccupation. “The gothic’s main concern is not to depict character but to create a feeling or effect in its readers by placing them in a state of thrilling suspense and uncertainty”;[343] and as a matter of a fact, Shelley does so by inserting a representation of the environment the seconds before the outbreak of a violent storm:

> I saw the lightening playing on the summit of Mont Blanc in the most beautiful figures. The storm appeared to approach rapidly; and, on landing, I ascended a low hill, that I might observe its progress. It advanced; the heavens were clouded, and I soon felt the rain coming slowly in large drops, but its violence quickly increased.[344]

As Frankenstein approaches the second meeting with his monster, the nature surrounding him almost seems to suggest that something terrible is about to happen. Nature is increasingly in turmoil, the thunderstorm inexorably approaching and looming over the land seems to mirror the increase of the feelings of terror at the awareness of a near threat. It is meaningful that, despite the peril suggested by the natural environment, the sight of the lightening intermittently illuminating the peak of Mont Blanc produces a pleasurable feeling in Frankenstein. The sense of danger is accompanied by the feeling of delight in the contemplation of the greatness of the natural forces, indeed Frankenstein adds: “While I watched the tempest, so beautiful yet so terrific, I wandered on with hasty steps. This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits.”[345] Before his eyes, the tempest is both beautiful and terrifying, and with this association Shelley perfectly translates into words the concept of delightful horror which, according to Burke, is the peculiar characteristic of the sublime. While watching the clouds violently fighting against each other, the immense power of nature both excites feelings of terror and pleasure in the main protagonist. These emotional responses are neither antithetical nor clashing with one another, yet if combined they generate the most special sublimity. Furthermore, the elevation of the spirit to which Frankenstein refers finds its root back to Longinus’s argumentation of the sublime, “for the mind is naturally elevated by the true sublime, and so sensibly affected with its lively strokes, that it swells in transport.”[346] Longinus argues that human beings instinctively respond to the mighty

[343] Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 6.
[344] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 59.
[345] Ibid., pp. 59-60.
[346] Longinus. “On the Sublime”, p. 23.

power of nature; indeed, the sight of this natural greatness prompts Frankenstein to be inwardly moved, and enjoy the view before his eyes. Although Longinus firstly locates this emotional reaction in the perfection of language, Burke interprets the same elevation as originating in the sight of the great and sublime in nature, which in turn produces astonishment.

The description orchestrated by Shelley to create the finest portrayal of the arrival of the thunderstorm in the readers' minds is masterful; and to achieve this, she relies on the key components discussed in Burkean theory for the excitement of sublimity. Frankenstein continues with the description:

> I quitted my seat, and walked on, although the darkness and storm increased every minute, and the thunder burst with a terrific crash over my head. It was echoed from Salêve, the Juras, and the Alps of Savoy; vivid flashes of lightening dazzled my eyes, illuminating the lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire; then for an instant everything seemed of a pitchy darkness, until the eye recovered itself from the preceding flash.[347]

The presence of the mountains - Mont Blanc, Salêve, the Juras, and the Alps of Savoy - not only does insert in the narration one of the pivotal elements unmistakably recognised as sublime since antiquity[348] - the mountains -, but also foreshadows the next and most meaningful encounter between creator and Creature, which occurs amidst the mountainous landscape of the mighty Alps. The scary darkness of the night, the intermitting flashes of lightings tearing the sky apart, the thunder bursting into crashes echoed by the mountains: all these elements actively contribute to the growth of tension, creating a sense of danger. Mary Shelley applies what Burke theorised as the fundamental qualities for sublimity to be such: Obscurity, Light, Sounds and Loudness. The darkness of the night together with the approaching storm exactly serves the purpose of shaking Frankenstein out from his indolence by exiting ideas of terror. According to Burke, for an object to truly achieve sublimity, "obscurity seems in general to be necessary."[349] Sublimity arises in obscurity because when immersed in it, "the mind is hurried out of itself, by a

[347] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 59.
[348] The importance of the mountains, especially the Alps, will be discussed at length in the next chapter.
[349] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 48.

crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused":[350] to evaluate the threat posed by the object becomes impossible, and the direct consequence of uncertainty is terror. The darkness surrounding the protagonist only temporary ceases when the lightings rip the sky apart, consequentially offering him a quick glimpse over the forest. Burke recognises also brilliant lights as one of the sources of sublimity, since they are so extreme as to "overpower the sense"[351], thus weakening the sight of the subject and provoking a similar induced blindness occurring when darkness reigns. The result, Burke argues, is even enhanced when the light switches with the utmost celerity from darkness to light, as that of a lightning: indeed, the thunderbolts in Shelley's narration are so brilliant that they make the lake in front of Frankenstein resemble a "sheet of fire".[352] However, Shelley does not only trigger the sublime through the sight, and to the darkness of the night, she adds the crash of the thunders. In the *Enquiry*, intense and loud sounds are considered sublime since they contribute to increase the tension of the subject. In *Frankenstein*, the thunders' crash is even louder because it is echoed by the surrounding environment.

Immediately after, the long-awaited moment comes:

> I perceived in the gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood fixed, gazing intently: I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightening illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect, more hideous than belongs to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy monster demon, to who I had given life.[353]

The darkness of the night conceals the identity of the murderer, thus increasing the suspense even more, until the rapid flash of a lightning confirms Frankenstein's gloomy presentiment. Predictably, the Creature's very first apparition cannot but happen in an environment as frightening as he is: all the typical qualities of the sublime of terror inherently belonging to the monster – his enormous body size, deformity and hideous aspect - are here

[350] Ibid., p. 51.
[351] Ibid., p. 65.
[352] Ibid.
[353] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 60.

merged with the sublimity of the surrounding nature. From this moment onwards, Shelley will always present her monster in highly sublime contexts, natural landscapes in which the Creature is clearly superior to his creator.

As the sublime is conveyed in the narration through darkness, extreme lights and strong sounds combined with the magnificence of the mountains, Shelley again seems to draw upon the *Philosophical Enquiry* when she describes Frankenstein's reaction as he lays his eyes on the Creature. "No sooner did that idea cross my imagination, that I became convince of its truth; my teeth chattered, and I was forced to lean against a tree for support."[354] The terror experienced in the mind is projected outwards, where it assumes a tangible physicality in the bodily reactions of chattering teeth and the inability to move. The Burkean terror exerts such a devastating power on the subject that it robs the mind of its capacity of acting[355]; Mary Shelley's main character similarly says "I remained motionless"[356], completely unable to move a single muscle, when the monster passes him by. While his body is deprived of movement, his mind is in turmoil, in a whirlwind of fear, horror and dismay as he tries to rationalise what is happening.

Furthermore, in this episode another quality of the sublime is hinted at. Along with ideas of pain and terror, the external appearance of the Creature seems to suggest an idea of power. Although generally the association between an imposing stature and a considerable physical strength comes almost naturally, in this encounter for the first time his power is alluded to: "The figure passed me quickly, and I lost it in the gloom. [...] another flash discovered him to me hanging among the ricks of the nearly perpendicular ascent of Mont Salêve, ... He soon reached the summit and disappeared."[357] The Creature faces no difficulty in climbing a perpendicular rock and running so fast as to disappear within the interval of time between two lightings. His physical prowess is yet another component highlighting his diversity from the human being. Burke's idea of power requires the presence of a superior force, which great strength impels the mind to experience sublimity, for "pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly."[358] Therefore, being the monster's strength of superhuman nature, his presence automatically poses a threat to those who cannot fight such a strength, namely for

[354] Ibid.
[355] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 47.
[356] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 60.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 53.

humans. It is in fact his physical superiority which allows him to perpetrate his murders undisturbed. None of the characters killed by the Creature (William Frankenstein, Henry Clerval and Elizabeth Lavenza) is able to confront him, because his strength far exceeds the strength of any human being.

After this encounter with his Creature, as his mind is seized by "scenes of evil and despair"[359], Frankenstein adds: "I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind [...] nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave."[360] The reference to vampires and spirits is significant firstly because in her choice of a term of comparison for the monster, Shelley directly draws from Gothic conventions; secondly because these type of entities are recognised in the *Enquiry* as capable of eliciting terror in the minds of human beings. These supernatural entities are traditionally associated with a significant dangerous potential (i.e. the very existence of the vampire is brought about by the deaths of the humans it feeds on) and by comparing these ghastly presences with the monster, she enhances the apprehension towards his person.

2.4.3 The Swiss Alps

"Conscious of the delicious aspects of suspense and the disappointing nature of certainty, Gothic narratives [...] often create a tension between a desire to prolong and defer the inevitable and an impulse towards the revelation of all mysteries, between the indulgence of curiosity and its satisfaction."[361] While Gothic novels slowly approach the revelation of the mystery at their core, they simultaneously defer it. To do so, the narration diverges by making a digression in scenic routes immersed in magnificent and impressive sublime sceneries, which readers both admire and fear. The greatness of these landscapes has the capacity of elevating the soul and making it

[359] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 55.
[360] Ibid.
[361] Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, p. 32.

experience a sort of transcendence, however, these views are often so majestic as to overwhelm the beholder and instil a sense of intimidation. Historically speaking, the conflicting elements inherently belonging to earth's morphology start to enjoy a prominent position with the eighteenth century new "consideration of a nature less automatically geared towards man's well-being, at times mysteriously destructive, yet for that very reason captivating, in a completely new way."[362] As underlined in previous chapters[363], Gothic writers often refer to the theorisation of the sublime in nature as conceived in the *Philosophical Enquiry*, in order to portray the environment in which the action takes place. The connection between nature and the sublime arises astonishment when it operates at its highest level; admiration, reverence and respect correspond with the same passion but of inferior intensity.[364] This device proves fundamental for the narrative efficacy: owing to its natural capacity of capturing the reader's attention, the 'pause' from the main narrative fulfils the purpose of enhancing the tension through the rationalisation of the perils connected to the landscape. Therefore, when the reader is confronted with the climax of the plot, he/she has already been thrown into a whirlwind of strong emotions, including fear, anxiety, bewilderment, wonder and awe, which explosion culminates in the deepest sort of involvement. To achieve this objective, which in *Frankenstein* coincides with the moment when the Creature takes the floor and tells his story unfiltered, Mary Shelley employs a variety of concepts discussed by Burke, i.e. discourse of terror, sublime in nature, delightful horror, power, and (the lack of) beauty.

The most obvious point of convergence between *Frankenstein*'s Gothicism and the Burkean theory is unquestionably to be found in the treatment of sublimity in relation to the external world. Not only does the Swiss landscape characterise the whole narration (with small variations with the Scottish Highlands and the North Pole), but most importantly it provides the proper background to the crucial passages of the plot. This typology of sublime is universally recognised by critics as the Natural Sublime, or even more specific Alpine Sublime. The importance which Shelley gives to the natural world most likely comes both from the Romantic influences to which

[362] Giacomoni, Paola. "Mountain landscape and the aesthetics of the sublime in Romantic narration" in *Romantic Prose Fiction*, edited by Gillespie Gerald, Engel Manfred, Dieterle Bernard, Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007, p. 108.

[363] See "1.4.4 Gothic Sublimity" and "2.4 The Sublime in *Frankenstein*".

[364] "The passions caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all motions are suspended, with some degree of horror." Burke, Edmund, *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 51.

she had been exposed[365], and her personal life experiences.[366] Romanticism wants its representatives to look at nature with an acute and sensible eye, and Mary Shelley had a great number of possibilities of experiencing the most sublime nature first-hand. Since her elopement to the Continent with Percy Shelley, Mary Shelley leads a semi-nomadic life travelling across Europe, being Italy one of the Shelleys' favourite destinations. The peninsula is characterised by a significant difficulty of access by land, as travellers have to cross the majestic mountain chain of the Alps. For example, this is how Shelley describes the Simplon pass in *Rambles in Germany and Italy*: "There was no horror; but there was grandeur. There was a majestic simplicity that inspired awe; the naked bones of a gigantic world were here: the elemental substance of fair mother Earth."[367] Having experienced such a journey, Shelley well knows the marvellous morphological characteristics of the Alpine land, as well as the stark emotional response that these panoramas solicit in the beholder.

Giacomoni argues that in *Frankenstein* Shelley uses the protagonist's birthplace, Geneva, to transform the Swiss Alps into "the point of departure, the origin, the distinctive criterion for the character, his perspective on the world. [...] the Alpine landscape appears as a native landscape, and in that way it inspires in the protagonist feelings based on recognition and a sense of belonging."[368] Indeed, on a number of occasions Frankenstein seeks for the sight of the majesty of these mountains so as to temporarily restore his lost harmony: for example, after the deaths of Justine Moritz and his brother William, Frankenstein looks for "the kind of sublime that a visit to the Alps should, in a Romantic world, provide"[369] by travelling to the Chamonix valley. Surrounded by this sublimity, the main character seeks some "relief from [his] intolerable sensation" in the "Alpine valleys, sought in the magnificence, the eternity of such scenes."[370] The sight of Alpine valleys generates a feeling of self-reconciliation, as this sublime scenery has the intrinsic power of elevating Frankenstein "from the littleness of feeling."[371] In Shelley's novel, this connection with nature is also evident in Elizabeth Lavenza, who

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[365] These influences came mainly from Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, Coleridge just to name a few.
[366] Shelley, Mary and Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *History of a six weeks' tour 1817*, Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989. It describes two trips, one across Europe in 1814, one to Lake Geneva in 1816. The text is divided in three parts, a journal, four letters, and the last contains Percy Shelley's famous poem *Mont Blanc*.
[367] Shelley, Mary. *Rambles in Germany and Italy in 1840, 1842 and 1843,* London: Edward Moxon, 1844, p. 135.
[368] Giacomoni, Paola. "Mountain landscape and the aesthetics of the sublime in Romantic narration", p. 119.
[369] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 43.
[370] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 73.
[371] Ibid., p. 75.

> busied herself [...] in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home —the sublime shapes of the mountains, the changes of the seasons, tempest and calm, the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers—she found ample scope for admiration and delight.[372]

It is relevant that not only Frankenstein is affected by the power of the natural sublime, because by including Elizabeth (a character about whom very little is known) Shelley widens the range of influence of the Alpine nature, decreeing this sense of delight as an automatic human reaction to the sight of such sceneries. However, in admiring these imposing landscapes, the elevation of the spirit is immediately accompanied by a sense of awe. This ambivalence is very significant in Burkean terms, for it perfectly encapsulates the concept of delightful horror, which is so important to Burke that he calls it the is "the most genuine effect of the truest sublime."[373] The burden on his soul is progressively relieved as he approaches the majesty and eternity which the Alpine setting evokes:

> The weight upon my spirits was sensibly lightened as I plunged yet deeper in the ravine of Arve. The immense mountains and precipices that overhung me on every side – the sound of the river raging among the rocks, and the dashing of the waterfalls around, spoke of a power mighty as Omnipotence – as I ceased to fear, or to bend before any being less almighty than that which had created and ruled the elements, here displayed in their most terrific guise.

When contemplating the imposing mountains and listening to the roar of water flowing downwards, an idea of Divinity is suggested to his mind, and the thought of an Almighty so powerful as to master the elements – more powerful than his own Creature - soothes him. It is interesting to notice that in linking the sublime of the landscape to the idea of the divine, Shelley

[372] Ibid., pp. 29-30.
[373] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 60.

somehow deploys sublimity as firstly conceived by its creator Longinus, namely an emotional reaction with the power of elevating the soul to greatness.

However, as the narration progresses, and Frankenstein ascends the mountains, the view over the Chamonix valley inspires him sentiments of melancholy and pain: "These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me from all littleness of feeling; and although they did not remove my grief, they subdued and tranquillised it."[374] The argumentation Burke formulates in favour of the simultaneous perception of pleasurable feelings mixed with feelings of pain is translated through the main character's words. The solemnity of the surrounding landscape has the power of alleviating his anguish for a while, however the awareness of the harm caused with his reckless action never leaves him. His feelings simultaneously seem to go in two apparently opposite directions - pleasure and pain. Exactly in this the core of Burke's discourse lies: although the sentiment triggers pleasure in pain, these two are mingled together in just one emotion, encompassing both nuances.

Shelley's narrative technique is significant, as she attentively describes the entirety of Frankenstein's journey. The moving upward of the protagonist corresponds with the enhancement of the perception of sublimity: the higher he goes, the more the sublime intensifies. Starting from the Swiss upland, Frankenstein progressively ascends the mountain, and as he does so he describes his surroundings:

> Still, as I ascended higher, the valley assumed a more magnificent and astonishing character. Ruined castle hanging on the precipices of piny mountains, and the cottages every here and there peeping forth from among the trees, formed a scene of singular beauty. But it was augmented and rendered sublime by the mighty Alps, whose white and shining pyramids and domes towered above all, as belonging to another earth, the habitations of another race of beings.[375]

[374] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 75.
[375] Ibid., p. 73.

The Alps seem to represent almost a separate world, a different world both enchanting and astonishing. The imprint of human beings in this secluded and untamed habitat does not even seem to be a real human product, yet belonging to another species. The observation Frankenstein makes is relevant because, by saying that these places resemble more another earth inhabited by another race, he contributes to increasing his Creature's estrangement from mankind.[376] This statement enhances the Creature's detachment firstly by suggesting the existence of a race capable of surviving in such a sublime and inhospitable environment, and then making the monster appear in this setting and displaying him perfectly at ease in the glacier.

The description proceeds as Victor travels to increasingly secluded spots. He says that Chamonix valley "is more wonderful and sublime, but not so beautiful and picturesque, as that of Servox, [...] The high and snowy mountains were its immediate boundaries; but I saw no more ruined castles and fertile fields."[377] From an aesthetic point of view, the Alpine setting no longer possess any characteristic of the picturesque, which according to eighteenth century theories "should represent some significant human action"[378] such as cottages, cattle etc. In the absence of signs of man, the landscape becomes more and more sublime: "Immense glaciers approached the road; I heard the rumbling thunder of the falling avalanche, and marked the smoke of its passage."[379]

It is worth noticing that frequently in the novel when the Mont Blanc is mentioned[380], the narration portrays its summit tormented by thunderbolts or stormy weather, even when the surrounding sky is unclouded.

> Mont Blanc, the supreme and magnificent Mont Blanc, raised itself from the surrounding aiguilles, and its tremendous dôme overlooked the valley. [...] I remained at the window, watching the pallid lightings that played about the Mont Blanc, and listening to the rushing of the Arve which pursued its noisy way beneath.[381]

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[376] Brantlinger, Patrick. "Race and Frankenstein", p. 134.
[377] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 74.
[378] Townsend, Dabney. "The Picturesque", in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 55, No. 4, 1997, p. 365.
[379] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 74.
[380] Also when the first encounter with the Creature takes place, Frankenstein notices "the lightening playing on the summit of Mont Blanc in the most beautiful figures." Shelley, Mary, *Frankenstein*, p. 59.
[381] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 74.

This fact implies that although the delightfulness spurring from looking at its majesty, a disturbing element is lurking beneath, signifying the presence of a destructive and dark side of this same delightful nature[382], thus recalling Burke's terror.

