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Wild Androgyny and Cultured Patriarchy: The Dogs of *Wuthering Heights*

Dogs are ever-present in Emily Brontë’s 1847 novel, *Wuthering Heights.* Pointers,

bull-dogs, springers, terriers, sheep-dogs, and dogged conducts permeate the story. However, most critics only briefly touch upon the dog motif, or leave it out of their analyses completely. Fortunately, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have recognized the importance of the canines in *Wuthering Heights*, and disperse a few important dog arguments in their 1979 Feminist critique of Miltonic ideals in chapter 8: “Looking Oppositely: Emily Brontë’s Bible of Hell,” of their book, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literacy Imagination*.

Gilbert and Gubar place importance on two dogs in the novel: Juno, the “bitch pointer” of Wuthering Heights, and Skulker, the male bulldog of Thrushcross Grange. These critics argue that Juno is a sin-like symbol of the female protest against male patriarchy at the Heights, and that Skulker is a guard/god of patriarchy at the Grange. Using these dogs as evidence, Gilbert and Gubar argue, at the human level, that the female protest inherent to the Heights lies in its androgyny—there is no inherent patriarchy at the heights. Inversely, Thrushcross Grange forms an “Urizenic hierarchy” in its full embodiment of patriarchy. The women of the Heights have fallen like Eve and becoming sin-like and exuding a Miltonic hellishness in their opposition to this hierarchy. However, they argue, this hellishness actually becomes an image of heaven for the women of *Wuthering Heights*, and is contrasted against the traditionally Miltonic image of heaven that is called forth by the civilized Thrushcross Grange. With this assertion, the Grange becomes a Miltonic image of hell for the women.

While I agree with Gilbert and Gubar’s argument that dogs are important to the patriarchy of the novel, and that this patriarchy oppresses women, and that the women of the Heights fight against this, I argue that images of nature and culture portray this more accurately than a images of heaven and hell do. Serving at their separate locations, these dogs protect the nature and culture that have been reared within each household; it is a battle between wild androgyny and cultured patriarchy, not between a Miltonic heaven and hell.

Though their argument is largely a feminine one, and a strong one at that, the Miltonic overtone, that of a moral right and wrong, detracts from the validity of their more important feminist argument. Goodridge’s interpretation of Brontë’s heaven and hell stands as an example.

It is useful in interpreting *Wuthering Heights* to consider the frequent use in it of the words “heaven” and “hell” and other terms of salvation and damnation…in *Dr. Faustus* and *Paradise Lost* for example, the words derive their force largely from the assumption that heaven and hell exist, as objective, theological facts. In Brontë, the theological facts appear to exist only as shadows of Victorian hypocrisy; the reality to which they refer varies from person to person. (Goodridge 73-74)

Goodridge resists placing a lens of religious morality on the novel, whether heaven and hell are reversed or not, because Brontë resists heaven and hell as “objective, theological facts.” Thus, Gilbert and Gubar’s Miltonic assertions of a reversed heaven and hell are complicated. *Wuthering Heights* does not lend easily lend itself to the moral critique that 19th century critics placed on it, even if the moral critique is used in a non-traditional manner of reversal. Even further, Goodridge argues that Wuthering Heights actually presents “the decay of Victorian Christianity” (76). The dogs are not Miltonic creatures, judging who is morally righteous and who lives in sin; they are simply products of their environment, protecting the opposing lifestyles they know.

Although this premise negates the moral overtone of Gilbert and Gubar’s article, their other arguments are still considerably relevant; the women of Wuthering Heights are fighting against male dominance, and this fight is embodied in the dogs. With this in mind, a different form of criticism would drive their arguments in a more relevant direction and develop them further. A Marxist argument (with added formalist elements for support,) takes the feminist arguments into account and also allows for a deeper exploration of the patriarchy. The bourgeois society enforced the culture that patriarchy thrived in, oppressing women. Further: “A class relationship is routed through a species of relationship and vice versa, and the humane becomes defined not only *against* the animal, as in earlier centuries, but also in sympathy with the animal” (Krielkamp 92). The cultured society that saw to the control of women also saw to the domestication of wild animals as pets. Thus Brontë’s use of dogs as a relation to male control is quite relevant to the dominating issue of the whole novel, male control.

