

06. Romanticism II.

British Romantic literature was influenced by several preceding literary trends that emerged already in the 18th century. Apart from influences in philosophy and aesthetics, two literary trends in particular contributed to Romantic writing: the Gothic novel, and interest in folklore.

The **Gothic novel** appeared before the Romantic movement with the work of Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764); later other authors joined in, for example Matthew Lewis (*The Monk*, 1796), Ann Radcliffe (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794). They are called “Gothic” novels because in this genre the setting is often in a medieval castle, or some other ancient or decaying mansion. Generally, Gothic novels are characterized by the use of terror and mystery, there are villains, threats, murders, seductions and insanities, ghosts, and frightening supernatural phenomena. This kind of fiction coincides with the dark side of Romanticism, the interest in the solitary hero, who does not necessarily have to be virtuous, and the importance of passions. There are many Romantic novels which are not strictly speaking Gothic but contain Gothic elements: for example Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, or Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*.

Horace Walpole (1717-1797)

Walpole came from a very prominent family: his father Robert Walpole was the first Prime Minister of England and Horace Walpole also became a member of the Parliament. He studied at Cambridge and then went on a Grand Tour of Europe together with a poet friend. Never worried by financial difficulties, Walpole bought a large mansion in Twickenham (now a suburb of London) which he called Strawberry Hill and transformed into a Gothic style hall with his own printing press. He was the designer (architect) of the transformation of Strawberry Hill; he was also an art collector so that Strawberry Hill eventually housed a great number of art works, especially portraits. Already during his lifetime Strawberry Hill was a tourist attraction.

<https://www.strawberryhillhouse.org.uk>

Walpole was an influential figure politically and culturally; besides his political career and being a “trend-setter” in Gothic revival he was also the author of fiction and political pamphlets. His best known work is a novel of the Gothic kind, the first Gothic novel in English literature, called *The Castle of Otranto* (1764). The book was an immediate success, it was reprinted many times even during Walpole’s life, and left an influence on the literature of the 19th century. In his own times, however, he became famous as an author even before the publication of *Otranto* when he published a book on the history of English painting. He wrote a broad range of texts: a gothic novel, a history of English painting, political texts, a comedy, art catalogs, a description of his own house, and a memoir. For the 18th century society, infused with the ideals of the Enlightenment and Classicism, this eclectic way of writing was rather shocking, and yet his texts became popular.

The Castle of Otranto is set in medieval Italy (sometime between the 11th and 13th century) at an ancient Italian castle; however, Walpole claimed to have been inspired by a dream of his own Strawberry House, as he confessed in a letter to a friend:

You will even have found some traits to put you in mind of this place. When you read of the picture quitting its panel, did not you recollect the portrait of Lord Falkland all in white in my gallery? Shall I even confess to you what was the origin of my romance? I waked one morning of last June from a dream, of which all I could recover was, that I had thought myself in an ancient castle (a very natural dream for a head filled like mine with Gothic story) and that on the uppermost banister of a great staircase I saw a gigantic hand in armour. In the evening I sat down and began to write, without knowing in the least what I intended to say or relate. The work grew on my hands and I grew fond of it—add that I was very glad to think of anything rather than politics—In short I was so engrossed with my tale, which I completed in less than two months, that one evening I wrote from the time I had drunk my tea about six o'clock, till half an hour after one in the morning, when my hand and fingers were so weary, that I could not hold the pen to finish the sentence, but left Matilda and Isabella talking, in the middle of a paragraph.

The story relates the fantastic and supernatural events happening at the castle of Otranto. The castle is currently the seat of Manfred, his wife Hippolyta, and their children Matilda and Conrad. Manfred wants Conrad to marry princess Isabella so that the family line would continue with a next heir but on their wedding day Conrad is killed when a mysterious giant helmet falls on him and crushes him to death. Manfred then decides to divorce his wife Hippolyta and to marry Isabella himself so that the heir could be born (Hippolyta is too old to have more children). When he tries to rape her, Isabella manages to flee through a secret passage and hides in a nearby church, helped by a peasant named Theodore. Theodore and Matilda fall in love and Theodore then fights with an unknown knight to protect her; that knight turns out to be Isabella's father Frederic who has been sent to Otranto with a foreboding of his daughter being in danger. Frederic then falls in love with Manfred's daughter Matilda. Manfred then proposes a double wedding: he will marry Isabella and Frederic will marry Matilda. Frederic unexpectedly refuses, remembering that he was sent to Otranto through a supernatural chain of events with a mission to save his daughter Isabella and to restore the castle to its proper ruler. This proper ruler turns out to be no other than the peasant Theodore, who is the heir of Otranto's former owner and who was lost as a child. Now his true identity is revealed. Manfred suspects that Theodore is having an affair with Isabelle and in rage he stabs her, only to discover that it was not Isabelle but Matilda: he has mortally wounded his own daughter. With Matilda dead, Manfred and Hippolyta are broken and both enter a monastery, and Frederic offers Isabella to Theodore who becomes the rightful owner and ruler of Otranto.