The sublime of the mountain landscape provokes a sensation of an impending catastrophe in the very same moment in which it amuses the sight with its majestic greatness. This ambivalence inherently belonging to natural sublimity stems from the literary tradition initiated with the *Peri Hypsous*, or rather, from the interpretation that eighteenth century philosophers and thinkers gave to the concept of the sublime in nature. In the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, what could be interpreted as a 'revival' of the conception of the sublime lead intellectuals to recognise the undeniable attraction of the mountainous landscape, so much so that "mountains become the archetypical example of the nature of the sublime."[383] Longinus's discussion of natural sublimities takes into consideration the ocean, mighty rivers, celestial bodies and magnificent volcanoes, but although he did not explicitly include mountains in his list, under the manoeuvrings of the eighteenth century the Alpine landscape firmly becomes one of the sublime scenery *par excellence*. "Mountains, because of their heights, [...] [was] ready and apt symbol in the physical world of the moral greatness to which Longinus attributed the sublime in art."[384] It is significant that the first Englishmen who attempted a formulation of an aesthetic theory of the sublime had directly experienced the power of the Alps over the imagination. After having travelled through the mountain landscape, John Dennis accounts for an emotion he calls "terrible joy"[385], whereas Joseph Addison confronted with the same experience writes of an "agreeable kind of horror."[386] From eighteenth century onwards, the aesthetic of nature and the aesthetic of the sublime become almost inseparable: whichever strong type of emotion is bristled with the sight of mountains, glaciers, the ocean, streams, storms, crags, precipices etc. The recognition of ambivalent feelings originating whenever at the presence of these natural

[382] The fascination of the Mont Blanc has been also captured by the poetical words of Percy Shelley, who, profoundly captivated in the admiration of the solemnity of its greatness as much as his wife, wrote a poem to show his reverence, attempting a portrayal of the maximum expression of natural sublimity. Written in 1816, it was published posthumously in 1822 by Mary Shelley. The fifth stanza directly addresses the Mont Blanc, and it shows how the sublime of the Alpine landscape elicited similar reactions on the Shelleys. See Shelley, Percy Bysshe*, Mont Blanc*.
[383] Sage, Victor. "The Dialogic Sublime: The Mer de Glace, The Spirits of Liberty, and *Frankenstein*", in *Mary Shelleys Frankenstein, 1818-2018*, edited by Vanon, Michela Alliata, Parrino, Maria, Scarsella, Alessandro, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020, p. 17.
[384] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, p. 205.
[385] Dennis, John. *The critical works of John Dennis 1711-1729*, Baltimore: The J. Hopkins Press, 1943, 38off.
[386] Addison, Joseph. "*The Spectator*, No. 412", p. 69.

sublimities paves the way for the Burkean delightful horror. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that, when Frankenstein accedes to his Creature's request of alleviating his solitude with a partner of equal nature, he moves to Scotland to perform the wicked deed. Shelley knows, as well as her readers know, that the geography of Scotland is not indifferent to the discourse of the sublime. The aesthetic filter of Romantic sensibility locates in the Scottish Highlands the epitome of the sublime. Only a few years earlier, in 1814, the sublimity of the mountain landscape was extolled by the great Walter Scott in his *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*, an historical novel particularly concerned with the unique appeal which only the Highlands can provide the beholder with.

From this literary heritage Mary Shelley draws the characterisation of the intrinsic power of the Alpine setting:

> The abrupt sides of vast mountains of this glorious presence-chamber of imperial Nature was broken only by the brawling waves, or the fall of some vast fragment, the thunder sound of the avalanche, or the cracking reverberated along the mountains of the accumulated ice, which, through the silent working of immutable laws, was ever and anon rent and torn, as if it had been but a plaything in their hands.[387]

During Frankenstein's ascent to the glacier, the destructive force of the landscape becomes more and more predominant. The signs of landslides and the loud noise of avalanches breaking the solemn silence are unmistakable instances of the unfailing presence of the imperial nature. From the peak of Montanvert, the protagonist witnesses the vastness and magnificence of the glacier, however at this point of his journey, "the benign presence which seemed to have waited upon earlier now appears to have vanished."[388] Significantly, each time that the protagonist is afforded a view over the mountains, this scenery firstly suggests a sense of recognition and peacefulness. Notwithstanding this initial sense of relief, often very rapidly, these feelings veer toward uneasiness, horrific and frightful.

[387] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, pp. 74-75.
[388] Giacomoni, Paola. "Mountain landscape and the aesthetics of the sublime in Romantic narration", p. 120.

Mindful of the Creature's first appearance punctuated with a multitude of details recalling Burke's discourse of terror[389], while reading the descriptions of the Alpine sublime, the reader clearly suspects something terrifying is about to happen. The narrative digression focused on the sublimity of nature serves the purpose of enhancing the suspense, which ultimately culminates as Frankenstein glimpses a distant figure "advancing with superhuman speed."[390] Immediately after, Frankenstein adds:

> He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his stature, also as he approached, seemed to exceed that of a man. [...] He approached; his countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes.[391]

In this description of the Creature, Shelley applies the Burkean concepts of terror and power, indeed, the sight of his Creature immediately evokes sentiments of terror and horror and Frankenstein reads his features as unequivocally malign. The non-human nature of the monster is emphasised and signalled by his outward appearance and his extraordinary strength. The fearful dexterity with which he bounds from one crevice of ice to the other serves the function of terrifying the reader (as well as Frankenstein): the monster's inexorable advance symbolises the inevitable threat approaching, which cannot be avoided or thwarted because it is of superior force.

Of all the times the creator encounters his Creature or refers to him, he never misses the opportunity of harshly describing his person with negative adjectives and epithets, i.e. when "the shape came nearer" Frankenstein comments "(sight tremendous and abhorred!)"[392]. On this too grounds the basis of the Creature's misperception[393], who up to this point in the novel, is only presented through the words of his opponent. Though Shelley endows the Creature with the typical features of the sublime, when her monster begins to tell his tragic tale of abandonment,

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[389] See "2.4.2 The Second Encounter in Geneva".
[390] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 76.
[391] Ibid., pp. 76- 77.
[392] Ibid., p. 77.
[393] See "2.4.1 The First Encounter between Creator and Creature."

rejection and sufferings, "the balance of sympathy at the novel's conclusion is firmly in favour of the Creature."[394]

Another element discussed in the *Philosophical Enquiry* can be noticed in the physical reaction this encounter has on the protagonist: "I was troubled: a mist came over my eyes, and I felt a faintness seize me; but I was quickly restored by the cold gale of the mountains."[395] As Burke points out, when human beings are seized by the strongest kind of emotion they are capable of feeling, their mind reacts by experiencing terror, however, this feeling quickly spreads throughout the body. The final outcome sees the physique under great pressure, characterised by extreme tension of the muscular fibres. Similarly, as Frankenstein is overwhelmed by terror, his mind is robbed of clarity, his vision blurs and he feels a faintness seizing him.

Once again, as the Creature enters Frankenstein's visual range, the first element mentioned is his "unearthly ugliness."[396] This substantial lack of beauty is taken to its extreme in this section, as the reader learns that because of this hideous appearance the Creature is forced to absolute loneliness. The social quality of beauty discussed by Burke emerges here with the uttermost vividness: the Creature is compelled to live in the only place where the environmental conditions impede the presence of man. Having been banished from the human world and indistinctly rejected by whoever he comes across, even from his 'father', the Creature is obliged to find shelter in the desolation of the glacier. The sublime landscape is unsuitable and hostile for the fragile human being; on the contrary, the Creature appears to feel at ease surrounded by the mountainous chain. At this point the reference Frankenstein made to 'another earth' and 'another race of beings' acquires a more specific meaning, as it becomes clear that this non-human species is the species to which the Creature belongs (and of which, he is the sole member). Only he, thanks to his unique physical characteristics, is able to survive to the constant threat that the sublimity of the Alps pose. Nevertheless, even though his superhuman strength and adaptability permit his merging with the immense majesty of the Alps, on the other hand the same sublimity forbids his living among human beings: the sublime Creature can only live in the sublime environment.

[394] Jansson, Siv. "Introduction" to *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus,* p. xiv.
[395] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 76.
[396] Ibid., p. 77.

2.4.4 The Chase in the Mer de Glace

Before delegating the narration to her protagonist Victor Frankenstein, Shelley sets the tone for her first novel by introducing Creature and creator already immersed in the sublime and treacherous Arctic realm. Surrounded by "vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to have no end"[397], the explorer Robert Walton and his crew perceived at distance "a being which had the shape of man, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge, and guided by dogs."[398] This apparition is followed in the next morning by another one, this time of a "human being, [...] an European."[399] The fact that the first appearance of Frankenstein and his monster occurs in the North Pole, a desolate frozen wasteland, is particularly significant because it preannounces that the encounters between the two enemies will always happen in specific places with similar characteristics, all sublime. In this way, the reader understands that, whenever the narration lingers on the description of these natural landscapes, the arrival of the Creature is imminent.[400] Furthermore, in this episode the difference between the Creature and his creator is already hinted at by Walton who, still unaware of the state of affairs, instinctively describes the Creature as having the shape of a man but not properly being a man, while Frankenstein is immediately presented as belonging to humankind.

As already discussed, these details inserted in the narration, which at first glance seem of little significance, actively contribute to exacerbate the idea of the Creature's association with another race. Therefore, the dexterity with which the monster crosses the "inequalities of the ice"[401] untroubled and undisturbed becomes particularly relevant, since on the other hand Shelley decides to introduce Frankenstein as a man "on the brink of destruction"[402], on the verge of dying when saved by Walton. All these elements anticipate the further development of the novel, foretelling the immense importance of Burke's theorisation of sublimity in Mary Shelley's masterpiece.

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[397] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 20.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Ibid., pp. 20-21.
[400] For instance: the description of the thunderstorm approaching in Geneva seconds before the first encounter with the monster; the detailed account of Frankenstein's trip in Chamonix valley.
[401] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 20.
[402] Ibid., p. 21.

In the final section of *Frankenstein*, where the narration reconnects with the present time in which Walton is writing the letters addressed to his sister Margret, a reversal of roles in the relationship between Creature and creator occurs. After the death of his bride Elizabeth, Frankenstein is left alone in the world, for his beloved ones paid with their lives his hubris for knowledge. Consumed by the sense of guilt – always and solely directed toward his family, never to his Creature – he vows to devote his remaining life to kill the wretch whom he had created. His rage together with a spasmodic desire for revenge push him on a chase at the world's ends. "The hunter becomes the hunted, the pursued the pursuer"[403]; the Creature flees but at the same time intentionally leaves signs of his passage so as to be followed: "Victor and his creature are virtually fused into one being, almost one consciousness, during their final race across the icy wastes of the North Pole."[404] They become each other's double, ultimately deploying one of the most significant topoi of the Gothic, the doppelgänger, forever intermingled in their sentiments of revenge, anguish and remorse.

The interest in the Arctic region seems to mirror Shelley's contemporary conversations of national relevance, concerned with a number of writings named 'polar print culture'. Vargo argues that "the composition of the novel dates from a period of 'Arctic Fever', during which Shelley would have read John Barrow's 'On the Polar Ice and Northern Passage into the Pacific' and other articles in Murray's *Quarterly Review,* which generated national interest in polar exploration."[405] Yet it is not so much the motif of exploration which plays a key role in the economy of the novel, as the peculiar conformation of nature in the territory at issue. The northernmost place on earth is also the most inaccessible of the globe, a place of solitude, desolation and barrenness.

The chase leads to the antipodes of the world, in the frozen wastes of the Artic realm. After a long and exhausting pursuit in the hinterland, both invigorated by the ghosts of Elizabeth, Clerval, Justine, his father and William and blinded by revenge, Frankenstein finds himself at the edge of the planet, the North Pole. On learning that the Creature has disappeared in the desolation of the icy land, the protagonist is seized by a temporary moment of despair.

[403] Mellor, K., Anne. "Making a "monster": an Introduction to *Frankenstein*", p. 23.
[404] Ibid.
[405] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising Sources", p. 30.

> He had escaped me; and I must commence a destructive and almost endless journey across the mountainous ices of the ocean – amidst cold that few of the inhabitants could long endure, and which I, the native of a genial and sunny climate, could not hope to survive. Yet at the idea that the fiend should live and be triumphant, my rage and vengeance returned, and, like a mighty tide, overwhelmed every other feeling.[406]

At the beginning of the novel, Walton's allusion to the "land of mist and snow"[407] and the analogy with Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*[408] prepare the final frame set in the Arctic. The narrative action shifts northwards only to find itself again in an environmental context which is even more sublime than the mighty mountainous chain of the Alps. Indeed, although these landscapes are morphologically different, they are equally representative of sublimity, so much so that "it has been a standard critical assumption that the polar setting serves as a transplanted version of the Alps and shorthand to convey the sublime."[409] The sense of astonishment previously attached to the Alpine landscape is shortly displaced, just to be found anew in the vastness of the frozen land.

The harsh climatic conditions and the hostile morphology of the land make it virtually impossible for humans to survive there, whereas they do not pose any type of threat to the monster's self-preservation. At the extremes of the world, the sublimity of the creature finds its counterpart in terms of external world in the imperial nature: the desolation of the North Pole rather than threatening the Creature's safety, welcomes him and protects him from human meanness. On the other hand, Frankenstein's human fragility is repeatedly underlined: "Immense and rugged mountains of ice often barred up my passage, and I often heard the thunder of the ground sea which threatened my destruction."[410] A sole thunderstorm in the Mer de Glace could sentence Frankenstein to death: his entire journey into the Arctic realm is characterised by the uncertainty regarding the possibility of being killed by the unconcerned and inhospitable icy environment rather than by his hideous monster.

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[406] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, pp. 157-158.
[407] Ibid., p. 18
[408] See "2.3 The Main Influences of the Novel."
[409] Vargo, Lisa. "Contextualising Sources", p. 29.
[410] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 158.

The physical characteristics of the Creature instead, such as superhuman strength and his body's composition brought about the stitching together of already dead pieces, make him capable of easily adapting.

One step away from seizing his Creature, the Arctic environment destabilises and Frankenstein loses his trace:

> A ground sea was heard; the thunder of its progress, as the waters rolled and swelled beneath me, became every moment more ominous and terrific. I pressed on, but in vain. The wind arose; the sea roared; and, as with the mighty shock of an earthquake, it split and cracked with a tremendous and overwhelming sound. The work was soon finished: in a few minutes a tumultuous sea rolled between me and my enemy, and I was left drifting on a scattered piece of ice, that was continually lessening, and thus preparing for my hideous death.[411]

The natural landscape surrounding the main character becomes second after second more ominous and terrific, the beginning of this turmoil is described through the roar of the sea churning beneath the sheet of ice. The wind blows powerful and gelid, the sea responds with a louder roaring, the rough atmosphere becomes utterly unstable. As the natural elements tremendously fight against each other in the background of the wasted land, the ice beneath Frankenstein's feet shatters with a deafening noise, so overwhelming as to resemble "the mighty shock of an earthquake."[412] However, a fundamental characteristic of these landscape must be kept in mind. Exceptionally harsh climatic conditions make the proliferation of fauna and flora almost impossible, human settlement is impractical, animals are few and well hidden. Vacuity, solitude and silence: these are the sources which Burke catalogues as the 'privations'. The Artic realm is a world precisely made of these absences obtained by the privation of entities, which contribute and highly enhance the experience of the sublime, as they are all intrinsically terrible. In this fragment, the natural sublimities are masterfully descripted as they rage over the barrenness of the North Pole. The linguistical representation recalls the ideas of the sublime

[411] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, pp. 158-159.
[412] Ibid.

discussed in the *Philosophical Enquiry*: Frankenstein is completely at the mercy of nature, its greatness is immeasurable and unbeatable, it even exceeds the power of his own creation. The vacuity - already naturally sublime - is temporally superseded by excessively loud sounds, which Burke too considers as source of sublimity. In fact, the sounds in the mountainous ices of the ocean, where usually silence reigns supreme, represent the warnings of an impending danger. Firstly, Victor Frankenstein hears the thunder of the advancing and tormented sea beneath his feet, then its disquieting roar, and ultimately the loudness with which the ice breaks fills the air almost deafeningly. Immediately after, another quality of the sublime is inserted in Shelley's narration. While drifting away on a thinning piece of ice, uncertainty becomes the preponderant feeling. The awareness of a probable death compels the imagination to fear the worst, in fact the protagonist soon envisages his own "hideous death."[413] Uncertain prospects regarding the self-preservation of the subject excite the strongest kind of emotion, terror, which subjugates every other feeling, and overwhelms the mind.

The final scene of the novel sees the monster on the deathbed of its unloving creator. Once Victor has finished to recount his story to Walton, the sublimity of the Arctic realm gets the better of him.

> 'But soon,' he cried, with sad and solemn enthusiasm, 'I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will face away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell.' He sprang from the cabin-window, as he said this, upon the ice-raft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.[414]

[413] Ibid., pp. 158-159.
[414] Ibid., p. 170.

Inextricably intertwined in life, the two protagonists seem to be bound in death as well. The Creature's last words are the ultimate proof of his remorse for this life as a wretch and outcast, however Mary Shelley does not only encapsulate the immense suffering in these last lines. The whole manuscript of *Frankenstein* was edited by Percy Shelley before its publication: he made a significant number of changes to the body of the work[415], so much so that recently criticism has been wrongly led to doubt Mary Shelley's authorship over the novel. More often than not, Percy Shelley altered the text, therefore causing the loss of the essence which Mary Shelley firstly intended: as in this case, instead of "borne away", she had written "pushing himself away." In this alteration Mellor notes that "Percy Shelley's revision, by rendering the creature passive [...] and by flatly asserting that the creature is "lost in darkness and distance"[416], provides a comforting reassurance to the reader that the creature is now powerless and completely gone."[417] The revision does not reflect Mary Shelley's intentions; her more assertive stylistic choice embodies two of the principal qualities of the sublime, which Burke considers as almost crucial to the triggering of the feeling of terror. The death of the monster remains uncertain, and in the lack of certainty, it is inevitable that the imagination gets carried away in dwelling on the most unsettling thoughts. Additionally, the crucial sentiment with which the author decides to leave her readers is infinity, which "has a tendency to fill the mind with that sort of delightful horror, which is the most genuine effect of the truest sublime."[418] In the archetypical sublime scenery Shelley sets her 'hideous progeny free'[419], and "lost in darkness and distance"[420] she bids her farewell, therefore closing her novel with the unknowable, the overwhelming, the infinite: with sublimity.

[415] "Shelley seems to have added four or five thousand words to the original text" in Redford, Catherine. "Shelley, Percy Bysshe", in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, Smith, Andrew, Hughes, William, Punter, David, Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 625.
[416] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 170.
[417] Mellor, K., Anne. "Making a "monster": an Introduction to *Frankenstein*", p. 14.
[418] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 60.
[419] Shelley in her 1831 Introduction writes "And now, once again, I bid my hideous progeny go forth and prosper." Shelley, Mary, "Author's Introduction", p. 5.
[420] Shelley, Mary. *Frankenstein*, p. 170.

CHAPTER III

3. Sublimity and Beauty in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Hers, then, is the rarest of all powers.
She could free life from its dependence on facts;
with a few touches indicate the spirit of a face so that it needs no body;
by speaking of the moor make the wind blow and the thunder roar. [421]
-Virginia Woolf

In the bleak northern Parsonage of Haworth, rising among the graves, secluded from the world on its wind-beaten hill, in a "lonely place among half-dead ash-trees and stunted thorns, [...] cut off on one side by the still ranks of the serried dead, and distanced on the other by mile-long stretches of heath"[422] probably the most powerful imaginative mind of the nineteenth century English literature grew up, lived and died. When Emily Brontë writes, she has the rare ability of displaying a parallel world before the eyes of her readers, a reality so perfectly and truthfully depicted as to make us feel as if we were 'reading a painting', that takes shape in our imagination with the most splendid poetical words. Emily Brontë delves deep into the most recondite emotions of the human being, and then moulds her prose into the representation of violent passions, sufferings, wildest feelings and thirst for vengeance; but above all Brontë powerfully paints the

[421] Woolf, Virginia. "Wuthering Heights", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, London: Penguin Books Ltd, [1847] 2012, p. 362.
[422] Robinson, A. F., Mary. *Emily Brontë*, London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1883, p. 154.

sublime love between Heathcliff and Catherine, a kind of bond never seen before, which destroys any concept of space and time, a love that defeats even death.