Before the domestication of the wild animals as pets, animals were used for work, as they are at the Heights. They were part of a wilder structure, one that placed them largely out of the control of their owners. As children at Wuthering Heights Catherine and Heathcliff are living amid this wildness; they are free to roam in nature: “it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day,” and they promised to “grow up rude as savages” (Brontë 59). Goodridge attributes this wild nature to the environment of the Heights: “Heathcliff and Catherine are brought up in the wild exposure of the Heights, are deprived of all civilized comforts” (70). The Heights are not comfortable, there is no parlor that would signal a cultured home, nor are there other signs, such as “roasting, boiling, or baking… nor any glitter of copper saucepans and tin cullenders on the walls (Brontë 26). Instead, the human inhabitants eat the same unroasted and unbaked food as the dogs: porridge, and in place of glittering copper and tin, there are pewter dishes, a delf-case, and a dog-kennel (Brontë 34, 58). These uncultured images of Wuthering Heights contain important images of the motif that embodies the wild—the dogs are representative of a closeness to nature that Catherine and Heathcliff shared as children.

As there are also dogs present at Thrushcross Grange, it is not enough to say that the dogs of Wuthering Heights represent nature just because they are dogs; they represent nature because they are untrained, uncultured dogs. In their lack of training and civilized comfort, these dogs are “not accustomed to be spoiled—not kept for a pet,” just as the human inhabitants of Wuthering heights have not been civilized (Brontë 27). This uncultured state applies to the Catherine, Heathcliff, and the other inhabitants of Wuthering Heights as well. As Goodridge states, “the novel human beings are described, especially by Catherine and Heathcliff, in animal images, which Brontë uses as emblems of the breaking down of barriers between the animal and the human” (70). Thus, there is a lack of hierarchical structure at the wild heights. The dogs are not cultured by the humans, just as the humans are not cultured by patriarchy. So when Lockwood, as a symbol of cultured patriarchy that threatens the wild freedom, shows up, the dogs fights back.

Juno, the “liver-coloured bitch pointer,” is the protective mother of the Heights, both literally and figuratively (Brontë 26). She protects her puppies, and symbolically protects the wild nature of the heights, by being wild. Lockwood, in his cultured patriarchal nature, is a threat; as Heathcliff states, “the dogs do right to be vigilant” (Brontë 28). Juno attacks the threat, protecting the “hive” from Lockwood’s insulting winks; breaking into a “fury,” she leaps at him and the other dogs come out of their hiding spots to join in the defense (Brontë 28). In Lockwood’s patriarchal world, outside of Wuthering Heights, he is higher up in the hierarchy. So, he feels like it is within his rightful position to insult the wild creatures that make him uncomfortable. But at the Heights, his position is threatened; there is no inherent hierarchy, so he has no power over the dogs, and they attack like any natural creature would when they feel threatened. Thus, the protection of the Heights by Juno is not inherently as hellish as Gilbert and Gubar claim in their article; she is not a “sin-like” hell-hound that “seem to live[s] in chaos without the structuring principle of heaven’s hierarchical chain of being” (Gilbert & Gubar 262). She is a natural mother, protecting her children, who has not been trained to allow male hierarchy, nor even human hierarchy.

Heathcliff has not been trained to allow the male hierarchy either. Hindley has attempted this training, in making the Heathcliff a slave of the Heights, but the wild nature of the heights has not allowed for the success Hindley wants. Thus, as Gilbert and Gubar argue, he is “somehow female in his monstrosity” (Gilbert and Gubar 293). In his fight against primogeniture, which forces patriarchy, Heathcliff becomes like Juno, a mother protecting her pups and her pack. He is even described by Nelly Dean as a “mad dog” when she threatens his reunion with Catherine. Further, as Krielkamp describes him, Heathcliff has been related as a dog since his first arrival at the Heights, and will be related as one until the end: “Brontë associates Heathcliff with animality in his introduction to the family as a rescued creature…and he resem[bles] the iconic figure of a loyal dog in his mourning for Catherine” (103). His whole fight against the Grange is related within doggish terms.

Catherine follows this dog imagery as well, described as “mak[ing] a spring into his embrace; she resembles the little springer dog, Fanny (Brontë 150). She is attempting to go back to the natural life by symbolically going back to the Heights, where the untrained dogs reside. She is, as Goodridge states, trying to get back to “the wild, free life of the moor” (Goodridge 71). At Thrushcross Grange, she has been robbed of the natural androgyny and forced into the patriarchal hierarchy.