Throughout the story there are many mysterious and supernatural events: the death of Conrad by the giant helmet, the appearance of a host of knights who carry a giant sword that matches the helmet, there are visions and ghosts; besides these elements, there is also a lot of melodrama: blushing, fainting and crying of innocent heroines, threats of a powerful villain, and heroic rescues by gallant men. In fact, *The Castle of Otranto* in a way goes a bit too far. It is not a parody but it has very clearly the qualities of a masquerade, a play in a sense: it is consciously artificial, perhaps even slightly ironic—playful, perhaps, in referring to the tradition of chivalric stories in this exaggerated way. There is also a political undertone (and Walpole was a politician himself): a tyrannous ruler (Manfred) is deprived of power after three generations of his family's rule, and a rightful heir is restored—a theme not unlike the events in English history when the Hanoverian dynasty (Kings Georges) succeeded the Stuarts (James II Stuart was a Catholic; he was deposed in the Glorious Revolution in 1688 and replaced by William of Orange; the subsequent Act of Settlement, passed by the Parliament in 1701, created the condition that following monarchs

must be Protestants and part of the Church of England – it was this requirement by which George I of Hanover bypassed many other candidates for the throne and became English King in 1714).

A short excerpt: Manfred attempts to rape Isabelle; at that moment he is distracted by a painting of his ancestor that suddenly comes to life. The figure leaves the painting and walks through the corridor. In the mean time Isabella, scared to death, finds a secret passage and escapes Manfred.

I tell you, said Manfred imperiously, Hippolyta is no longer my wife; I divorce her from this hour. Too long has she cursed me by her unfruitfulness: my fate depends on having sons,—and this night I trust will give a new date to my hopes. At those words he seized the cold hand of Isabella, who was half-dead with fright and horror. She shrieked, and started from him. Manfred rose to pursue her (...) At that instant the portrait of his grandfather, which hung over the bench where they had been sitting, uttered a deep sigh and heaved its breast. (...) Manfred, distracted between the flight of Isabella, who had now reached the stairs, and his inability to keep his eyes from the picture, which began to move, had however advanced some steps after her, still looking backwards on the portrait, when he saw it quit its pannel, and descend on the floor with a grave and melancholy air. Do I dream? cried Manfred returning, or are the devils themselves in league against me? Speak, infernal spectre! Or, if thou art my grandsire, why dost thou too conspire against thy wretched descendent, who too dearly pays for—Ere he could finish the sentence the vision sighed again and made a sign to Manfred to follow him. Lead on! cried Manfred; I will follow thee to the gulph of perdition. The spectre marched sedately, but dejected, to the end of the gallery, and turned into a chamber on the right hand. Manfred accompanied him at a little distance, full of anxiety and horror, but resolved. As he would have entered the chamber, the door was clapped-to with violence by an invisible hand. The prince, collecting courage from this delay, would have forcibly burst open the door with his foot, but found that it resisted his utmost efforts. Since hell will not satisfy my curiosity, said Manfred, I will use the human means in my power for preserving my race; Isabella shall not escape me.

The element of “play” in the novel is also very clearly seen in the way Walpole presented the first edition of the book. He published it under a fictive identity of “William Marshal” as a translation from Italian. In the second edition he still doesn’t disclose his identity but explains that it is a contemporary work of fiction and not a translation of an ancient Italian text. He also uses the preface to write a literary theoretical reflection on his romance, explaining that it is a combination of “the two kinds of romance, the ancient and the modern. In the former all was imagination and improbability: in the latter, nature is always intended to be, and sometimes has been, copied with success.”

The Romantic interest in the rural and the idealization of country life, as we find it for example in Wordsworth, grew not only out of an idealized view of human nature (where rural people are something like “noble savages,” unspoiled by civilization and city life), but also from the 18th century interest in folk songs and poetry. A famous collection called *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) was compiled by Thomas Percy (Bishop Percy); it contained various poems and lyrics from the preceding two centuries, and also a number of ballads from the Scottish Borders region. Their popularity inspired another author, James MacPherson, to retell his own versions of old Celtic

legends from the north of Scotland. MacPherson, however, presented his work as a collection of original Celtic legends. This fake, called *The Poems of Ossian* (1765), received much attention and praise even on Continental Europe, and became an inspiration, among others, also for the Královédvorský and Zelenohorský Manuscripts of 1817 and 1818.