It is rarely possible to rejoice in the presence of an artist in the family; however, the Brontës might claim this privilege thrice. All the three Brontë sisters were writers: the talented Charlotte Brontë, the delicate Anne Brontë and the genius Emily Brontë. From her self-imposed reclusion and almost a stranger to the contemporary literary discourse, Brontë deflagrates every conventional rule of writing in the self-righteous Victorian England. She rises as an unwitting pioneer who, from the remoteness of the Yorkshire moors, was able to unhinge the strict nineteenth century dogmas, thus influencing generations of writers to come. The figure of Emily Brontë is still nowadays shrouded in mystery, her personality as well as her private life remain elusive and enigmatical. Seldom are other authors in literary history as deeply attached to their hometown as Emily Brontë is to the wildness of the heath: the separation from the world of the grey old Parsonage always causes her an unendurable homesickness. Her misery is soon relieved once she can romp again on her moors. Many have struggled to understand how, only by relying on her uneventful and plain life experience, Emily Brontë could ever stitch together a novel so profoundly imbued with passion, wilderness, supernatural and sentimentality. Many have tried to account for the ambiguity of her personality, perplexed by an external timidity which hardly matched with a fiery and passionate temperament, recognised in her the "Romantic genius – eccentric, larger than life, and not bound by the usual constraints that govern Charlotte Brontë and her contemporary audience's conception of the feminine."[423]

As Hewish argues, "this author's life and personality are monolithic and tend to be biographer-proof."[424] The consistent lack of material and the nature of this same material complicated the already difficult task of interpreting this unique woman. Emily Brontë's independence of mind and strength of character are given expression to for the first time through the words of her dear sister Charlotte Brontë in the *Biographical Notice and the Editor's Preface* to the 1850 posthumous edition of *Wuthering Heights*. The version of Emily Brontë that Charlotte Brontë presents to the literary history discloses the exceptional young woman concealed behind the 'fragile creature' who did not even survive her thirties.

[423] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989, p.12.
[424] Hewish, John. *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study*, London: Macmillan, 1969, p. 9.

> In Emily's nature the extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, inartificial tastes, and an unpretending outside, lay a secret power and fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero. […] Her temper was magnanimous, but warm and sudden; her spirit altogether unbending.[425]

Yet not even her own sister, one of the very few people admitted in Brontë's narrow circle, seems to fully understand her nature. Eager to give justice and to defend her from the "charges of coarseness"[426], Charlotte presents Emily as an unsophisticated "nursling of the moors", an "obtrusive"[427] woman whose literary compositions were romantically triggered by the rough landscape and the rustic inhabitants of the Yorkshire. To preserve a positive image of Emily Brontë in the Victorian public memory, so unsympathetic and hostile towards her unconventional and revolutionary persona, Charlotte constructs the portrait of the sister as possessing an inherent dichotomy: her genius is explained through a "Romantic theory of creativity in which the literary work comes unbidden to the possessor of the 'gift'."[428] Emily Brontë's "secret power and fire"[429] pushed her into writing merely following an impulse of nature, and because of that, Charlotte Brontë claims that Emily Brontë could not be held directly responsible for the impassioned work she had unconsciously created.[430] By stressing her being asocial and cloistered, Charlotte discharges her sister, but she "of all people must have known that the literary sister of the angel in the house is the madwoman in the attic: by describing Emily Brontë as a nun possessed by dark

[425] Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bells", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, London: Penguin books, 2003, p. xlix.
[426] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Biographies to 1940", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 42.
[427] Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bells", p. xlix.
[428] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 11. Similarly to what Mary Shelley does in her Introduction by stating "My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me", Charlotte delegates the responsibility for such a powerful and unsettling creation to an uncontrollable artistic force, therefore somehow exempting the author from any kind of 'guilt'.
[429] Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bells", p. xlix.
[430] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 12. Pykett quotes from Brontë's *Biographical Notice*: "Having formed these beings, she did not know what she had done."

powers, she places her own sister squarely within the gothic tradition of dark domesticity."[431] Hence, also Charlotte Brontë recognises the genius, but cannot account for its origin.

Following Charlotte Brontë's lead, in her famous biography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*[432] Elisabeth Gaskell analogously presents Emily Brontë as "tenacious in her 'habits of independence' and drawn to the 'fierce wild, intractability' of animals."[433] As a testimony of Brontë's fiercely independent and stoical nature, Gaskell recounts an anecdote that seems to endorse the incipit of Brontë's famous poem *No Coward Soul is Mine:* unconcerned with the ferocity and disobedience of her mastiff Keeper, when he attempts to leap at her throat she fearlessly beats him with her bare fists.[434] Although physically weak and delicate, Emily Brontë was fierce and passionate, and she transports this unbending strength in her art. "Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone."[435]

Despite the fact that Emily Brontë's personality and private life are still exceptionally resistant to any sort of cataloguing, one thing is certain: one of the most unforgettable stories of English literature impetuously flowed out from her pen, embedded in a narration which uniqueness is impossible to surpass, both marvellous and disquieting in all its details, captivating and enchanting the readers as few novels in literary history could ever claim to have done.

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[431] Rena- Dozier, Emily. "Gothic Criticism: "Wuthering Heights" and Nineteenth-Century Literary History" in *ELH*, Vol. 77, No. 3, California: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010, p. 762.

[432] Gaskell's biography was the very first to recount the lives of the Brontë sisters. "Revd Patrick Brontë asked Charlotte's friend and fellow novelist Elizabeth Gaskell to write a reliable account of his daughter's life. […] Gaskell was an established author whose popularity ensured that the biography would be widely read." In Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Biographies to 1940", p. 42.

[433] Nestor, Pauline. "Introduction", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* London: Penguin books, 2003, p. xviii.

[434] Gaskell, Elizabeth. *Life of Charlotte Brontë,* New York: Penguin, 1985, pp. 268-269.

[435] Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bells", p. xlviii.

3.1 Emily Brontë: A Reclusive Life in the Moors

The form of *Wuthering Heights* is as consummate
as its subject is sublime.[436]
- Lord David Cecil

Emily Brontë was born on 30 July 1818, the fifth of six children of the Irish-born Anglican priest Patrick Brontë and the Methodist Maria Branwell. In 1820 the Brontë family moved from the parsonage of Thornton to the parsonage of Haworth, surrounded for kilometres by the Yorkshire moors, where the father had obtained the perpetual curate.

Emily Brontë's childhood was shadowed by death: eighteen months after giving birth to her sixth child, Anne Brontë, Maria Branwell died from uterine cancer. The absence of a feminine figure was soon filled with the arrival of the mother's sister, Elizabeth Branwell, to whom the management of the Brontë household and especially the upbringing of children was delegated. The Brontë children grew up in a house with the windows overlooking the cemetery on one side, and the harsh moorland perpetually beaten by the wind on the other.[437] Robinson poetically highlights Brontë's connection to nature already as a child by stating: "She loved the freedom [of the moors], the large air. She loved the creatures, too. Never was a soul with a more passionate love for Mother Earth."[438] Although he gave them some formal instruction by home-tutoring them, the Reverend Brontë was neither particularly attentive toward his children's needs nor significantly rigid regarding their education.[439] As a consequence, already in their early age the Brontë children learnt to depend entirely on their own resources. This relatively unconventional upbringing on the one hand fostered the development of a strong bond and mutual interdependence between the siblings and on the other hand, it afforded them a certain degree a freedom.[440]

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[436] Cecil, David. *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1948, p. 150.
[437] Nestor, Pauline. "Introduction", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. xv.
[438] Robinson, A., F., Mary. *Emily Brontë*, London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1883, p. 48. She was one of Emily Brontë's first biographers.
[439] Morris, Lord, of Castle Morris. "The Brontës and Education, Education, Education", in *Brontë Society Transactions*, Vol. 2, Haworth: The Brontë Society, 1997, pp. 1-18.
[440] Nestor, Pauline. "Introduction", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. xvii.

According to their father's will, the four older sisters Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte and Emily Brontë followed the path frequently taken by the several motherless daughters and were sent to the Clergy Daughter's School at Cowan Bridge. In 1825, Emily's (first of the many) unhappy sojourn ceased following an outbreak of a typhoid epidemic in the school, which prompted Reverend Brontë to withdraw the girls from the institution. However, only two of them made it back home: shortly after the epidemic, Maria and Elizabeth died of tuberculosis. The loss of the eldest sister, who was looked upon as a surrogate mother to the younger, was deeply felt by the siblings. The bereavement was especially felt by Emily Brontë, inasmuch as some critics recognised affinities between the prematurely dead sister with the ghostly child trying to break through the window in Lockwood's waking nightmare in chapter three of *Wuthering Heights.*[441]

The remaining Brontë children, Charlotte, Emily, Anne and the only boy Branwell became inseparable. Lacking a life outside the grey and old walls of their Yorkshire house, the children sought refuge in their imaginative world, steadily growing more intense by the day, prompted by their own readings and the influence they had on each other. The father's return from Leeds carrying a box filled with wooden soldiers decrees the beginning of the flourishing and extraordinary writings of the Brontës.[442] These juvenilia consists in "a closely connected series of stories, poems, novels, histories, and dramas having a common setting and common characters", therefore the chronicles of "the epic cycle of an imaginary world in which the four young Brontës lived, moved, and had their being, into which they projected themselves and all that they knew of life from narrow experience and wide reading."[443] Although the surviving work of these sagas is mostly Charlotte's, the few remaining fragments of the stories of the Gondal vividly recall the characters and the incidents in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights:* "The most impressive and passionate of Emily Brontë's poems are Gondal poems, and even though they obviously reflect her own deepest emotional needs they are on the surface dramatic utterances by invented characters."[444]

Not only was the imaginative energy of the Brontës triggered by the fictional adventures happening in their imaginary worlds, but also by the books they avidly read, the stories in the

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[441] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011, p. 2.
ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unive1-ebooks/detail.action?docID=686922.
[442] Mac, B. G. Carthy, "Emily Brontë", in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 39, No. 153, Dublin: Messenger Publications, 1950, p. 19.
[443] Daiches, David. "Introduction" in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986, p. 9. Charlotte and Branwell created the cycle of Angria, whereas Emily and Anne made their characters move within the imaginary world of Gondal.
[444] Ibid., p. 10.

Blackwood's Magazine[445] and the tales of both Aunt Branwell and their servant Tabby used to tell them. Among all the books owned by the Brontës, surely the most influential for Brontë were the works of Lord Byron, Walter Scott, Shakespeare, Percy Shelley. Furthermore, Patrick Brontë possessed a copy of both Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of our idea of the Sublime and Beautiful*, as well as John Milton's *Paradise Lost,* which are known to have been used by his children.[446] Along with their readings, the aunt's fervent Methodism and what Charlotte would later call her "mad Methodist magazines, full of miracles and apparitions and preternatural warnings, ominous dreams and frenzied fanaticisms"[447] inadvertently contributed to fodder the children's imagination. Moreover, Tabitha Aykroyd shortened in 'Tabby', employed in the household as a cook and native of Haworth, introduced the children to the Yorkshire moors folklore as she "told of fairies that danced by the bed-sides in the moonlight, and of those who had seen them. When the peat glowed red on the kitchen hearth and shadows stretched across the stone floor, Tabby made the warm air seem alive with creatures of the fern and heather."[448] All these imaginative stimuli were set against the backdrop of the characteristic wilderness and roughness of the moorland, where the siblings used to take long walks[449], and to which especially Emily Brontë developed a particular attachment. The Yorkshire heath gave Brontë a sense of freedom, so much so that Charlotte Brontë writes "liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils."[450]

That Emily could not bear the separation from her beloved moors and the domestic routine is evident in the extreme brevity of her stays.[451] In July 1835, she joined Charlotte Brontë at Roe Head School, where her sister was already a teacher. However, no later than November of the same year, she had Anne Brontë replacing her and went back to Yorkshire. By the same token, in September 1838 Brontë became a teacher in Law Hill School in Halifax. Under the stressful work

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[445]Alexander, Christine. "Readers and Writers: "Blackwood's" and the Brontës", in *The Gaskell Society Journal*, Gaskell Society, Vol. 8, 1994, pp. 54-69.

[446] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Books owned by the Brontës", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 52-53.
Brontës' copy of Milton's epic poem still exists and is heavily marked.

[447] Daiches, David. "Introduction" in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. 8.

[448] Simpson, Charles. *Emily Brontë*, London: Country Life, 1929, p. 27.

[449] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Brontë, Emily Jane", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 88. The Brontë children used to have lessons in the morning, and then spend their afternoons romping in the moors.

[450] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, quoting Charlotte Brontë, p. 8.

[451] Austin, M. Linda. "Emily Brontë's Homesickness", in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4, Indiana: Indiana Press University, 2002, p. 573.

load (around 17-hours per day)[452] her already fragile health soon broke and in April 1839 she was compelled to return home. Some years later, in 1842 a family friend suggested that the Brontës, in preparation for the imminent opening of their own boarding school, should improve their languages by studying in Brussels.[453] Emily Brontë's permanence is so recalled by the Brontës' Belgian teacher, M. Heger:

> She should have been a man – a great navigator [...] Her powerful reason would have deduced new spheres of discovery from the knowledge of the old; and her strong, imperious will would never have been daunted by opposition or difficulty; never have given way but with life. [...] Her faculty of imagination was such that, if she had written a history, her view of scenes and characters would have been so vivid, and so powerfully expressed, and supported by such a show of argument, that it would have dominated over the reader.[454]

In 1842 the death of Elizabeth Branwell hastens the Brontës sisters' return in Yorkshire; however the legacies left by the aunt significantly contributed to relieve many of the anxieties about the future, especially Emily Brontë's.[455] By taking advantage of any circumstance that would allow her staying at home, Brontë took over the management of the household and also of the sisters' inheritances. Between 1845 and 1848, all the Brontës remained in the parsonage; yet this period was neither joyful nor peaceful, owing to Branwell's rapid decline into debts and drunkenness.[456]

In 1845, Charlotte Brontë made the discovery that brought the world to know the masterpieces of these provincial young women, when she " 'accidentally lighted on a M.S. volume of verse in [her] sister Emily's handwriting. Recognizing the 'peculiar music' of these poems, 'wild, melancholy, and elevating' "[457] the elder sister discovered that both Emily and Anne Brontë had been writing poems the past years. Although at the beginning Emily Brontë felt invaded in

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[452] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, quoting Charlotte Brontë, p. 9.
[453] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, p. 8. The friend was Mary Taylor.
[454] Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, London: Dent, 1971, p. 151.
[455] Robinson, A., F., Mary. *Emily Brontë*, p. 90-91.
[456] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 11. In the wake of his dismissal from his tutorship in Thorp Green, but mostly because of the rejection of his employer Mrs Robison, whom he was in love with, Branwell drinks himself to death.
[457] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, p. 10.

her privacy, ultimately she agreed to the publication under the pseudonymous of Ellis Bell, while Charlotte became Currer Bell and Anne became Acton Bell.[458] The entrance of the Brontës sisters into the nineteenth-century literary panorama is marked by the publication of the *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. Notwithstanding the total commercial failure of the *Poems*, which sold only two copies, the following year each of the sisters wrote a novel: Charlotte Brontë *The Professor*, Emily Brontë *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Brontë *Agnes Grey*. After a long search, the publisher Thomas Cautley Newby agreed to publish the novels; however, it was not until the great success obtained by the publication of *Jane Eyre* by Smith Elder that Newby pushed the venture forward.[459]

Nineteenth century criticism utterly failed to give justice to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. In her *Biographical Notice*, Charlotte writes that "The immature but very real powers revealed in *Wuthering Heights* were scarcely recognised; its import and nature were misunderstood; the identity of its author was misinterpreted."[460] Unfortunately Emily Brontë had never had the chance to enjoy the status of author as Charlotte Brontë did. She only lived enough to see her only novel highly misread and misjudged from a shocked readership still too subjected to Victorian strict social conventions, unable to account for such a powerful and revolutionary narrative. Later criticism also failed to understand Brontë's genius, and "frequently perceived paradox turning upon the assumed uneventfulness, isolation and cultural deprivation of [her] life as contrasted with the dynamism of her writing."[461]

Upon attending Branwell's funeral on October 1st 1848, Emily Brontë fell ill with severe cold which rapidly turned into inflammation of the lungs. Only a few months later she followed him to the grave. Not even on her deathbed did her fierce independence abandon her, indeed the period of her illness was heavily marked by a stoical refusal of sympathy and help; she kept on repeating "no poisoning doctors"[462] until her death on 30 December 1848. "Never in her life she had lingered over any task that lay before her, and she did not linger now."[463]

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[458] All the information regarding the publication of the novels are given by Charlotte Brontë herself in her *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bells*.
[459] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, p. 11.
[460] Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bells", p. xlvi.
[461] Miles, Peter. *Wuthering Heights*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990, p. 15.
[462] Fraser, Rebecca. *Charlotte Brontë*, London: Methuen, 1988, p. 316.
[463] Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bells", p. xlviii.

3.2 *Wuthering Heights*

No manuscript of *Wuthering Heights* survived, neither drafts or a fair copy. The composition is supposed to have started about October 1845, however, many critics argued that "planning such a complex narrative structure, chronology, and legal detail would have required time, and the possible sources for characters, buildings, and themes suggested a gestation period reaching back as far as Emily Brontë's period at Law Hill."[464]

From a structural point of view, Emily Brontë's only novel is particularly remarkable. The plot gains credibility thanks to the masterfully planned shifting of narrative viewpoints[465]: the majority of the story, which spans over twenty years, has the housekeeper Ellen (Nelly) Dean as the narrating voice; her storytelling is interspersed with other character's intense personal stories, for example, Isabella Linton recounts her experiences with Heathcliff in a long letter. Nelly's voice is framed within the narration of a foreigner, Mr Lockwood, who brings the reader into the world of the novel as well as concludes the narration at the end. Neither Nelly Dean nor the other temporary narrating voices are reliable[466], and each of them presents his/her own view of this conflictual world ranging over two generations.

The story opens with the arrival of the new tenant of Thrushcross Grange in 1801. Lockwood decides to pay a visit to his landlord, Heathcliff, a wealthy man living in the ancient and imposing - although neglected - manor of Wuthering Heights, towering on a wind-beaten hill in the Yorkshire moors. Heathcliff is immediately described as a gipsy-like man and particularly unwelcoming towards his new neighbour. Despite this unfriendliness, Lockwood is intrigued by Heathcliff's mysterious figure and repeats a second visit the next day. Now, the hostility towards him is much more blatant: not only is Heathcliff annoyed by his presence there, the other inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, namely the young Catherine and uncouth Hareton Earnshaw, are irritated as well. "Lockwood's alienation and misplaced courtesy create the effect of black

[464] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Brontë, Emily Jane", p. 94.
[465] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Wuthering Heights. A Novel", in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 558.
[466] For a more extensive study on the unreliability of the narrators see: Shunami, Gideon. "The Unreliable Narrator in *Wuthering Heights*", in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 1973, pp. 449-468.

humour, but there is also a sense of real danger and threat"[467] which is articulated not only in the annoyance of the people, but also in the description of the strong inhospitality of the landscape.