The male hierarchy relies not on the environment of the Heights, where the dogs are “working as sheepdogs or hunters”, but on the environment of Thrushcross Grange, which “(though guarded by bulldogs) appears to be decorative or aesthetic, the home of lapdogs as well as ladies” (Gilbert and Gubar 274). This cultured environment is the one that envelops Catherine. Unlike the Heights, Thrushcross Grange has a parlor, and is a “splendid place carpeted with crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling carpeted by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with soft little tapers” (Brontë 60). As Goodridge describes it, it is “a ‘civilization’ which values comfort more than life itself. Its children are spoiled and pampered so much that they are robbed of all connection with the sources of natural feeling” (71). These cultured children, Edgar and Isabella, are not out playing on the moors; nature is a background for them.

This remove from nature is evident in the dogs: “where Wuthering Heights is functional, even The removal of natural autonomy from the dogs at Thrushcross Grange have been trained out of the natural autonomy that the working dogs of the Heights, like Juno, hold. Take for example the small lapdog that Isabella and Edgar argue over as children. It is not a wild animal like those at the Heights, but a “genteel…toy” that is given no respect (Gilbert and Gubar 287). It has been so trained that it allows the children to be pick on it without getting vicious: “in the middle of the table sat a little dog shaking its paw and yelping…they had nearly pulled [it] in two between them…That was their pleasure! To quarrel over who should hold a heap of warm hair (Brontë 60). Unlike Juno, who attacks at just the the threat of rude faces, the little lapdog will not even attack when faced with physical danger.

Skulker, the bull-dog of the Grange, has also been trained into patriarchy, protecting what Juno fights against. He may be vicious, but he is not wild; he obeys the commands of his master. He attacks Catherine only after his master gives the word, as Catherine herself says, “*They* have let the bulldog loose [my emphasis],” and old Linton gives commands to the dog, telling him to “keep fast” (Brontë 61). He is trained to obey orders for protecting the Grange. But in this protection of the Grange, Skulker goes against the androgyny of the Heights. He, as a bull-dog, represents a fierce masculinity that is inherent to Thrushcross Grange, and in attacking Catherine and pulling her to the house, he takes her into hierarchy, and away her wild androgyny (Gilbert and Gubar 271). He is protecting the values of his home, just as Juno does.

Because Skulker protects the values of his owner, and attacks because he is commanded to, Gilbert and Gubar’s argument of him as “a sort of hellhound posing as a hound of heaven” falls short (272). Given the differences in freedom between the two houses they are correct to say that Skulker “forced passage from Wuthering Heights to Thrushcross Grange,” but he does not actively seek to hurt everyone that arrives at the Grange (Gilbert and Gubar 272). He is not a demon dog; he merely does what he is told. In this way, he is the exact opposite of the free Juno, who is not kept to as a pet. And in attacking Catherine, he turns her into a pet as well; going forward, she will forever be stuck within the patriarchal hierarchy, at least until she dies. Thus, the wild androgyny has been left at the heights, and she is taught/forced to conform. Catherine becomes a pet, used to “demarcate the human,” that is the higher rung of the ladder that the human resides on (Krielkamp 93). So, more accurately Catherine is taken in by force and used to demarcate male dominance.

As a symbol of this forced conforming, Isabella’s dog, Fanny, also plays an important role in Brontë’s portrayal of the separation between nature and culture. Gilbert and Gubar very briefly (one sentence) bring Fanny into their argument by stating that, in her hanging from the bridle hook by Heathcliff, the little dog dramatically furthers the point that “patriarchal society inevitably crushes the feet of runaway girls” (Gilbert and Gubar 289). I agree with this point and further develop the importance of Fanny. This little dog completely embodies the forces of patriarchal control on women, adding another layer to Brontë’s dog motif. She is no Juno, who embodies a fierce androgynous autonomy in her viciousness, nor Skulker, who embodies a trained hierarchy in his viciousness.