A snowstorm forces Lockwood to spend the night at the Heights, he is accommodated in a bedroom where he finds a diary bearing the names of 'Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff, Catherine Linton'. Lockwood falls asleep, then he wakes up in the middle of the night as he hears the branch of a tree knocking on the window and he opens it to stop the tapping. He suddenly becomes terrified when he realises his fingers grasped by a "little, ice-cold hand."[468] A ghastly child's voice, claiming her name to be Catherine Linton, cries to be let in; as a consequence, seized by terror Lockwood tries to free himself by savagery rubbing the ghost's wrist on the broken pane until "the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes."[469] Upon hearing Lockwood's cries, Heathcliff rushes into the room, curses the stranger; once alone he starts begging for Catherine's return.

The surrounding environment proves once again hostile, as Lockwood makes his way back to the Grange in deep snow and consequentially falls ill with fever. During his convalesce, he enquires after Heathcliff and the other people living at the Heights to his housekeeper. Nelly Dean, who was formerly employed at Wuthering Heights before Thrushcross Grange, spent her childhood in the company of the Earnshaw family. She takes over the story from this point onwards, almost until the end.

Nelly recalls the day in which the master of the house, Mr Earnshaw, returns from a trip to Liverpool with a ragged orphan, a black-haired child "as dark as if it came from the devil."[470] The boy is christened Heathcliff, named after a previous son who died. The foundling is raised with Mr Earnshaw's other children, Hindley and Catherine. By becoming the master's favourite, Heathcliff fuels Hindley's hatred, whereas he forms a particularly close bond with the beautiful Cathy. The two become inseparable and grow to love each other by the day. With Mr Earnshaw's death, Hindley inherits the property and revengefully relegates Heathcliff to the status of a farm-labourer. Despite the degradation forced upon the boy, Heathcliff and Cathy are inseparable and spend a lot of time wandering through the moors, Penistone Crags being their favoured spot.

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[467] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Wuthering Heights. A Novel", pp. 558-559.
[468] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, London: Penguin Books Ltd, [1847] 2012, p. 26. All the direct quotations from the novel will be taken from this edition.
[469] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 27.
[470] Ibid., p. 39.

One ill-fated day, with the intention of spying on the children of the wealthy Linton family, Cathy and Heathcliff trespass on the garden of Thrushcross Grange; while watching Edgar and Isabella fighting over a little dog, Skulker, the family's guard dog finds them and chases them, ultimately biting Catherine's ankle. The wound forces her to spend five weeks in the Linton's property, where she enjoys any sort of comfort and learns the civilized manners. At her return, she crosses the threshold of the Heights as an elegant young lady, who now, having grown accustomed to higher social rank standards, mocks Heathcliff's appearance.

With the death of his wife, Hindley is devastated and seeks for some comfort in drinking. Hareton, Hindley's son, is given to Nelly's care. At this point, the Hindley's hatred for Heathcliff is even exacerbated, he further attempts to degrade the already uncouth boy, pushing him to vow undying revenge against his wrongdoer. Meanwhile, Edgar Linton increasingly grows fond of Cathy, he starts to court her, and she soon accepts his marriage proposal. Heathcliff overhears the conversation between Nelly and Cathy, and profoundly wounded by the girl's words "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff",[471] he runs away and disappears in a ranging storm, unfortunately too soon to hear Catherine's declaration of love:

> My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rock beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff.[472]

Heathcliff returns three years later having acquired education and wealth, just to find Cathy mistress of Thrushcross Grange and married to Edgar Linton. His sudden return shatters the placid existence of the Linton family as well as the precarious situations at the Heights: learning about Isabella Linton's infatuation, he encourages it and ultimately elopes with her only to gain a hold onto the Linton's inheritance and properties through marriage; by becoming Hindley's mortgagee, he slowly but gradually obtains the lawful possession of the manor by gambling.

The enmity between Heathcliff and Linton is exacerbated as Nelly's recounts to her master about Catherine and Heathcliff's conversation where he accuses her of having betrayed him by

[471] Ibid., p. 86.
[472] Ibid., p. 88.

marrying Linton, thus he swearing revenge against him. The direct confrontation between the two men not only highlights Cathy's preference for her girlhood friend instead of her husband, but also exposes Linton's cowardice, who is not able to stood up against his opponent. When Heathcliff leaves the room, Edgar Linton states that his wife must choose between the two men. Catherine refuses to give an answer, utterly torn, she is unable to make a choice she locks herself in her room and refuses to eat. The young woman becomes ill, she declares "I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own"[473], and indeed so she does. She dies giving birth to a little girl, named Catherine after her. After her death, the section narrating the incidents of the second generation begins.

The following twelve years are swiftly summed up in Nelly Dean's narration: young Catherine grows up strong, beautiful but rather spoiled; Isabella Heathcliff dies and Heathcliff claims the child born from their union, whom, after having escaped from the Heights, she had raised somewhere far away from Gimmerton. Heathcliff uses his ailing and petulant son Linton as a bait to lure young Catherine to Wuthering Heights, and although Edgar prevents his daughter from going there to meet him, she breaches his orders and visits her cousin, growing some sort of affection for the sick boy. Knowing about his son's precarious health, Heathcliff secures his claim on the property of Thrushcross Grange by imprisoning Catherine in the Heights until the marriage between her and Linton Heathcliff takes place. In the meantime, Edgar Linton dies and Catherine inherits the Grange. After her father's burial, Catherine goes back to Wuthering Heights to assist her dying husband; her permanence there felt as annoying and problematic by the other inhabitants: Zillah completely ignores her, fearing for her employment; old Joseph despises her; Hareton Earnshaw is not able to establish the much wanted relationship he would like to have with the cousin. With Linton's death, Heathcliff becomes the lawful possessor of the Heights and the Grange. The promised revenge is finally achieved, however, his satisfaction gets enfeebled by his obsession with Catherine's ghost. His love for Catherine progressively erodes the lust for revenge. The prospect of a 'spiritual' re-connection with his beloved soulmate makes Heathcliff open Cathy's coffin to look at her and hold her again between his arms. Additionally, before closing it, Heathcliff loosens the coffin's panel on the side in which he is going to be buried, so that they will be able to merge together, their love defying earthly boundaries and triumphing over death.

[473] Ibid., p. 125.

Having brought the narration up to the present time, Nelly's voice is replaced by Lockwood's. The tenant visits the Heights a year later, in 1802, and finds a completely different situation: Nelly recounts about Heathcliff's mysterious death (in Cathy's former bed), as well as the imminent marriage between Catherine and Hareton. Both old Joseph and other villagers claim to have seen the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine, freely wandering across the moors together at last. The novel ends as Lockwood visits the graves of Catherine, Heathcliff and Edgar, wondering "how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth."[474]

3.3 The Background of the Novel

Not before the twentieth century did *Wuthering Heights* start to enjoy the popularity and the critical esteem it deserved. The rise of a new criticism[475] in 1940s acknowledged an exceptional diversity of interpretations, and as the studies on the uniqueness of her novel grew, so did the interest in Emily Brontë's personae. In fact, the literary vacuum surrounding the intellectual life of the author had for a long time gone together with an equal vacuity of information with regards to Emily Brontë's personal life.[476] The task for Brontë's critics has proven extremely challenging; many struggled to identify the cultural and contextual background from which such a Romantic genius took inspiration.

It goes without saying that Emily Brontë's traumatic life experiences have largely contributed to the enrichment of her narrative[477]: her childhood was early marred by the deaths of her maternal figures; at six years old she was almost killed in a freak bog explosion on the Yorkshire heath; short after, she was sent to Cowan Bridge where she witnessed the abusive treatment of Maria and Elizabeth, who died shortly thereafter. From these early encounters with

[474] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 360.
[475] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Criticism 1860-1940", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes,* pp. 142-145.
[476] Pykett, Lyn. Emily Brontë, pp. 1-2.
[477] Chitham, Edward. *A Life of Emily Brontë*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987, p. 30, p. 46-47.

death, "Emily developed a sense of guilt and an obsession with dying that are evident in her writing and in her response to her final illness."[478] Significantly, the very place where Emily Brontë spends the majority her short life permeates the pages of *Wuthering Heights*, thus underlying her vital connection to the moorland nature. The extreme isolation in the grey old parsonage of Haworth together with the very strong bond she felt with the sublime natural world take shape and substantially characterise Brontë's literary compositions.

Wuthering Heights demands for a multiplicity of readings, and displays what Kermode calls a "surplus of signifiers"[479], the intrinsic versatility which distinguishes the works of art. Yet, from where does this come from? Although Emily Brontë received the bare minimum formal education – all Brontë children were home tutored from the father, graduated from Cambridge – and an interval of eleven years occurred between her scholastic experiences (1824 Cowan Bridge, 1835 Roe Head), Brontë is far from being uneducated or naïf while writing. She was an avid reader who had free access – which for the period, was quite unconventional - to a multitude of books, newspaper, journals etc. The intense involvement in reading the works of her contemporaries contributed to the creation of a certain degree of formal literary knowledge. This familiarity with the literary landscape takes shape in Emily Brontë's novel in a singular way, and this same singularity has led many early critics to judge *Wuthering Heights* as markedly unconcerned with and uninfluenced by the immediate issue of the day.[480] However, even though *Wuthering Heights* seems a stand-alone prose, completely detached from the Victorian social and cultural context in which it was conceived, the influences coming from Brontë's early readings have been exposed by closer analysis of the novel's themes and narrative techniques.

The sole novel of the "sphinx of our modern literature"[481] springs from a lonely however flourishing imagination. The abiding fascination of *Wuthering Heights* stems "from the fact that the novel not only incorporates elements from a number of genres, but also interrogates those different elements by creating a tension between them."[482] As pointed out before, the taste for supernatural occurrences probably has its origin in the folkloristic tales narrated by the servant

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[478] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Biographies from 1940", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 39.
[479] Kermode, Frank. "A Modern Way with a Classic", in *New Literary History*, Vol. 5, No. 3, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 434.
[480] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 34.
[481] Shorter, Clement. *Charlotte Brontë and Her Circle*, p. 144, as quoted in Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret, "Biographies to 1940", *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes,* p. 46.
[482] Nestor, Pauline. "Introduction", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. xxi.

Tabby, together with the strict Methodist preaching imparted by Aunt Branwell. However, Brontë's predilection for Gothic motives and metaphysical scenarios was constantly nurtured through the reading of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, which was "a major vehicle for the dissemination of Romantic fiction, publishing and reviewing numerous works of the horror school."[483] Leafing through the pages of 'Maga', Brontë would have come upon instances or discussions of the works by E.T.A. Hoffman, James Hogg or Mary Shelley[484], just to mention a few of those involved in the experimentation of Gothic tales of evil possessions and the topic of the doppelgänger.

In light of the author's very strong connection with the natural world, where the perception of Nature verges on mysticism, it is not actually surprising that Emily Brontë's favourite readings bear the names of the Romantic poets *par excellence*: Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron. The Wordsworthian "sense of something far more deeply interfused" emerges in "Bronte's choice of setting, her plotting, and some aspects of characterisation"[485] which are directly in debt to the ballad tradition upon which the same Wordsworth had drawn from.

Edward Chitham, the most influential modern biographer of the Brontë sisters, underlines the presence of a connection between Emily Brontë's journal papers and Lord Byron's, arguing that Brontë derived her sparse and terse style of writing directly from the poet.[486] This is surely not the only element Brontë valued in Byron and then made it her own. Undoubtedly, Brontë shares Lord Byron's Romantic interest in the manifestation of the powers of nature, articulated through the representation of the sublime greatness of the external world. Moreover, the characterisation of her heroes and heroines, utterly proud and rebellious; the rootless individuals of unknown origins; her special attraction to banditti, prisoners, outlaws and the like: all these peculiarities in Brontë's writings owe a great deal to Lord Byron.[487] However, the greatest effect of reading Byron's poetry on Brontë's writings is to be unmistakably found in the intriguing character of Heathcliff. Emily Brontë moulds her protagonist on the Byronic hero, "unconventional, lawless, proud, wilful, independent, and rebellious".[488] The comparison is often

[483] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 30.
[484] Ibid., pp. 30-31.
[485] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 29.
[486] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, p. 14.
[487] Brown, Helen. "The Influence of Byron on Emily Brontë", in *The Modern Language Review*, Modern Humanities Research Association, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1939, pp. 374-381. and Pykett, Lyn. "The writings of Ellis Bell", in *Emily Brontë*, p. 30.
[488] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 30.

drawn between Lord Byron's protagonist Manfred and Brontë's Heathcliff.[489] Manfred's curse is to keep on living after the death of his beloved Astarte, and Heathcliff is analogously doomed to the same destiny when Catherine dies. There are furthermore some similarities between the reactions of these main characters when they are confronted with the 'lifeless remains' of their lovers after many years from their deaths: the apparition of Astarte's ghost leaves Manfred wondering whether "Can this be death? There's bloom upon her cheek"[490], and in the same way, when Heathcliff unveils Catherine's face, he recognises her features to be "hers yet"[491], unchanged by the passing of time. "There is a feeling that the gap between life and death seems for a moment almost something that could be bridged."[492]

As far as the character of Heathcliff is concerned, although the protagonist clearly conforms to the typical Byronic hero, in his physical and behavioural characterisation a certain acquaintance with the main topics dealt in Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* emerges. The entirety of the next chapter will be dedicated to this analysis.

Additionally, Brontë's reading of Lord Byron interlocks with her reading of *Paradise Lost* in the figure of Heathcliff[493]: the dominant leitmotif in *Wuthering Heights* has at its core "the story of Satan's rebellion and fall, filtered through a Miltonic lens and coupled with Byronic imagery simultaneously evoking mankind's angelic potential and bestial state."[494] In their renowned study *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar interpret the novel as "a rebelliously topsy-turvy retelling" of Milton's epic poem, thus stressing a juxtaposition with Satan's fall and the fall of Catherine Earnshaw and her satanic 'shadow self' Heathcliff.[495]

Revered by Emily Brontë, as much as Lord Byron, was Percy Bysshe Shelley. The Brontës had a copy of the 1839 edition of Shelley's *Poems* curated by Mary Shelley.[496] However, possibly stimulated by the reading of Thomas Moore's *Letters and Journals of Lord Byron, with Notice of*

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[489] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, pp. 21-28. All the comparison between Brontë and Byron which will be dealt with here are extensively explained by Brinton.
[490] Byron. *Manfred*, Act II, scene IV, 98.
[491] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 308.
[492] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, p. 26.
[493] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p.30. Pykett claims that "The Byronic heroes of *Wuthering Heights* and the poems owe a great deal to Emily Brontë's profound fascination with the thwarted power of the Satan of *Paradise Lost*."
[494] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Imagery in the Brontës' works", in *The Oxford Companion to the Brönte*s, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012 p. 262.
[495] Gilbert, Sandra and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, New Haven: Yale university press, 1979, p. 255.
[496] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Shelley, Percy Bysshe", in *The Oxford Companion to the Brönte*s, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 460.

his Life (1830), they may have become acquainted with Shelley's poetry earlier than 1839.[497] Shelley's influence conspicuously emerges in Emily Brontë's works, especially in her conception of God, the soul, love, and marriage. Furthermore, Emily Brontë's poetic preoccupation with the neglected captive as well as the imprisoned soul is prefigured within Shelleyan philosophy, particularly explicit in *Epipsychidion.*[498]

"For fiction - read Scott alone; all novels after his are worthless":[499] the profound effect that the Scottish novelist, poet, critic and historian Sir Walter Scott had on the Brontës is so summed up by Charlotte Brontë. Walter Scott's career as a novelist began with the publication of his highly acclaimed *Waverley; or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (1814), thus creating a public appeal for the historical and regional novel. "His work raised the cultural status of the prose fiction and exerted a far-reaching influence throughout the nineteenth century"[500], and Emily Brontë was no less fascinated by his novels. "Much of the Brontës penchant for the German Romanticism, Gothic novels, Scottish border ballads, regional dialect, the evocation of landscape, chivalrous war, and romantic love, had been fostered by their addiction to Scott's poetry and novels."[501] The point of convergence between Scott's novels and Brontë's, is so summarised in Juliet Baker seminal study *The Brontës*:

> *Wuthering Heights* which, ironically, is regarded as the archetypical Yorkshire novel, was actually Gondal through and through and therefore owed as much, if not more, to Walter Scott's Border country as to Emily's beloved moorlands of home. [...] In *Wuthering Heights*, on is irresistibly reminded of *Rob Roy*'s setting in the wilds of Northumberland, among the uncouth and quarrelsome squirearchical Osbaldinstones, who spend their time drinking and gambling. The spirited and wilful Cathy has strong similarities with Diana Vernon, who is equally out of place among her boorish relations. Heathcliff, whose unusual name

[497] Chitham, Edward. "Emily Brontë and Shelley", in *Brontë Facts and Brontë Problems*, Chitham, Edward and Winnifrith, Tom, London: Macmillan, 1983, pp. 58-61.
[498] The affinity between Brontë's poetical preoccupation and Percy Shelley's philosophy is highlighted both in: Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret, "Shelley, Percy Bysshe", p. 460; Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, pp. 29-30.
[499] Barker, Juliet R.V. *The Brontës*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994. p. 122.
[500] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Scott, Sir Walter", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes,* p. 444.
[501] Ibid., p. 445.

recalls that of the surly Thorncliff, mimics Rashleigh Obaldinestone in his sinister hold over the Earnshaws and Lintons and his attempts to seize their inheritances.[502]

On the other hand, in his 1981 Introduction for the World's Classic edition of Brontë's novel,[503] Ian Jack pinpoints to an impressive number of similarities between *Wuthering Heights* and *Waverley*. In the first place, by analysing the arrival of Captain Edward Waverley at the Scottish manor and Lockwood's first impression on Wuthering Heights, a parallelism between the architectural description of the manors is made explicit. The hall-doors are similarly of ancient and massive appearance, both bearing a significant inscription: Waverley notices '1594' carved on the architrave, and Lockwood detects the date '1500' accompanied by the name 'Hareton Earnshaw'. Additionally, Wuthering Heights stands amidst the rugged Yorkshire moors; a landscape of equal roughness - the Scottish Highlands - surrounds Glennaquoich.

Emily Brontë is profoundly indebted to Scott's first prose fiction on the basis of the structure and the setting of her *Wuthering Heights*. Scott's *Waverley* derives much of the narrative force from the strong and well-defined contrast between the Highlands and the Lowlands, a stark opposition which trespasses the geographical limits and spills over the characterisation of the peoples inhabiting those specific areas. The geography in *Wuthering Heights* is astonishingly similar, the same geographical contrast is transported and represented in the opposition between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. The Highlands and the Heights represent inhospitality and harshness, whereas the Lowlands' evenness and the Grange's domesticity suggest harmony. However, Brontë's antithetical realities do not merely clash in terms of natural landscape: the temperament of the families, either fervent or docile, mirror the external natural world surrounding them.

The literary genesis of this stark contrast finds its roots back to the sharp opposition between the sublime and beautiful discussed by Burke in his *A Philosophical Enquiry*. The original antithesis between sublimity and beauty is articulated in these novels by means of the description of both natural landscapes and characters. The great influence exerted by the *Philosophical Enquiry* on *Wuthering Heights* will be thoroughly discussed in the upcoming chapters.

[502] Barker, Juliet R.V. *The Brontës*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994. p. 501.
[503] Jack, Ian. "Introduction" to *Wuthering Heights*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

3.4 The Sublime and The Beautiful

Victorian Gothic Literature

The historical period recognised as the 'Victorian Era', which roughly corresponds to the years of Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901) spans from 1814 to 1914. Against the backdrop of an increasingly economically powerful nation, Victorian England was characterised by a strong attachment to social conventions, hypocritical prudish rejection of sex and a blind trust towards progress. The process of reforms inaugurated in first part of the nineteenth century led many writers to reflect this tendency in their works: Victorian novelists actively questioned and provided their own answers to the social change which caused increasing social inequality, and denounced the hierarchical organisation of British society, utterly unbalanced and egoistical towards the weakest. In practical terms, Victorian novels are mainly concerned with the most faithful and truthful representation of the reality of the society. Consequentially, around the 1840s a new generation of novelists emerged, whose major concern was the exploration of "the condition of the people"[504] as well as the wider "exploration of the community"[505], which takes shape in a novel having a clear final purpose.

Published in 1848, Emily Brontë's novel appears to be strangely at odds with the productions of her contemporary fellow-novelists such as Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley or Elizabeth Gaskell – just to name a few -, who were extensively committed to the portrayal of the consequences of the ever-growing industrialisation.[506] Even her sister Charlotte Brontë, raised in the same isolated context of the Yorkshire, shows a certain degree of involvement with the political and social life in London, especially voiced through the fierce declaration of her heroine Jane Eyre with regards to social condition of women, and the disparity of sexes[507].

[504] Tillotson, Kethleen. *Novels of the Eighteenth-Forties*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954, pp. 81-115.
[505] Williams, Raymond. *The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence*, St Albans: Paladin, 1974, p. 8 and p. 11.
[506] Nestor, Pauline. "Introduction", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. xix.
[507] "Jane Eyre stands out as a singular heroine in defiance of what Brontë suggests are socially dictated acts of female self-annihilation", Davison, Carol Margaret, "The Victorian Gothic and Gender", in *The Victorian gothic: an Edinburgh companion*, Hughes, William and Smith, Andrew, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012, p. 130.

A change of trend occurred around the 1820s: in particular with the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), the 'original Gothic' culminated and reached its natural end.[508] The exaggerated conventions of the genre soon became formulaic and were perceived as too excessive. However, this change does not affect its actual existence, indeed, "the Gothic novel breaks up and becomes a more scattered but now permanent and widely influential aspect of literary sensibility rather than a concerted genre or movement as such."[509] Thus, Victorian writers who incorporate typical Gothic themes into their novels – often gloomy descriptions, either terrifying or supernatural events - are claimed by the critics to be writing within the tradition of Victorian Gothic literature. "In keeping with Victorian literature's general preoccupation with the relationship between the individual and society, the exploration of alterity of subjectivity in Victorian Gothic fiction is usually directed towards social critique."[510] Hence, if on the one hand the motivation for writing becomes the will to expose the distortions of society, on the other hand the productions of these authors, still influenced by the literature of horror, give birth to a new kind of Gothic. The Victorian Gothic is clearly different; it is decentralised and does not pursue the same aims of the literature of terror. Most frequently, Gothicism in Victorian writings is mixed with social realism.

In his essay[511], Sage acknowledges the merit of having "kept alive the Gothic flame" to *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine.*[512] However, in this merit partakes also the Border Ballads of Walter Scott, having gained an astonishing popularity in this period. Not surprisingly, Emily Brontë was acquainted with both sources.[513]

Notwithstanding the apparent estrangement from the productions of the era, concerned with the paradoxes and the denunciation of the Victorian society, *Wuthering Heights* is not actually too detached from the period in which it was conceived: "*Wuthering Heights* brings together realism and romance, two modes which co-exist in a state of dynamic tension in much Victorian fiction."[514] To some degree, in the poetical representation of the rural lives of her

[508] Punter, David. "Victorian Gothic", in *The Encyclopedia of the Gothic*, Smith, Andrew, Hughes, William, Punter, David, Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, p. 711.
[509] Sage, Victor. "Gothic Novel", p. 84.
[510] Davison, Carol Margaret. "The Victorian Gothic and Gender", p. 128.
[511] Sage, Victor. "Gothic Novel", p. 84.
[512] In *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, this merit is extended also to *Lady's Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine* and the *New Monthly Magazine*. Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret, "Gothic Novel", in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, p. 222.
[513] See "3.3 The Background of the Novel".
[514] Pykett, Lyn. *Emily Brontë*, p. 33.

characters, Emily Brontë looks at the world of the novel with a critical eye.[515] She paints her characters as faithfully as possible to human nature, and she presents a society where women are still obliged to adhere to a role to fit in, i.e. Catherine marries Edgar Linton not only because she is fascinated by aristocratic life, but also because she thinks that by marrying him she could use his money to save Heathcliff from degradation. The remoteness of the setting and the excess of passion of the characters make it difficult to relate *Wuthering Heights* to the Victorian trend of the 1840s.

But if it is challenging to recognise a similar motivation for writing between Dickens, Gaskell etc., *Wuthering Heights* could be understood in a much easier way if related to Gothicism and Romanticism. The composition of the novel owes less to the immediate Victorian social context than it does to the late eighteenth century Gothic novel and the poetry of the Romantics. The necessity to insert Gothic aspects to the narration proves that some of its pivotal themes continued to influence a major number of realist novelists throughout the century. Although it would be erroneous to refer to these authors writing within the Victorian Gothic tradition as merely influenced by Gothicism[516], the term is useful to recognise those works that are characterised by elements belonging to the literature of terror. *Wuthering Heights* belongs more to the Gothic tradition than to the Victorian, since its narrative reality is filled by supernatural events, such as ghosts, terrifying occurrences scattered along a plot which often suggests ideas of darkness, excessive passions and feelings of confinement. As many writers confronting with the Gothic did before her, Emily Brontë does not blindly apply the exemplary themes of the genre, but rather questions them and applies them in her own way. For example, the manor standing in the middle of the windswept moors firstly dislocates, but then perfectly mimics the literary convention of the castle[517], which turns out to be a prison-like space for many characters. Or again, Brontë "radically transforms the heroine of Gothic story by making Catherine [...] more realistic, and also overly aggressive and aware of her demonic nature"[518], whereas Heathcliff "owes his

[515] In his essay, Arnold Shapiro gives an exhaustive overlook of the points of convergence between Brontë's novel and the typical Victorian novels. For a more extensive analysis see Shapiro, Arnold. " "Wuthering Heights" as a Victorian Novel", *Studies in the Novel*, Vol. 1, No. 3, California: John Hopkins University Press, 1969, pp. 284-296.
[516] Punter, David. "Victorian Gothic", p. 716.
[517] The similarity between *Wuthering Heights* and the Gothic convention of the castle is dealt with both in Daiches, David, "Introduction" in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. 12 and Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret, "Gothic Novel", p. 222.
[518] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret, "Gothic Novel", p. 223.

diabolic energy and emotional power to Gothic lineage."[519] As Heilman discusses in his seminal paper, the old Gothic was internalised and psychologised by Brontë, ending up in the production of a dark narrative which kept alive the Gothic tradition mostly in the Satanic/Byronic Heathcliff and in the bleakness and remoteness of the landscape.[520]

Furthermore, other reminders of the Gothic emerge in the 'atypical' setting: although written in the Victorian era, the events of the novel do not take place in the industrialised and often over-polluted city. On the contrary, the reality of Wuthering Heights recalls more the traditional setting of the *Lyrical Ballads* and the Border Ballads. The world of *Wuthering Heights* is a world on its own, a world so secluded that when one character goes away from this circumscribed space it is as if he/she had disappeared from earth.[521] Additionally, both the main narrators, Nelly Dean and Lockwood, are characterised by their unreliability. In the first place, Lockwood "may seem [...] to have a measure of stability"[522], however his alienation from the roughness of this uncivilised world and its inhabitants is soon undermined by his unmotivated violence towards Cathy's ghost as he rubs her wrist on the glass of the window.[523] In the second place, throughout the novel Ellen Dean seems to want to establish herself as a standard of morality, since she claims to be only driven by good sense in her actions.[524] Nevertheless, the reader understands that in a number of passages she acts for her own interest, and her actions frequently bring about the most terrible incidents in the novel, such as Heathcliff's leaving the Heights, or the animated discussion between Catherine, Heathcliff and Linton which will pave the way for Catherine's madness and ultimate death.[525]

In the portrayal of the strongest human passions and the rurality of its landscapes, *Wuthering Heights* unravels the author's interest with Romanticism-related themes. As an avid

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[519] Ibid.

[520] Heilman, B., Robert. "Charlotte Bronte's 'New Gothic'", in *From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad: essays collected in memory of James T. Hillhouse,* edited by Rathburn, Robert C. and Steinmann, Martin, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1958, pp. 118-132.

[521] When Heathcliff leaves the Heights, nothing about him is known until he comes back, and even when he comes back, nothing is said about his period away. Similarly, no information is ever given regarding Isabella's whereabouts after she flees from Wuthering Heights. Nestor, Pauline, "Introduction", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. xix.

[522] Punter, David. "Victorian Gothic", p. 716.

[523] "His behaviour toward Cathy during his terrible dream at the start of the novel shows that beneath even the most polished exterior there lurks a potential savage." In Shapiro, Arnold. " "Wuthering Heights" as a Victorian Novel", p. 289.

[524] Miles, Peter. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 31.

[525] Hafley, James. "The Villain in Wuthering Heights", *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, Vol. 13, No. 3, California: University of California Press, 1958, pp. 199-215, especially p. 206. In his essay, Hafley even vents so further as to identify in Nelly Dean the actual villain of the novel.

reader of Romantic poetry herself, Brontë reflects this preference also in her novel, inasmuch as "in *Wuthering Heights* the natural elements pervade the human drama."[526] In his influential biography on Emily Brontë, Gérin even recognises that Brontë's "sense of nature as a presence and a power in human destiny was all-pervading."[527] Indeed, in her novel Emily Brontë sets out for the exploration of humanity's most primordial passions, especially in her two protagonists Catherine and Heathcliff. The intensity of their feelings is irrepressible and does not even want to be contained. Even though at times bringing out a certain level of perversity, the two rebelliously fight against the fetters of the social conventions by never bending to them and by expressing their love unfiltered.

The sense of nature permeates the narrative, its presence is ubiquitous, and it is conveyed through the most poetical words. This poeticalness was also recognised in an anonymous early review on the novel appeared in *Britannia*, a British periodical.[528] The reviewer interestingly associated *Wuthering Heights* with Salvatore Rosa's paintings by claiming the impetuous force of the novel, " 'the force of a dark and sullen torrent, flowing between high and rugged rocks', emphasising the central role taken by landscape in this tale of 'passionate ferocity.' "[529]

Italian painter and poet (1615 - 1673), Salvatore Rosa's fame is substantially linked to the sublime depiction of landscapes. Following his predilection for dark tones and luminous contrasts, his paintings portray the greatness in nature, a sublimity articulated through harshness, wilderness and hostility. Human presence in his paintings is always marginal, it is the landscape that clearly dominates the scene.[530] This association between the novel and Rosa's landscapes is meaningful, as it implicitly correlates *Wuthering Heights* with the aesthetic of sublimity. By putting forward this affinity, the reviewer actually understands the real essence of Emily Brontë's narrative. Having recognised the strength of the sublime quality in the novel, the influence of its literary antecedent straightforwardly emerges - the aesthetic theory of the sublime.

It is no wonder that Edmund Burke himself indicated Salvatore Rosa as 'the painter of the Sublime'. Since its publication, Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* has provided a detailed model for

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[526] "...from the snowstorm that forces Lockwood to spend the night at the Heights in the opening chapters to the description of the three gravestones among the heath and harebells, under a benign sky, on the closing page." In Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret, "Wuthering Heights. A Novel", in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontes*, p. 557.

[527] Gérin, Winifred. *Emily Bronte: A Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 13.

[528] Brinton, Ian. *Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, p. 103.

[529] Ibid.

[530] Wallace, W., Richard. "The Genius of Salvator Rosa", in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 1965, pp. 471-480.

all artists wishing to engage in the excitement of the most extreme emotional states. Where visual art produces scenarios centred on landscapes as magnificent as wild, the literature of horror feeds itself upon the Burkean notions of terror, obscurity, ugliness and the like. The responses to Burke's theory are to be found already in the early Gothic productions: in the self-proclaimed first Gothic novel, *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, the application of Burke's discourse on sublimity emerges in the constant fear of the hapless damsels Isabella and Mathilda persecuted by the villain Manfred and the plethora of supernatural occurrences.[531]

Already in Mrs Ann Radcliff novels, the sublime starts to occupy a greater space in terms of narrative description of the landscapes, as she often pauses the events of the plot to insert passages portraying this greatness, which is both awe-inspiring and astonishing.[532] In *Frankenstein*, the application of the sublime corresponds to an integral and vital part of the text, which achieves its status of Gothic novel *par excellence* also thanks to the fear and anxiety that Shelley is able to arouse in her readers. As highlighted in the previous chapter with regards to Mary Shelley[533], the responses to the theory of the sublime are far from being univocal and applied to the letter, but these instead are readapted in the most befitting way to the exigencies of the authors.

The Opposition of Beauty and Sublimity

Between the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the understanding and the consequential answer to the *Philosophical Enquiry* witnesses its re-interpretations more oriented towards the sublime as a means of acquiring a Gothic tone in the text. The emphasis is indeed placed on the achievement of "whatever is fitted to excite the ideas of pain and danger, or is in any sort terrible."[534] On the one hand, the writers were aiming at producing the strongest kind of emotions in their readers; on the other hand, Burke's theory presented itself as a handbook on how to awaken those feelings. Therefore, predictably enough,

[531] For a more extensive analysis on the affinities between Walpole's novel and Burke's aesthetic theory, see Smith, Andrew. "The Gothic Heyday, 1760-1820", in *Gothic Literature*, pp. 18-25.
[532] Monk, Samuel. *The Sublime*, pp. 218-221.
[533] See "2.4 The Sublime in Frankenstein".
[534] Burke uses these words to define the sublime in Part I, Sect. VII. "Of The Sublime". Burke, Edmund, *Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 33-34.

Gothic writers, while looking upon Burke's blueprint, force their characters into disquieting situations, where their safety and well-being is seriously put at risk. By leveraging on the reader-character bond, readers by proxy should experience feelings much akin to those experienced by characters. Hence, it appears that the 'original Gothic', comprehending the works published in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, solely focuses on the Burkean theory of aesthetic with regards to the sublime. The reason is pretty straightforward: being terror the central purpose of Gothic writers, or, using Mary Shelley's words, the aim being making the readers "dread to look around, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart"[535], it goes without saying that only the stimuli exiting sublimity would be taken under consideration. The 'ruling principle of the sublime', namely terror, is their final objective, and the path for its achievement appears very clear to Burke. Thanks to his *Enquiry*, providing a scrupulous catalogue of the necessary qualities of the sublime, this path becomes clear to writers too. As a consequence, the literature of terror fills its narratives with sinister settings, scenarios immersed in darkness leading to an induced blindness; the presence of a villain who constantly threatens the balance of the narrative; the descriptions of secluded and inhospitable landscapes, where the magnificence of nature endangers the subject while taking his breath away with its majesty. In Burkean terms, these examples could be respectively translated as: terror, obscurity, uncertainty, infinity, power, vastness and magnificence.

Especially and almost uniquely with regard to nature, Gothic writers also incorporate in their novels the fundamental concept of delightful horror. According to Burke, the sublime has this intrinsic quality of contemplating the coexistence of two apparently opposite emotions – pain and pleasure. For Burke it becomes a necessity that "the emissary of the king of terrors"[536], that is to say death, must not press too nearly in the shape of either danger or pain, otherwise its sublime component would be irremediably lost and the sole terrible would prevail. To experience delight in terror, any threat to the subject's self-preservation needs to be mitigated with the insertion of "certain distances, and with certain modifications"[537] whether of physical, mental or spatial nature, between the terrible object and the experiencing subject. Being these prerogatives fulfilled, the delight becomes achievable. This ambivalent feeling encompassing pleasure and pain is translated in the Gothic through long narrative digressions devoted to the description of sublime

[535] Shelley, Mary. "Author's Introduction", p. 3.
[536] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 34.
[537] Ibid.

landscapes in which the protagonist (and thus, to some extent, the reader) finds herself/himself immersed.[538]

Emily Brontë spent her whole life immersed in these sublime landscapes in real life. Her sensibility toward the natural world together with her Romantic intellectual heritage make *Wuthering Heights* perfect for the representation of the delight in sublimity. Yet Emily Brontë does much more than that. As mentioned in the first paragraphs of this chapter, around the 1820s the Gothic lost the status of a literary genre of its own, however, it became scattered and yet continued to receive attention in the Victorian novel. This specific transformation is to be found in *Wuthering Heights*, even more if confronted with *Frankenstein*, published barely thirty years earlier. To account for this change, it is necessary to look back to Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* in its entirety.

The philosopher opens his treatise by making explicit the existence of pain and pleasure, joy and grief. This distinction is functional for the introduction of one of his most revolutionary conceptions. With this polarisation, Burke is taking the first step towards an epochal turning point in the aesthetic of the sublime. In his essay *Pleasure of Imagination* appeared in the *Spectator* in 1712, Joseph Addison firstly ventures on delineating a mild opposition between the beautiful and the sublime by discussing the regularity, the specific design and the order of a garden as compared to the wilderness and the greatness of untamed landscapes. Consequentially Mark Akenside, drawing from Addison, in his *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) acknowledges the existence of 'the sublime and the fair' (initially the separation took into consideration three elements, the sublime, the wonderful and the fair. In the revised edition of 1772, Akenside removes the presence of the wonderful). Although the two categories increasingly started to be felt as independent from one another, no one before Burke ever suggested such a sharp division between the sublime and the beautiful.[539]

Burke grounds his aesthetic theory on the antithesis of the emotions of pleasure and pain: the sublime is provoked by the presence of pain, an emotion arising from the acknowledgment of a possible threat to the self; the beautiful takes the shape of pleasure, an emotion strictly characteristic and productive of the society of men. In Part III of the *Enquiry*, where the beautiful

[538] Kilgour, Maggie. *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, pp. 31-32. Kilgour argues that these narrative pauses serve the purpose of enhancing the tension in the reader for what is to come.

[539] The development of the aesthetical conception of the sublime is dealt with in the first chapter of this thesis. See especially "1.3.2 Joseph Addison", "1.3.4 Mark Akenside" and "1.4 The Burkean Sublime".

is dealt with and its sources are listed, the philosopher's reasoning begins to show its weakness. Beauty seems to be purely characterised through its opposition to the sublime, without possessing any quality of its own. For example, where the sublime requires vastness, beauty prefers smallness; while the sublime should be obscure and gloomy, the beautiful should be illuminated by delicate lights etc.[540] Interestingly, for Burke beauty is a necessary component for the establishment of a society and human's peaceful coexistence within it. In fact, beautiful human beings and beautiful animals "inspire us with sentiments of tenderness and affection towards their persons; we like to have them near us"[541] and in this 'natural' tendency Burke locates the roots of society. The fact that beauty is identified as a social quality is particularly significant, because it implicitly explains the estrangement of whatever does not possess this characteristic. Additionally, witnessing beauty arises to the mind a feeling of satisfaction, pleasure in what stands before the subject, ideas of love or a passion very near to it. Once again, if on the one hand Burke motivates the sublime in physiological terms in an unnatural tension of the nerves, on the other hand, the physical reactions to beauty produce a state of relaxation. This relaxation tranquillises the muscles of the body and arises the passion of love in the mind, and this pleasurable feeling pushes human beings to remain where they are, therefore gathering together in societies.