Fanny is the image of the complete lack of viciousness within a system of controlling hierarchy; she does not fight back when Heathcliff hangs her on from the bridle hook, and Nelly easily captures her when she tries to get beyond the fence at Thruschcross Grange (Brontë 125, 127). She is the trained little dog that was being pulled apart by the young, cultured hands of Isabella and Linton (Brontë 60). With a lack of autonomy, Fanny is not able to be vicious in her opposition to either nature or culture; she is not a dog of the Heights. Fanny is a dog of culture, however even in her culture, she is representative of the wild Catherine’s struggle of conforming to culture, after marrying Edgar. Immediately after we see Catherine struggling in Edgar’s arms to attack Nelly (after Nelly tells Edgar that he is allowing Catherine to “poison” Isabella against him by allowing Heathcliff’s courting) Fanny is found “suspended to a handkerchief, and nearly at [her] last gasp” (Brontë 125). In this image of Fanny, Catherine has been symbolically hung up by the forces of patriarchy while trying to escape from it, or at least bring some more wildness into it by way of Heathcliff.

We see her wild nature, in her attempt to attack Nelly, and we see this nature constrained by culture, in Edgar’s holding her back. She is, as Nelly mistakes Fanny to be before she gets a clear view of the little hanging dog, “a creature of the other world,” fighting against the cultured rules of the hierarchy by encouraging Heathcliff, another “creature of the other world” (the wild world) to take Isabella out of culture and into the wild Heights (Brontë 125). Though this is not her intention, Catherine is fighting against the forces she has been dragged into by Skulker. Unfortunately for Isabella, Catherine’s fighting pays off, and the cultured girl elopes with Heathcliff.

But no matter how “uncultured” an elopement may be, the custom of marriage is still one male control; Isabella will in no way be happier than Catherine. Yes, she goes to the Heights, where there is less of a cultured hierarchy, but she is not as prepared for this as she believes herself to be. Like Fanny, she has been raised as a lapdog, not as a working dog. And like Catherine, she is thrown into a world she does not belong in and is not able to leave it because of her marriage—patriarchy traps her. The little “dog” just wants to get out of the yard, but is brought back; the Heights did not afford her the same androgyny it once afforded Catherine because she went there under the bond of marriage (Brontë 127). Though she a great new life with Heathcliff, she is hung up, just as Catherine was. And as the reader later learns, it is in fact the wild Heathcliff that hangs up the little dog, right in front of Isabella’s eyes (Brontë 143). He has forced control; just as cultured patriarchy calls for, Heathcliff has been led away from androgyny of the Heights.

Just as Gilbert and Gubar argue that Heathcliff is androgynous in his portrayal of feminine “sin,” as they would name it, so Eagleton argues that Heathcliff is “androgynous” within his economic status. From a feminist standpoint, Heathcliff lies between two sides, the masculine and the feminine. From a Marxist standpoint, Heathcliff lies between two sides: though he is “proletarian in appearance,” he lays “no claim to status” (Eagleton 397). He may have started out in a natural environment, free from patriarchal control, but he takes on the patriarchy when he leaves to better himself. He has blurred the lines of the separation between Wuthering Heights and Thruschcross Grange. This blurring occurs within his portrayal as a dog. Heathcliff becomes vicious, like both Skulker and Juno, and herein lies the obscurity. He takes on the viciousness of both sides, Literally and figuratively, he hangs the woman upon a bridle hook, but he does so in order to find away to defeat the hierarchy and get Catherine back to the natural state they grew up in. Heathcliff’s role as both the issue and the solution to the dominance of men over women lies in his taking on of the role of a patriarch in order to defeat patriarchy.

The most fascinating aspect of this double role is the way in which it is conceptualized. The natural imagery of the dogs at the onset of the novel becomes the image of a domesticated pet at Thrushcross Grange, and is these two images are blurred within Fanny and Heathcliff. The force of Victorian culture would have been too strong to allow for the argument of a wild and androgynous life. But Brontë makes the argument anyway, by way of the dog motif. using the dogs to portray the forces of patriarchy on humans. Brontë brilliantly imagines life outside that conformity, a wild life in which women fight against cultured expectations. And by placing that non-conformity in the dogs, rather than directly in the human form, she is able to make an argument that would not have been accepted by 19th century men or women, had it been stated outright: living in filth and surrounding yourself in nature is better than conforming to patriarchy of the man’s world—the wild dogs are safer than the trained.

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