Brontë grounds her *Wuthering Heights* on this same distinction. Whereas early Gothic novels focus their attention on the discourse of the sublime, Emily Brontë extends the area of influence of the *Philosophical Enquiry* by encompassing the beautiful. This aesthetic category, though having been neglected for a long time, proves to be essential for the economy of the novel. It is not so much the category of the beautiful alone which elevates *Wuthering Heights* to uniqueness, but rather its function as the main element opposed to the sublime. On first impression, narrative spaces devoted to beauty are difficult to recognise, merely hinting at pleasurable feelings (i.e. the description of the beauty of the Lintons' estate, or the beauty of the women in the novel, especially Catherine Earnshaw's). Hardly anyone would recognise *Wuthering Heights* as a text devoted to the beautiful; certainly no one would fail to notice its sublimity. This is because the role of beauty in the novel is precisely to exalt its sublime aspects. It is no wonder then that the qualities of beauty, which should evoke relaxation and pleasure, are not distinctly perceivable. In this way, when the two categories are compared, the sublime emerges and stands

[540] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 101.
[541] Ibid., pp. 36-37.

out in the narrative even more violently and markedly. Had sublimity been left alone, it would have probably started to lose its power at some point.

The idea of the need to perceive the sublime object as always new was first emphasised by John Baillie. In his *An Essay On the Sublime* (1747), in which he addresses a number of themes akin to those Burke would later develop, Baillie recognises 'novelty' as a characteristic of sublimity. Although it is not an inherent quality of the objects, uncommonness has the capacity of heightening the sublime. The mind must perceive the objects as always new, since by becoming familiar, they would eventually lose their sublimity. Similarly, according to Burke's aesthetic theorisation, the sublime operates on individuals on the physical level causing an unnatural tension, but this unnaturalness cannot be perpetual, since if it were so, it would automatically become a normality. Hence, on the one hand, the insertion of the beautiful in the novel opposes sublimity, preventing it from becoming a normality by always renewing its novelty; on the other hand, it exacerbates the strength of the sublime. The delicacy of the beautiful makes the sublime feel even more powerful.

Walter Scott was the first to recognise the power and intrinsic value of this opposition[542]: in his widely acclaimed *Waverley*, Scott contrasted the reality of the Highlands and the Lowlands, as well as the customs and traditions of the English and Scottish peoples, in order to facilitate the emergence of their differences and enhance the qualities of each. In this respect, *Wuthering Heights* could easily fit into the Waverley Novels cycle, since a much similar contrast is at the heart of Brontë's novel.[543] This opposition, heir to the literary polarisation between the sublime and the beautiful, is articulated in Emily Brontë's novel in two major aspects: the landscape and the characters. "Everything associated with Wuthering Heights is akin to the sublime: the natural setting and the passion of Catherine and Heathcliff -dangerous, destructive, mysterious, awe-inspiring." Instead, everything associated with the Grange, "belongs to what these theorists called 'beauty': rational harmony, cultivated, tamed nature."[544]

[542] See "3.3 The Background of the Novel".
[543] Oda, Yukari. "*Wuthering Heights* and the *Waverly Novels*: Sir Walter Scott's Influence on Emily Brontë", in *Brontë studies: journal of the Brontë Society*, Vol.32, No. 3, 2007, p.217-226.
[544] Williams, Anne. "Natural Supernaturalism in "Wuthering Heights" ", *in Studies in Philology*, Vol. 82, No. 1, 1985, p. 125.

3.4.1 The Heights and The Grange

Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë could hardly have chosen a more appropriate title. In the readers' mind, these two words create a vivid image of a tormented landscape, shaken by violent storms, where nature reigns supreme. Already in the name of the novel, a strong reminder of sublimity is inserted. Wuthering Heights is not only the title of the novel, but it also coincides with the name of the property once belonging to the Earnshaw family, at the present moment owned by Heathcliff. The derivation of the name is clarified in the opening chapter, and the explanation refers to a multitude of concepts derived from Burkean sublimity. 'Wuthering' is a provincial adjective, particularly meaningful since it is

> descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there, at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few, stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. Happily, the architect had foresight to build it strong: the narrow windows are deeply set in the wall, and the corners defended with large jutting stones.[545]

This description, short but meticulous, fulfils the purpose of creating the most sublime imaginary in the mind of the reader. The manor towers over the Yorkshire moorland with its fortress-like appearance, surrounded by nothing else but wild nature for miles. Emily Brontë remarks the sublimity of the house by placing it at a significant distance from the adjacent dwellings. This intentional exclusion from civilization underlines the extreme distance of Wuthering Heights from the beautiful, since the automatic consequence of beauty is society. Its isolation in geographical terms simultaneously highlights its inherent sublime component. According to Burke the beautiful is an essential element for the coexistence of individuals in the

[545] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p.4.

same society, therefore the secluded placement of Wuthering Heights validates the 'social quality' of the beautiful: the dwelling, lacking beauty and exceeding in sublimity, is completely isolated.

The "atmospheric tumult"[546] easily arises ideas of danger and confusion: the strong thunderstorms hitting the region suggest a certain degree of inhospitality of the land together with a sense of unsafeness. The fact that the area is highly susceptible to these climatic phenomena is significant, and by giving this information to the readers Brontë simultaneously sets the tone for the inclusion of elements triggering Burkean terror. Through association, the mind connects the idea of peril with the object possessing terrible characteristics, exciting an innate reaction, an urge for survival leveraging on the primary passion of self-preservation. Indeed, the first emotion that arises in the contemplation of such perilous environment is a sense of uneasiness excited by the idea of a dark stormy sky, obscure and threatening. This translates in narrative terms the same idea which Burke calls 'obscurity', a darkness which feeds upon the fear of the subject regarding his incapacity of properly assessing the level of danger before him. Although obscurity does not directly correspond to sublimity, the impossibility of formulating clear ideas as a consequence of it enhances the passion of terror.

The morphological conformation of the territory leaves the house completely exposed to turbulent weather, which is the manifestation of the greatness and fury of nature. The awareness that such climatic phenomena could strike the land at any moment suggests a sense of continuous impeding danger. Furthermore, the tempest possesses the ability of blurring the sight, therefore adding even more confusion and uncertainty to the individual, and according to Burke the "terrible uncertainty" hurries the mind out of itself exactly thanks to the "crowd of great and confused images."[547] For Burke, when the sublime operates at its highest level in nature[548], the emotional response is astonishment; this sort of amazement is firstly triggered by Emily Brontë's description of the atmospheric tumult and then reinforced with the idea of the impetuous north wind. The "pure, bracing ventilation"[549] is so strong that as the reader readers the passage, he/she might be probably feel its cold breeze on the skin.

The characterisation of the Heights is moulded on Burke's discourse of 'Power' as well. For the philosopher the presence of power is so meaningful that he claims he knows of "nothing

[546] Ibid.
[547] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 51.
[548] Ibid., p. 47.
[549] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p.4.

sublime, which is not some modification of power."[550] Additionally, it appears clear to him that this power of the object has to be of a superior entity compared to the power of the subject. In this disparity of strength, the sublime has its origin: greater strength can force the mind to experience sublimity thanks to the terror it instils, for "pain is always inflicted by a power in some way superior, because we never submit to pain willingly."[551] In Brontë's analogy, nature becomes the powerful and intrinsically threatening object, whereas the experiencing subject is man. Given her special bond with the natural world, it is probably easier for Brontë to acknowledge and describe the immense power of Mother Nature. It is also worth noticing that this nature is no common nature, the natural environment surrounding the Heights is anything but ordinary. Normally, already in its tranquil status nature shows its greatness; however, the nature surrounding Wuthering Heights is extra-ordinary because of its constant tumult. As the elements fight against each other in the raging storm and the wind blows, the very safety of the individual is jeopardised, and the idea of terror starts to creeping in, until the mind becomes subjugated to it. Of the fact that in this specific territory nature expresses itself at the height of its greatness and majesty, the reader is informed when Lockwood is forced to pass the night at the Heights because of the snowstorm. Burke argues that "power derives all its sublimity from the terror with which it is generally accompanied" and from "the considerable degree of strength of its ability to hurt."[552] In this case, Lockwood, fearing for his life, does not dare to venture out of the manor and confront himself with nature in turmoil. Of all the representations of power that are liable to outclass human beings - such as animals or physically stronger human beings - nature is the absolute queen. Nothing can contain the power of nature when it is unleashed. Nothing is stronger.

The flora surrounding the house is of some importance too. For Burke, the oak, the ash, the elm, or in general the robust trees of the forest are "awful and majestic; they inspire a sort of reverence."[553] Analogously, the farmhouse is encircled by robust trees and thorns; the black currant bushes are dark, thorny and wild. The fir trees around the property are said to be excessively slanting, but still they are left in their natural state: wild, untamed. The wilderness enriches the whole picture of the neglected property, where nature thrives undisturbed.

[550] Ibid., p. 53.
[551] Ibid.
[552] Ibid., pp. 53-54.
[553] Ibid., p. 93.

The quality of the Burkean sublimity named 'Magnitude in Building', according to which an artificial object impresses the beholder because of the "immense force and labour"[554] required for its construction, is evoked in Emily Brontë's description of the manor. The architect is said to have built it 'strong', and this adjective suggests an impressive and imposing appearance. In addition, the exterior of the house also recalls the literary Gothic convention of the castle[555]: its small windows and massive stones indirectly convey an idea of imprisonment. Furthermore, although not explicitly addressed, the concept of 'Vastness' as theorised by Burke relates to both Wuthering Heights and its surroundings. Lockwood informs the readers that "before passing the threshold, [he] paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carvings lavished over the front, and especially about the principal door."[556] In order for a large number of engravings to fit in the delimited space of a façade of a house, the structure must be large enough to accommodate them. Thus, in the imagination of the readers the Earnshaws' property assumes remarkable proportions, which will be later confirmed by the fact that the dwelling is able to offer a shelter to an abundant number of residents (at the beginning of Nelly Dean's narration, seven people.)[557]

The reader is further informed that the interior of the manor is quite modest, it is a farming house therefore its primary need is that of being functional[558], not luxurious. The fire is not big enough to heat up the whole house: young Catherine, after the death of her husband Linton Heathcliff, is forced out of her room because the cold in it is unbearable.

Wuthering Heights is not properly 'vast', but it is great in dimensions, and this for Burke is "a powerful cause of the sublime."[559] Great dimensions in objects are essential because the grand object actively challenges the capacity of the eye, which while trying to rationalise all its boundaries experiences no rest. The retina is forced to a persistent state of tension and it is so deeply stuck as to generate the sublime.[560] Moreover, according to Burke, vastness does not only work in terms of height and length, but also in terms of depth. It is exactly this idea of

[554] Ibid., p. 62.
[555] "Wuthering Heights is not itself a Gothic castle, but it shares many of the key features." Punter, David. "Victorian Gothic", p. 716.
[556] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p.4.
[557] Mr Earnshaw, Mrs Earnshaw, Catherine, Hindley, Heathcliff, Nelly Dean, Joseph.
[558] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Wuthering Heights. A Novel", p. 552.
[559] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 59.
[560] The workings of greatness of dimension as discussed by Burke is accurately explained in Monk, Samuel, *The Sublime*, p. 97.

profoundness which rushes into the mind at the sight of the heath stretching for miles in every direction.

Particularly important is Burke's theorisation of the coexistence between pain and pleasure to account for the uniqueness of Wuthering Heights. In the *Philosophical Enquiry*, he claims that a certain distance between the terrible object and the subject is fundamental, since this allows the sublime to be fully experienced. The threat must exist and must be felt as imminent, but never press too closely as to be noxious. This concept is synthesised by Burke as delightful horror, "the most genuine effect of the truest sublime."[561] This ambivalence of delight in pain characterises the Earnshaws' dwelling: despite the adverse climatic conditions, its massive appearance and the feelings of uneasiness its sight generates, Wuthering Heights' peculiarity forms a captivating idea in the mind, which still nowadays fascinates with its singularity. At the thought of it, the imagination is led to visualise a wild but wonderful landscape, untamed but breath-taking. This atmosphere could easily be found in most of Salvatore Rosa's paintings.

Concealed from the sight by the bleak summit behind, just four miles apart from the former household of the Earnshaws stands Thrushcross Grange. The estate belongs to the Linton family and is located near the village of Gimmerton. In the novel, which in the first chapters only focuses on the sublimity of the Heights, beauty is introduced when Heathcliff and Catherine trespass into the world of the Grange. The two young protagonists, while running freely across the moors, are drawn into the property by the light coming from the Linton house. Through the window, Cathy and Heathcliff get a view on the life of the neighbouring wealthy family:

> We crept through a broken hedge, groped our way up the path, and planted ourselves on a flower-pot under the drawing-room window. The light came from thence; they had not put up the shutters, and the curtains were only half closed. Both of us were able to look in by standing on the basement, and clinging to the ledge, and we saw – ah! It was beautiful – a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers.[562]

[561] Ibid., p. 60.
[562] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 51.

Thrushcross Grange lies in a fertile valley, surrounded along its entire perimeter by a park, itself protected by gates. Its location is not isolated and remote as in the case of the Heights, in fact, the house was built in the vicinity of a village. The geographical location of the Lintons' estate is not coincidental: the very fact that the elegant manor is placed in the heart of the valley and close to a village supports Burke's theory according to which the beautiful is a mandatory quality for the inclusion in the community. The beauty of the Grange guarantees the admission in society, simultaneously indicating its inclination and willingness to be part of the same. By conforming to the standards of the beautiful Thrushcross Grange fulfils the primary function of Burkean beauty, namely the participation within a society. This would not happen if a manor such as Wuthering Heights would be placed in the same spot: its sight would suggest a discrepancy between its exterior appearance, utterly recalling the ideas of sublime, and its surroundings, which instead arise ideas of beauty in the mind. The result would probably be a sense of incongruity and repulsion.

Conversely to the description of the Heights, the narrative does not linger on the architectural details of the house, but through Heathcliff's account the reader is given a glimpse into the luxury of Thrushcross Grange's interior. From the drawing room window, Cathy and Heathcliff spy on the placid existence of the Linton family, and are fascinated by this "splendid place"[563] where the furnishings are richly carpeted with crimson, golden and silver decorations. Significantly, Heathcliff himself recognises the place as 'beautiful': the only reality with which the boy has familiarity up to this point in the novel is the reality of the Heights, and this limited knowledge probably makes him the best witness to the differences between the two houses. The word choice is not accidental: Brontë might as well have employed one of the many adjectives of the English language to describe that world beyond the window, but beautiful is the most appropriate term to express the emotions that such a view suggests. This choice can be explained in Burkean terms as follows. By taking into consideration that "beauty is [...] some quality in bodies acting mechanically upon the human mind by the intervention of the senses", as Heathcliff gets a glimpse on the reality of the Grange, he unconsciously and automatically recognises it as beautiful, because its characteristics reflect the properties necessary for the object to trigger

[563] Ibid.

beauty. In Catherine's case, the beautiful environment of Thrushcross Grange will exert a much stronger influence, so much so that she will return to the Heights completely changed, as an elegant young lady.

As opposed to the ubiquitous state of tension suggested by the environment at the Heights, the details of the cosy drawing room aim at creating a sense of peacefulness, softness, warmth and pleasure. In this reality, nothing threatens the disruption of harmony. Although the two young Lintons are shortly afterwards described in a futile quarrel, this episode is an example of the extent of disharmony contemplated in such a reality. The peacefulness of this world is temporarily broken by an argument over the possession of a small dog, and this represents the highest level of discomfort experienced the inhabitants of the Grange. There is no threat to the state of things, no imminent danger to the self-preservation of the individuals. Apart from this single episode, the wholesome sensation which this reality communicates is a sense of extreme relaxation, a placid and quiet existence. Emily Brontë's characterisation of Thrushcross Grange recalls Burke's argumentation regarding the physical cause of love. Beautiful objects act on a physical level by relaxing the muscles and fibres of the body, in turn producing the passion of love. The reality to which the Lintons are exposed never subjects them to a real state of tension, or fear. Brontë's description solely focuses on pleasurable feelings: unnatural tension as a reaction is not contemplated in this world because hardly ever any discomfort, let alone danger, can cross the threshold of the house.

The qualities which stimulate the association of beauty with the world of the Grange are to be found in the *Philosophical Enquiry* under the categories smoothness, colours, elegance, sound, taste, smell and delicacy. Although the architectural details of Thrushcross Grange are never explicitly dealt with, a general idea of smoothness associated with the building takes shape in the mind. This happens because, as Burke argues, whenever an object has a broken or rugged surface, that object would automatically lose its capacity of arising pleasing sensations. But unlike Wuthering Heights, which was built 'strong' with its narrow windows and massive irregular stones, the Grange has no reason for adapting its structure to the external world. It logically follows, both because in the novel the beauty of the estate is an objective fact and because there is no actual necessity for it to be otherwise, that the probability of it having smooth and regular surface is very high. Had it not been so, Heathcliff would have not used the word 'beautiful'.

From Heathcliff's account, the reader is told that the prevailing colours in the drawing room of the Lintons are crimson, gold, and silver. These colours are pleasing to the eye and their purpose is that of exhaling even more the beauty of the room. The whiteness of the ceiling perfectly matches with the furniture, enhances the vividness of the decorations and most of all, brightens the whole place. Starkly in contrast with the dimly lighted rooms of Wuthering Heights, the atmosphere at the Grange is heated up by soft tapers illuminating with moderate intensity the drawing room.

This depiction ultimately conveys the idea of elegance. In Burke's view, elegance arises "When any body is composed of parts smooth and polished without pressing upon each other, without showing any ruggedness or confusion, and at the same time affecting some regular shape."[564] Brontë's characterisation of Thrushcross Grange perfectly mimics the Burkean conception of elegance in its evenness, regular dimensions, and lack of asperity.

One of the novelties brought into the aesthetic of sublimity and beauty by the *Philosophical Enquiry* is the inclusion of the senses of smelling, tasting and hearing – traditionally, the attention would focus solely on the sight. The emphasis on the other senses can be found in the narrating voice of Nelly Dean, who periodically informs the readers about the meteorological conditions and the passing of the seasons.[565] A pleasing sensation is suggested as Nelly recalls her period at Thrushcross Grange by saying

> the weather was sweet and warm, the grass as green as showers and sun could make it, and the two dwarf apple trees, near the southern wall, full in bloom. I was comfortably reveling in the spring fragrance around, and the beautiful soft blue overhead.[566]

An essential quality of beauty is the appearance of "delicacy, or even fragility."[567] According to Burke, the liveliest sensation of the beautiful is elicited in the sight of flowers. It is no wonder then that Emily Brontë surrounds the Lintons' property with a beautiful garden. The idea of delicacy, already suggested in the description of the interior design of the house, reaches its climax with the representation of the domesticity of the natural world surrounding the Grange.

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[564] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 97.
[565] Tytler, Graeme. "Weather in *Wuthering Heights*", in *Brontë Studies*, Vol. 41, N. 1, 2016, pp. 39-47.
[566] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 348.
[567] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 93.

Burke clarifies the conception of delicacy related to beauty through a confrontation between sublime and beautiful trees:

> the delicate myrtle, it is the orange, it is the almond, it is the jasmine, it is the vine, which we look on as vegetable beauties. It is the flowery species, so remarkable for its weakness and momentary duration, that gives us the liveliest idea of beauty and elegance."[568]

The peculiar characteristics of the flowery species, its temporariness as well as its fragility, impel the mind to admire all its beauty. The Grange is encircled within garden trees, crocuses flowers e primroses[569]; the beauty and delicacy of the flowery species catches Catherine's eye, and she admires the "little flower, up yonder, the last bud from the multitude of blue-bells that clouded those turf steps in July with a lilac mist."[570] This characterisation of the natural world at the Grange serves to underline a strong contrast with the natural world of the Heights, where trees are robust and bushes are thorny. The conception of a beautiful tamed nature stands in stark opposition with the wilderness of the world at the Heights. At the Grange, the reader contemplates the possibility of a 'domestication' of the natural world, an idea perfectly exemplified with the private garden of the estate. On the contrary, the nature surrounding Wuthering Heights admits no modification of its structure at the hands of men. The contraposition between the domesticity of the nature at the Grange and the wilderness of the nature at the Heights becomes fundamental at an ideological level as far as the understanding of the final section of the novel is concerned. When Lockwood comes back to Wuthering Heights a year later, he finds a cultivated garden there, a symbol of the intrusion of domesticity in wilderness. This presence becomes the ultimate symbol of the final reconciliation and the re-establishment of the lost balance between the families after the incidents of the novel.[571] The garden belongs to young Catherine and Hareton, the last representatives of the two household of the Earnshaws and the Lintons. The introduction of an

[568] Ibid., 93-94.
[569] "The primroses and crocuses were hidden under wintry drifts; the larks were silent, the young leaves of the early trees smitten and blackened." Ibid., p. 183.
[570] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 246.
[571] "Hareton's planting of decorative flowers, under Catherine's direction, in the functional vegetable garden at the Heights serves as an emblem of reintegration." In Nestor, Pauline. "Introduction", in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. xxx.

element of the beautiful within the utterly sublime scenario of the Heights represents the attempt to restore the harmony by acknowledging the necessity of the coexistence of both.

Thrushcross Grange's beauty makes readers perceive the already sublime Wuthering Heights as ever more sublime. Much likely to what Burke did in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, Brontë reinforces the sublimity in her novel by contraposing to it the qualities of the beautiful. Whereas Thrushcross Grange is smooth, delicate and pleasing to the eye, Wuthering Heights is imposing, strong and suggests a sense of tension. The beautiful aspects of the Grange serve the creation of a stark opposition which starts in geographical terms, taking into consideration the structure of the buildings as well as the kind of nature surrounding them. The perception of this contrast between the Heights and the Grange consequentially becomes functional also for the characterisation of the people living in those specific areas.

3.4.2 Sublime and Beautiful Characters

The stark geographical contrast between the two worlds of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange is accompanied by an even harsher social opposition between the inhabitants of the respective houses. The divergences between the two realities, which re-enacts the aesthetical opposition of the sublime and the beautiful, provide a starting point for the understanding of the true nature of the characters in the novel. The world of the novel is a microcosm of its own, where the external environment profoundly exert an influence over the characters, so much so that "the impact of social environment upon human destiny tends to be indicated not only realistically by the action, but also by means of a symbolic shorthand."[572] In the narration, it is clear that the inhabitants of each household share common character and physical traits, which in turn are linked to the particular characteristics of the place where they live. In his

[572] Williams, Anne. "Natural Supernaturalism in "Wuthering Heights" ", p. 115.

seminal essay, Lord David Cecil meticulously explains the nature of the principal characters in a fundamental division into opposing categories:

> On the one hand, we have Wuthering Heights, the land of the storm; high on the barren moorland, naked to the shock of the elements, the natural home of the Earnshaw family, fiery, untamed children of the storm. On the other hand, sheltered in the leafy valley below, stand Thrushcross Grange, the appropriate home of the children of calm, the gentle, passive timid Lintons.[573]

In the land of storm, readers meet fierce characters, strong and wild, passionate and rebellious. The children of storm, analogously to the elemental nature to which they are bound, possess all the violent and magnificent characteristics that associate their persons with the discourse of sublimity. Emily Brontë leaves no room for misunderstandings: the children of storm are undoubtedly the mirror image of the atmospheric tumult to which they are constantly exposed, and this emerges as much in their actions as in their feelings. The extreme passions of these characters are the offspring of the equally extreme natural world where Wuthering Heights is immersed.

Just four miles away, in the heart of a fertile valley, live the children of calm, sheltered in a beautiful residence surrounded by their own park. The personalities of these characters can only reproduce the serene and peaceful environment of this reality, a microcosm where harmony reigns. In the existence of the Lintons, there is no pretext for discord, at least not until the 'storm' crosses the threshold of the Grange. The first reason for distress in this almost utopian and idyllic reality is the death of Mr and Mrs Linton, brought about by Catherine's admission within their hermetic world. When Catherine falls ill with fever as a consequence of Heathcliff's departure, the Lintons take her in to their household to cure her, but Mr. and Mrs. Linton become infected and die.

It goes without saying that, since characters are the unequivocal representatives of these two worlds, as Wuthering Heights is characterised by sublimity, Catherine and Heathcliff are

[573] Cecil, David. *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation,* p. 128.

sublime at their core. As Thrushcross Grange represents the beautiful, Isabella and Edgar are exquisitely beautiful. With Catherine's death, the second phase of the novel begins, and the focus shifts on the characters of Hareton, Linton Heathcliff, and Catherine Linton. The second generation does not perfectly adhere to any categorisation[574]; their character traits are never as marked as those onto which the opposition of the protagonists of the first generation is based. Nevertheless, being these characters the offspring of the combination of children of storm and children of calm, the peculiar characteristics of the families from which they descend can still be traced. For example, it might be easier to identify Hareton as a child of storm, but the fact that he willingly comes to term with his nature to be with Catherine demonstrates that he is not ascribable to the same category that his surname suggests.[575] On the other hand, although Linton Heathcliff is Heathcliff's son, a sublime character *par excellence*, he does not inherit any characteristic from his father: he is weak, effeminate, and mean. Finally, although young Catherine has grown up sheltered in the world of the Grange, she does not behave with the characteristic passivity of the Lintons, especially when she disobeys her father's orders or when she confronts Heathcliff verbally. Owing to the second generation's blended nature, in which the traits of the 'storm' and 'calm' although still traceable are however mitigated, this thesis will focus only on the characters of the first generation, the true representatives of the eighteenth century aesthetic theory of the beautiful and sublime.

[574] Lord David Cecil further divides the characters of the second generation in two different categories: Catherine and Hareton are child of love, displaying the positive qualities of their parents, whereas Linton Heathcliff is a child of hate who only inherited the negative qualities.

[575] Cecil, David. *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation,* pp. 129-130.

3.4.2.1 Children of Storm: Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff

Catherine Earnshaw

Catherine Earnshaw is the second child of Mr Earnshaw, owner of Wuthering Heights. Her character is widely recognised as one of the most powerful and passionate women that English literature has ever had the pleasure to meet. Catherine is described as having dark features: deep dark brown eyes, framed in the most charming face and long dark hair. She is wilful, wild, passionate, and free-spirited. Nelly Dean describes her as a "wild, wicked slip"[576], as beautiful as untameable. Emily Brontë makes Catherine a child "half-savage and hardy and free"[577] by nature, because her wilderness and freedom intrinsically bond her with the world of the Heights. Her spiritual turmoil, her ungoverned passions and her emotional outbursts are the personification of the natural turmoil to with Wuthering Heights is constantly exposed. She loves to wander freely on the moors (a characteristic that she shares with the author), she is not afraid of mingling with nature.

Her intrinsically sublime nature is already hinted at when, as a child, she asks for a whip from her father as a present. This object and its presupposed function link Catherine already in her childhood to the discourse of the sublime which Burke labels as power. The whip is the instrument through which the individual can exercise dominion over others, since it forces the subject to submit to the will of who has it, in order to safeguard the self-preservation. However, if it is true that the whip leads back to an idea of terror inherently linked to the very function of prevailing over the other, in this imbalance of power Daiches also recognises a strong passionate component.[578] If the whip were to be considered as a symbol of perverse passion, it would probably be a foretelling sign of Catherine's temperament in adulthood. In Nelly's narrative a number of episodes see Catherine expressing the passion and power of her character: when "the spirit which served her was growing intractable; she could neither lay nor control it"[579] as she

[576] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 44.
[577] Ibid., p. 134.
[578] Daiches, David. "Introduction" in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p.21.
[579] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 121.

quarrel with Heathcliff over Isabella; when Nelly narrates that "she started up – her hair flying over her shoulders, her eyes flashing, the muscles of her neck and arms standing out preternaturally. I made up my mind for broken bones, at least"[580] as a reaction of overhearing Nelly saying to Linton that she is faking a fit of frenzy. Nelly, recognising in Catherine a potential danger, is induced to momentarily fear for her life.

Moreover, as can be noted in all the relationships Catherine has with the other characters, her presence and her actions always cause a state of tension on who surrounds her, so much so that Craik recognises her as "the ruling force" dominating the whole novel.[581] First of all, this perpetual tension is to be seen in Heathcliff, who is not only obsessed with her in life, but her presence torments him also after death. Edgar Linton is as well thrown is many situations of uneasiness, which he is not able to control, therefore he distances himself from Catherine, for this unnatural tension is unbearable for his beautiful character. The housekeeper too, as well as Isabella Linton, stand in awe to Catherine's power, and although sometimes – especially Nelly – they try to confront her strength, ultimately Catherine gets the best of both. In this sense, she perfectly exemplifies the emotional response that the Burkean sublime impels on individuals, "a state of unnatural tension."[582]

The sublimity of Catherine Earnshaw emerges consistently in her passions, mostly directed towards Heathcliff. In one of the most famous passages of the novel, Catherine declares her impassioned and inextinguishable love for her soulmate, by comparing it to 'eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary':

> If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees – my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath – a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff – he's always, always in my mind – not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to

[580] Ibid., p. 127.
[581] Craik, W. A. *The Brontë Novels*, Routledge Revivals, Taylor & Francis Group, 2011, p. 14.
ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unive1-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1111790.
[582] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 105.

myself – but, as my own being – so, don't talk of our separation again – it is impracticable.[583]

Catherine's love for Linton is "like foliage", therefore it is subjected to rapid and inexorable change. The two types of love that Catherine describes, conveyed through an analogy with the natural world, are clearly evoked by two opposing passions. Her love for Heathcliff is compared to a sublime and eternal element, foreshadowing that although death will divide them, their love will last forever. The famous confession "I *am* Heathcliff" defies the boundaries of subjectivity: "her love for him is a form of self-love, and not always a pleasure."[584] In the *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke argues that the most powerful passions derive exactly from the passion for self-preservation. In fact, her bond with Heathcliff is so deeply rooted in her soul that her love for him becomes a kind of act of self-preservation, and it cannot be otherwise since the preservation of the subject is a natural, innate urge for survival. If Heathcliff were to be annihilated, she would cease to exist. From the strongest kind of emotions, sublimity arises: for this reason, the irrepressible passion between Catherine and Heathcliff represents the sublime in feelings at its highest level, which, being such, cannot but spill over into eternity.

Catherine's love for Edgar Linton is of a completely different nature: Nelly says that Cathy loves Linton "because he is handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich, and loves [her]." This passion is not rooted in Catherine's true essence and intrinsic nature. Instead, it comes from her reaction to the exposure to the beautiful both in Thrushcross Grange and the affluent Linton family. An instance of domesticity of the sublimity of her nature occurs as she spends five weeks immersed in the wealthy reality of Thrushcross Grange, and indeed this contamination seems to succeed with her decision of marrying Edgar Linton. The compromise of Catherine's extreme sublimity occurs precisely during this period, from which she returns irreparably corrupted. Beauty, comfort, wealth: these instances of beauty temporarily taint her true nature, and it is exactly this betrayal of her sublime essence that will sentence her to death. "By rejecting Heathcliff, Catherine spiritually tears herself in two."[585] Although "Catherine's nature remains

[583] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 88.
[584] Daiches, David. "Introduction" in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. 22.
[585] Craik, W. A. *The Brontë Novels*, p. 16.

untamed, in deep sympathy with wild natural objects and with Heathcliff, and repugnant to the gentle civilising forces of the Grange"[586], her marriage forces her to contain her passions. Catherine's true nature merely rests dormant until Heathcliff returns. Her marriage to Linton, as she confesses, is an attempt to relieve Heathcliff from the misery Hindley Earnshaw had forced on him.

Catherine's connection with nature is also highlighted after her death. Her presence in the natural world being precluded with the metaphysical death of her body, Cathy finds her way back to Heathcliff as a supernatural entity. Emily Brontë allows her protagonist to return to the earthly world as a ghost, and introduces her to the readers already in the third chapter as she cries to be let in Wuthering Heights. In the *Enquiry*, the notions of ghosts and goblin are recognised as some of the most affecting for the mind, since the human understanding fails to form clear and distinct ideas of these blurred entities. Whenever obscurity gets combined with these notions, the impossibility of properly rationalising them inevitably throws the subject into the emotional state of terror. In her ghostly form, Catherine embodies Burkean terror: indeed, Lockwood excuses his unscrupulous violence against the waif spirit by saying "terror made me cruel."[587] Her becoming a spectral entity simultaneously guarantees her perpetual existence, therefore letting her achieve infinity, one of the most powerful sources of the sublime. With Heathcliff's death, the reunion with all the lost parts of her soul takes place, and she is seen wandering forever with her sublime love immersed in the sublimity of her beloved moors.

Heathcliff

From his trip to Liverpool, Mr Earnshaw returns to the Heights with something very different from the gifts his children had asked for: "a dirty, ragged, black-haired child", "as dark almost as if it came from the devil."[588] The boy, found starving on the streets of the big city, is adopted by the Earnshaws and named after one of their dead sons, and brought up as if he were one. The boy's mysterious origin is never accounted for in the novel. However, from the moment

[586] Daiches, David. "Introduction" in Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights,* p. 17.
[587] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 27.
[588] Ibid., p. 39.

in which he makes his first appearance, his person becomes immediately attached to derogatory descriptions, so much so that he is initially referred to using the neutral pronoun 'it'. Because of his gipsy-like appearance, his dark skin, dark hair and dark eyes, Nelly Dean is quick to draw a comparison between Heathcliff and the devil, and this association will be frequently repeated throughout the novel. As the plot unfolds, the housekeeper never misses an opportunity to use language to impress upon the reader's mind an idea of 'otherness'[589] associated with the male protagonist, repeatedly emphasising his detachment from the human race. Heathcliff's "undeniable monster potential"[590] to which Gilbert and Gubar refer, is translated in linguistical terms by Nelly's narration: she describes his eyes looking like "black fiends" or "devil's spies", often calls him "evil beast" or "goblin."[591] The dangerous potential intrinsically attached to Heathcliff is not only recognised by the housekeeper, but also by Isabella Linton, and even by Catherine. Analogously to Nelly's question "Is he a ghoul, or a vampire?"[592], Isabella in her letter asks "is Mr Heathcliff a man? [...] if not, is he a devil?"[593]; whereas Catherine describes him as "a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man."[594] However, if Cathy shows that she understands Heathcliff's nature (which is also her own) and accepts it, the other characters are not able to comprehend his nature. Even the outsider Lockwood, who in the first chapter works as a proxy of readers in the introduction of the world of the Heights, sees in his "erect handsome figure"[595] a rather "morose" quality.

Heathcliff achieves his devilish - almost Satanic - status thanks to his characterisation moulded on what Burke's calls, "the strongest emotion that the mind is capable of feeling",[596] terror. "His power to inspire hate and fear" is articulated from the linguistical point of view not "through his cruel acts, which are indeed a few, but through the spiritual effect he has on others."[597] The most clear example of this is expressed in the pervading terror instilled in his own son Linton merely with his presence, without even touching him. As Craik persuasively argues[598], Heathcliff rarely uses physical violence to prevail over others, whereas other characters - such as

[589] Smith, Andrew. *Gothic Literature*, p. 69.
[590] Gilbert, Sandra and Gubar, Susan. *The Madwoman in the Attic,* p. 281.
[591] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, respectively: p. 82, p. 114, pp. 117 and 222.
[592] Ibid., p. 352.
[593] Ibid., p. 145.
[594] Ibid., p. 110.
[595] Ibid., p. 5.
[596] Ibid., p. 47.
[597] Craik, W. A., *The Brontë Novels,* p. 31.
[598] Ibid.

Hindley – use violence more often. Nevertheless, he is always seen as a demon. Even when his outward appearance improves as a result of his long absence, his being a "tall, athletic, well-formed man" can become more than "half-civilised ferocity."[599] The Burkean sublime takes shape in Heathcliff's character as he represents a threat to the social environment. Indeed, his entrance in the world of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange disrupts the equilibrium of the society twice – firstly, when he joins the Earnshaw family, secondly when he returns from a three-year absence. His superior physical prowess at this point in the novel raises the awareness in his enemies of the impeding danger he represents, making the threat his presence suggests all the more real. It is clear that Heathcliff now has the physical power to injure those who have wronged him. However, he does not perpetrate his revenge physically (only once does he beat Hindley and he does so just because his own safety is put at risk). He skilfully wins over his wrongdoers legally.

For the sublime to be experienced properly, Burke argues that the terrible must not subjugate and press on the individual too closely. Having stated this necessity, Burke goes on by addressing as 'delight' the emotion arising from terror experienced at a certain distance. Brontë's protagonist shows some affinities with this idea: Heathcliff is dark, handsome but rather morose; his Byronic exterior suggests there is something both seductive and dangerous in his person. He does indeed win over the hearts of both the female protagonists of the first generation. Although the feelings Catherine and Isabella have for him are of a completely different nature, Cathy's being the deepest and passionate love, whereas Isabella's a superfluous fascination, the recognition in him of a quality capable of eliciting delight makes him even more sublime - or even better - delightfully sublime. Consistently, Catherine herself specifies that it is not his being handsome that arises in her breast the passion of love: "I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am."[600] Indeed, her sentiment has far deeper roots.

As a child of the storm at the level of Catherine, "there is something elemental about him, as his name and his association with the harsh aspects of nature (the north wind, cliffs, wilderness, whinstone, and wolves) suggest."[601] From the sublime world in which he is immersed he inherits an equally sublime strength in his feelings and passions, mainly exemplified in the extreme love for Catherine and his thirst for revenge against those who have prevented him from

[599] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* pp. 102-103.
[600] Ibid., pp. 86-87.
[601] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret. "Heathcliff", in *The Oxford Companion to the Bröntes,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 245.

being with her. His unbridled passion for Catherine even leads him to curse the love of his life in one of the most unforgettable confessions of love:

> I pray one prayer – I repeat it till my tongue stiffens – Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living! You said I killed you – haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murders. I believe – I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul![602]

Instead of losing Catherine, Heathcliff would rather have her ghost relentlessly haunting him until they can be reunited in death - which they actually do. Heathcliff's destructive force is unleashed as well as stopped by Cathy: the awareness that he has lost her makes him mad for vengeance; however, when his revenge is finally fulfilled as he becomes the lawful possessor of his enemies' properties, his obsession with Cathy's ghost pushes him to self-starvation so as to hurry the final reunion with her in death.

Like the storm in tumult, Heathcliff destroys the order and balance of the two worlds of the Heights and the Grange, his passions are of the strongest kind, so strong as to defeat the corporeal boundary of death. Fittingly enough, the wilderness of the moorland, on the top of the wind beaten hill where Wuthering Heights stands, welcomes him in its greatness and untameable nature. Emily Brontë concludes her masterpiece with an eternal image of the most sublime characters immersed in the most sublime nature by portraying their re-conjunction both in supernatural and earthly terms. On the one hand, the ghosts of Catherine and Heathcliff are depicted as roaming through the heath in the darkness of stormy nights, forever. On the other hand, the very last description of in the novel sees Lockwood visiting the place where their bodies are buried, and commenting on the three headstones "half buried in the heath."[603] Significantly, their graves are not located in a cemetery but in the open moor, and this same moor seems to welcome them and embrace them: the headstones are depicted as sinking into the heath, half-

[602] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 181.
[603] Ibid., p. 360.

covered by "the moss creeping up [their] foot"[604] as if to signal the material remaining of their bodies ultimately merging with the sublimity of the moors. It is as if, in some way, their bodies were definitively restored to the wilderness of the heath to which they belong, thus making them appear even more alive, and sublime.

3.4.2.2 Children of Calm: The Lintons

Isabella Linton

"I never feel hurt at the brightness of Isabella's yellow hair, and the whiteness of her skin; at her dainty elegance."[605] As a foil to exalt Catherine's sublimity, Emily Brontë creates the beautiful Isabella Linton. Youngest child of the Lintons, Isabella is presented to the readers as good-looking, fair-haired, with charming blue eyes, white skin, always dressed with beautiful and fine clothes and of particularly elegant manners. Isabella's characterisation makes use of a number of features of the beautiful as conceived by Burke, which unequivocally emerge in the moment that the character makes her first appearance in the novel. Firstly, in her physical description the distinctive traits of the Linton family are highlighted: the child is beautiful because her features are tinged with pastel, light and bright colours. The brightness of her face also brings with it an awareness of a total absence of possible hidden threatening aspects, which might instead lurk behind a dark or dimly-lit appearance. For Burke indeed, no obscurity can be contemplated in the beautiful, for in darkness the danger is always lurking. Hence, one of the essential qualities in the achievement of beauty are 'Light colours'. Reflecting the need to avoid "dusky and muddy" colours in preference to "clean and fair"[606], Brontë associates Isabella's character only with fair colours.

Although Isabella's face is illuminated, it is not luminous: it does not shine of its own light but with reflected light. The candidness of her features is also enhanced by her civility and fine

[604] Ibid.
[605] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 56.
[606] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 94.

manners, which widely contribute to her gracefulness and elegance. Gracefulness as a Burkean source of beauty is associated with an idea of posture and motion, therefore suggesting an image of the beautiful as a response to an absence of difficulty in the movements. In her world, Isabella moves gracefully, is perfectly in place, her figure never clashes with the world of the Grange. On the other hand, the elegance Isabella shows is significantly dependent on the economic possibilities of the family to which she belongs, who can afford to dress her with sophisticated clothes and soft fabrics, thus enhancing her beauty. An idea of her standard wardrobe is indirectly suggested to the reader through Cathy: when she returns to the Heights after her time at the Grange, she "looks like a lady."[607] Nelly Dean narrates:

> I removed her habit, and there shone forth beneath, a grand plaid silk frock, white trousers, and burnished shoes; and, while her eyes sparkled joyfully when the dogs came bounding up to welcome her, she dare hardly touch them lest they should fawn upon her splendid garments.[608]

Therefore, the beauty with which Isabella Linton is illuminated is undoubtedly derived from the reflected light of the world of Thrushcross Grange: to the social context in which she grew up Isabella owes much of her beauty, except for her genetic characteristics inherited from her parents, which in any case are not "natural advantages"[609] on a par with Catherine Earnshaw's. Would Isabella be beautiful without the delicacy, the elegance and the gracefulness that she inherits from the social context of the Grange?

Along with elegance, a questionable characteristic considered by Burke as the ultimate expression of beauty is femininity. According to his formulation, beautiful objects ought to be both delicate and fragile, and women, he argues, are the most suitable examples of delicacy, fragility and weakness. "The beauty of women is considerably owing to their weakness or delicacy, and is even enhanced by their timidity, a quality of the mind analogous to it"[610] so much so that women learn to counterfeit weakness to elicit pleasurable feelings and deceive the beholder into

[607] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 56.
[608] Ibid.
[609] To Hindley's question "Isabella is not to be compared with her, is she, Frances?" his wife answers "Isabella has not her natural advantages". Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 56.
[610] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 94.

recognising them as even more beautiful. Following this unfair generalisation, Isabella's character acquires still more beauty simply because she is a woman. This cannot be said of Catherine, since she is an exceptional woman in Burkean terms. She could never be comprehended in this category, for she is very far from being fragile and timid. Emily Brontë transports the delicacy of the Lintons as opposed to Catherine's roughness in the natural world, emphasising the contrast between them by means of a similitude: "it was not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing the thorn."[611]

The placidity shown by Isabella in the first part of the novel is mainly due to the prevalence of pleasurable sensations governing her life at Thrushcross Grange until Heathcliff's return, of whom she will become infatuated. Before that, in her reality there are neither reasons nor pretexts to hurry the body out of its state of relaxation. None of the stimuli to which she is exposed have any potential to alter this existential placidity. The muscles of the body are never subjected to unnatural or exaggerated impulses, not once a threat is posed to her person. This state of tranquillity and excessive relaxation results in an induced weakening of passions, which leads to the characteristic disposition of mind of the Lintons: extreme passivity. Isabella shares this 'lack of action' with her brother for the first part of the novel, but her stay in the sublime world of the Heights will ultimately affect her personality.

From this point of view, it is interesting to consider her change in relation to the strong influence that the two worlds, the beautiful and the sublime, imprint on her. Firstly, at her arrival in Wuthering Heights, she shows her beauty in Burkean terms in her attempt to talk and establish a relationship with the inhabitants of the house. Being beauty a social quality, Isabella looks for society. In return, she is treated with contempt. As she breaks free from the passivity and the sheltered, comfortable world of Thrushcross Grange, her exposure to the reality of the Heights has a major impact on her inner beauty. Deceived from Heathcliff's handsome external appearance, failing to account for his dangerousness, she elopes with him and marries him. With her, Heathcliff behaves more like a villain than a Romantic hero, but she shows no repulsion with regards to his cruel actions or harsh temper. For example, she watches him hanging her little dog, he says that "no brutality disgusted her - I suppose she has an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person were secure from injury!"[612] This simultaneously validates two peculiar aspects

[611] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 98.
[612] Ibid., p. 161.

dealt with in the *Philosophical Enquiry*. On the one hand, Brontë describes Isabella as being under the effect of a sort of "tranquillity tinged with terror"[613], clearly represented in the peril embodied by Heathcliff, a danger which however does not undermine her safety - or at least, she thinks so - and therefore she witnesses terrible deeds without withdrawing disgusted and horrified, yet as slightly pleasurable. On the other hand, the hypothesis that Isabella is influenced by the world of Wuthering Heights as much as by the world of Thrushcross Grange is validated since, when immersed in a sublime context her roughness increases, whereas her beauty becomes marred i.e. she hesitates before warning Heathcliff that Hindley intends to overpower and kill him.

Comparing the two female protagonists, another aspect emerges. The world of the Grange fascinates Catherine but she never really yields to it; whereas Isabella is irrevocably corrupted by Heathcliff and Wuthering Heights. Since each is respectively the representative of sublimity and beauty, it can be inferred that, as Burke states, the passions related to the sublime are significantly more powerful than those arising from the beautiful. Catherine's sublimity admits only a temporary corruption of her nature. Isabella's beauty, on the other hand, is irrevocably corrupted when the sublime presses on her too strongly.

Edgar Linton

Heathcliff is the absolute representative of sublimity as much as Edgar Linton is the beautiful character *par excellence*. Unmistakable descendant of the Linton family, he inherits the family's physical and distinctive traits: fair hair, beautiful blue eyes and pale skin. Like his sister Isabella, soft tones and light colours characterize his features. Edgar Linton's beauty is so delicate that it verges on the candid feminine beauty, thus linking his character with Burke's statement according to which the clearest manifestation of beauty is to be found in women. In his characterisation, his effeminacy is strictly connected to ideas of smallness, weakness and timidity.

The first time Edgar Linton is properly presented to the reader is during his first visit to the sublime world of Wuthering Heights. Nelly Dean, talking with Heathcliff, says

[613] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 109.

> I'll steal time to arrange you so that Edgar Linton shall look quite a doll beside you: and that he does – you are younger, and yet, I'll be bound, you are taller and twice as broad across the shoulders – you could know him down in a twinkling; don't you feel that you could?[614]

Accustomed to the strong presence of children like Catherine and Heathcliff, Nelly cannot but see him as a doll. The identification with the play toy is significant, firstly because the reader is drawn to recognise uncontaminated and fragile beauty in his person, secondly because the analogy highlights at the same time his existential immobility, which stands out in stark contrast to the dynamism of the children of storm. He is as delicate and passive as a doll. Moreover, through a comparison with Heathcliff, Brontë underlines Edgar's physical disadvantage. He is described as smaller, slim in features and physically weaker. In the *Philosophical Enquiry*, Burke recognizes a pleasing effect in small objects, stressing their innate quality of suggesting a sense of submission. Possibly in this, the attraction that Catherine Earnshaw feels for Edgar might be motivated: in Burkean terms, "we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us."[615] Besides the fact that marrying Linton implicates climbing the social ladder, Catherine probably enjoys his indulging all her whims. On the other hand, from the moment Cathy enters in his life, Edgar is irresistibly drawn to her and always submits to her, so much so that "his gentleness to his wife is seen partly as the yielding of a weaker, timid nature before her imperious tyranny."[616]

The pleasing ideas associated with Edgar's person are reflected in terms of an analogy with the natural world, where "the contrast [with Heathcliff] resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley."[617] Probably by opposing the roughness and inhospitality of a coal country with the fertility of a valley, Brontë wanted to highlight also a sense of safeness connected to Linton's beauty, since his presence could never be perceived as perilous. However, the effect Edgar has on others is not only articulated in visual terms, but also by taking into consideration sounds. Burke was the first[618] to address sounds as a quality productive of

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[614] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 60.
[615] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 91.
[616] Alexander, Christine and Smith, Margaret, "Linton, Edgar", in *The Oxford Companion to the Brontës*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 305.
[617] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 75.
[618] Burke was the first to properly theorise the role of sounds in the achievement of sublimity and beauty. Before his formulation, in his *An Essay on the Sublime* (1747) John Baillie had already broaden the areas of interest of the objects

either sublimity or beauty; in the case of beauty, he claims that the ear is pleased whenever sounds are "clear, even, smooth and weak."[619] Analogously, Nelly describes Edgar as having "a sweet, low manner of speaking, and pronounced his words as you do [Lockwood], that's less gruff than we talk here, and softer."[620] To listen to Edgar Linton speaking, is to visualise in the mind the beautiful: his accent is soft, the tone of the voice is calming.

As Burke points out, the most affecting ideas of beauty are excited by instances of delicacy, or even more so by the fragility of the objects. Edgar Linton's fragility is translated into the weakness of both his external appearance and his internal feelings. Confronted with Heathcliff strength, his physical prowess together with his smallness are emphasised. His body shape prevents him from eliciting whichever idea of danger; no one has ever felt a sense of fear towards him, no one has ever stood in awe of him. Lacking this awe-inspiring appearance, it can be noted that his submission is not limited to his wife, but every character in the novel in his/her own way undermines his authority: when Isabella prefers Heathcliff over her own brother, Linton's reaction is to stop speaking to her. Yet he does not hesitate to take on the guardianship of her son born from that same outrageous disobedience. Or again: when his daughter Catherine disobeys his orders by visiting the Heights, Edgar Linton only temporarily opposes her relation with the cousin Linton Heathcliff; it will be his lack of action that will indirectly allow the marriage to take place. Additionally, even his authority as a landlord is discredited, as his housekeeper Nelly Dean complies more with Heathcliff's demands than his own.

His physical frailty is accompanied by a timidity of mind: his passions and wills are so feeble that he is not listened to even by those who love him. He does not have the strength to impose himself, and therefore accepts with passivity all the events happening to him: Edgar Linton is probably the least active character in the novel. Apart from asking for Cathy's hand and putting her in front of the final choice between himself and Heathcliff, Linton does nothing but submit to the decisions or the strength of others. For instance, when Heathcliff confronts Edgar directly, he is "taken with a nervous trembling, and his countenance grew deadly pale. For his life he could not avert that access of emotion – mingled anguish and humiliation overcame him completely. He

producing the sublime, and he regarded music, especially grave sounds, as elements liable to excite sublimity, for they affect the ear in the same way in which vastness affects the eye.

[619] Burke, Edmund. *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 99.

[620] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 75.

leant on the back of the chair, and covered his face."[621] Many times in the novel Emily Brontë recounts the bodily reactions of her protagonists when overwhelmed by their passions, their internal feelings spilling over physiologically in exaggerated muscular tension. Seized by an excess of emotions, Edgar cannot react as the other characters do – therefore openly expressing their feelings - but in the opposite sense. Instead of reacting verbally or physically, he totally annihilates himself, trembles and turns deadly pale. As emotions overwhelm him, his response is to lean down on a chair and cover his face in humiliation. He is not able to respond in any way to the power that these two characters represent, and when Heathcliff realises it, he adds: "I wish you joy of the milk-blooded coward, Cathy! [...] I compliment you on your taste: and that is the slavering, shivering thing you preferred to me! [...] Is he weeping, or is he going to faint for fear?"[622] therefore humiliating him even more.

Because of this, the beauty of the world of Thrushcross Grange finds its maximum expression in the characterization of Edgar Linton. The delicate and placid existence in this sheltered, perfect reality undoubtedly has the strongest influence on Linton's character. The excess of beauty and pleasurable feelings have enormous effects on his temperament: unlike his sister, who at some point when confronted with displeasing situations reacts accordingly, Linton never manages to get out of from the utopian reality of the Grange. He never clashes with Heathcliff, he never contradicts Catherine, he does not even get angry with the servant who lets his enemy into his property. Furthermore, he is the only principal character who never leaves his house, with the exception of few visits to the Heights while courting Catherine, from which in any case he always returns deeply upset.

The fact that Edgar's mild passions are uniquely directed toward Catherine makes him not only Heathcliff's rival in love, but also his literary foil. Edgar Linton possesses all the typical characteristics of the beautiful which openly clash with Heathcliff's sublime personality. To this collision between sublimity and beauty Emily Brontë gives a clear epilogue at the end of her masterpiece: Linton's beauty of soul - and his naivety - will lead him to believe that he will finally be reunited with his beloved Catherine in death. However, he will only obtain a burial spot next to hers: lacking sublimity, Edgar Linton will not be welcomed into the eternity of the afterlife.

[621] Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights,* p. 123.
[622] Ibid.

Conclusion

The purpose of this final thesis was to highlight the significant influence which Burke's aesthetic treatise exerted on two of the most prominent and fascinating novels of the nineteenth century English literature.

By retracing the historical development of the concept of the sublime from its first theorisation in ancient Greece to its ultimate establishment as a fundamental aesthetic concept in the eighteenth century literary landscape, this dissertation showed how, although its meaning has changed over the centuries, its essential core has remained unchanged. The sublime corresponds to the emotional response of mankind with regard to specific aspects of the external world. For Longinus, the sublime coincides with what enables human beings to achieve the greatness of soul, but in his explanation he unmistakably recognised the enormous contribution of nature in this path towards elevation. From this intrinsic and implacable power of the natural world the reformulations of sublimity during the age of sensibility started: eighteenth century critical thinkers extrapolated this conception from the realm of rhetoric - to which it had been confined for centuries -, and gave it a new life in the realm of aesthetic. As a consequence, the sublime of the nineteenth century summarised the absolute predominance of the emotional sphere, as the attention shifted from the object to the experiencing subject, thus decreeing the beginning of a more psychological study of the sublime, aiming towards the explanation of emotive responses of human beings.

The first philosopher who was able to offer a detailed theory concerning the sources of the sublime and their effect on man was Edmund Burke. The novelty of Burke's discourse lay in his refusal of following the widespread formulation of the sublime as intended from Boileau back to Longinus. Instead, Burke approached the subject matter in the most realist way possible for the day, thus attempting to conduct his analysis within a psychological and physiological discussion. The theory formulated in the *Philosophical Enquiry* is clearly indebted to the philosophical discussion in vogue during the age of taste, however, the Burkean sublime differed from the previous theorisation as it recognised terror as the fundamental emotion for the excitement of this aesthetic experience. Burke must be credited with the formalisation of a concept of the

sublime profoundly intertwined with the pivotal emotion of the *fin de siècle* – terror -, thus providing an idea of sublimity which the Gothic literature was soon to exploit to its fullest.

The literature of terror undoubtedly employed the core concepts of *Philosophical Enquiry* in order to trigger the emotion of terror in its readership, but in doing so, these same concepts were not merely applied however simultaneously re-elaborated and put into question. As discussed in chapter two, Mary Shelley extensively made use of the sources of the sublime which Burke catalogued as terror, darkness, uncertainty, infinity, delightful horror or power, just to mention the most recurring. But the reformulation of Burkean theory in *Frankenstein*, despite being mainly translated into the wonderful and awe-inspiring settings of incidents of the novel, is not confined to the description of landscapes. In her novel, Shelley actively puts into question the arbitrariness of the quintessential social quality of the beautiful. The sublimity in *Frankenstein* is articulated through ubiquitous power and overwhelming greatness of Mother Earth, as well as in the 'unnatural' existence of the Shelleyan Creature. The monster brought to life by Victor Frankenstein embodies all the characteristic which Burke deems as necessary to elicit sublimity; and although he actively seeks inclusion in the society of men, his sublimity condemns him to a life as an outcast. Therefore, despite the fact that the monster displays the essential characteristic of the beautiful in his quest for sociality, the same lack of this beauty leads to his rejection and abandonment. The only space in which the Creature is welcomed coincides with those places in the world where the sublimity of nature equals his own sublimity. In this sense, the sublime of the outside world welcomes him because he is as threatening as the surfaces of the craggy Alps with its crevasses and overhangs, the piercing and unbearable cold of the North Pole, the atmospheric tumult represented by a thunderstorm.

In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, which in this thesis serves as the representative of the application of Burke's theory during the first half nineteenth century, the emphasis is purely placed on the imperative aspects fundamental for the excitement of terror. The novel indeed mainly applies the sublime, without focusing specifically on the theory of beauty, which emerges only in the characterization of the Creature.

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* instead, which in this dissertation is intended as the representative of the utilisation of the *Philosophical Enquiry* cardinal principles during the second half of the same century, shows to be indebted with regard to both sublimity and beauty. In the same antithetical distinction between the beautiful and the sublime, Brontë grounds the unique

power of her sole masterpiece. Whereas early Gothic novels, such as *Frankenstein*, exploit to its fullest the conception of terror as a key element of the sublime almost alone, Brontë extends the area of influence of the *Enquiry* by encompassing the theory of the beautiful. In *Wuthering Heights* in fact, the contrast between the two realities of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange is ubiquitous and overwhelming. The world situated at the top of the wind-beaten hill incessantly exposed to atmospheric tumult coincides with the embodiment of the sublime; the harmony and domesticity of nature in the sheltered world of the Grange stands for the perfect representation of the beautiful. In addition, this stark opposition is not simply confined to the environmental context, yet it spills over the characterisation of the main protagonists inhabiting these specific areas, making them inherently sublime in the case of Heathcliff and Catherine, or delicately beautiful in the case of the Lintons. The inclusion of beauty in the novel has a similar function in Burke's philosophical inquiry: by opposition, the presence of the beautiful delineates even more markedly the characteristics of the sublime and profoundly enhances its power. Sublimity as opposed to beauty, in this way, emerges in the narrative violently, as an intrinsic and implacable force, arising astonishment, bewilderment, and fascination.

Although written only thirty years apart, *Frankenstein* and *Wuthering Heights* absorb, re-elaborate and consequently apply the fundamental concepts of Burkean theory in different ways. Notwithstanding this, in both novels it is precisely the influence of the ancient literary tradition of sublimity which elevates these works of art to their uniqueness, making them two of the most unforgettable novels ever written.

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