Among these 18th century collectors of national folklore, one author in particular was particularly influential:

Robert Burns (1759-1796)

Burns grew up in a poor peasant family in the south of Scotland. With the Industrial Revolution already starting and affecting the peasants, Burns was getting ready to emigrate from Scotland to escape poverty. A lover of Scottish folk songs and ballads, he was inspired by them to write his own poems. They were published as *Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect* (1786) and became very popular. Burns stayed in Scotland, still struggling financially, but continued to write poetry and collect folk songs. Until today he is considered one of Scotland's national authors. Here are a few of his most famous poems: a love poem "A Red, Red Rose," in which he combines elements from several folk songs, and a poem in which the everyday work of farming becomes an occasion for a reflection on suffering, "To a Mouse." One line in this poem inspired the title of the famous book *Of Mice and Men* (1937) by the American writer John Steinbeck, depicting the hard life of poor migrant workers in the United States during the Great Depression of the 1930's. Burns is also the author the famous farewell song, "Auld Lang Syne."

A Red, Red Rose

O My Luve's like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June;
O My Luve's like the melodie
That's sweetly played in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,
So deep in luve am I;
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,
And the rocks melt wi' the sun:
O I will luve thee still, my dear,
While the sands o' life shall run.

And fare thee well, my only luve,
And fare thee weel awhile!
And I will come again, my luve,
Though it were ten thousand mile.

To a Mouse

On turning her up in her nest with the plow, November, 1785

YOUTUBE

"To A Mouse" by Robert Burns (read by Sir William "Billy" Connolly); by Zsuzsanna Uhlik
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kFST60dNgY>
text and standard English translation in the description

Walter Scott (1771-1832)

Another collector of Scottish folklore and a younger admirer of Robert Burns. Scott was a Scotsman, born in Edinburgh, a lawyer by profession and also a businessman and writer. As a child he suffered from polio; for recovery he spent a long period of time in the region of Scottish Borders. He mostly recovered but limped for the rest of his life. Because of polio Scott could not engage in many activities as a child but he was fascinated by stories told to him by relatives about Scottish history. He was also an avid reader. As an adult man he spent a lot of time hiking (despite the limp) or riding through the Scottish countryside and collecting folk songs and ballads he heard. These he published in a collection entitled *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1802-3); after that he started to publish his own poetry and fiction, inspired by Scottish and English history.

YOUTUBE

[2014] Beyond the Border: Sir Walter Scott's Minstrelsy in Story and Song; by The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club

Lecture and performance by Margaret Bennett and Lori Watson

Watch from 15:25 to 20:55

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HihHW5b7t0M>

Like Walpole, Scott, too, bought an old mansion near Edinburgh and rebuilt it in the Gothic style and collected various antiques and art.

<https://www.scottsabbotsford.com/>

His first novel called *Waverley* (1814) was published anonymously. Its title hero is a young Englishman who comes to Scotland in the 1740's as an officer in the English army. He is a loyal Englishman but at the same time he admires the Scottish royal tradition (the Stuart dynasty) and eventually joins a Stuart uprising. He also falls in love in Scotland, hesitating between two Scottish women, until after many adventures he marries the right one.

This novel was the first in a series of Scottish novels that are sometimes also called "the Waverley novels" and Walter Scott is remembered as the founder of the genre of the historical novel.

He was, of course, not the first author to write fiction set in the past but he was the first who was genuinely interested in the past as such. His characters are always deeply embedded in their historical-social setting (while they have their individual features) and they serve to create an image of the Scottish society, its political, religious and cultural aspects. Scott enjoys the historical detail: we learn a lot about the customs, clothing; he gives detailed descriptions of sites and landscape and of historical events. He also pays attention to the ordinary people, their language and their customs.

Scott's "Scotch novels" became extremely influential and popular throughout Europe. Scott achieved several things in his fiction: he created a compelling representation not only of his characters but also of their Scottish setting and history and social changes and dilemmas that the Scottish society underwent, bringing broader attention to the distinct history and culture of the Scots. Besides *Waverley* the Scotch novels include *Rob Roy* (1817), based on the historical figure of Robert Roy MacGregor and depicting the Scottish Highlanders at the time of the Jacobite uprising in 1715 (the attempt to restore the Stuarts to the throne after the Glorious Revolution and the rule of William of Orange). Another very interesting novel from this group is called *The Heart of Mid-Lothian* (1818), based on another historical event from 1736 when the people of Edinburgh broke into the Edinburgh prison and hung a captain of the city guard who had been pardoned a death sentence (Captain Porteous had ordered shooting at protesters in a riot). As in other Scott's novels the historical events are intertwined with the personal story of fictitious characters, in this case of two sisters, Jeanie and Effie Deans. They come from a Presbyterian family. Jeanie accepts the faith and the lifestyle, she is obedient, humble and pious; Effie, however, doesn't fit in. She falls in love with a reckless English nobleman and a baby is born but the baby is stolen and Effie is condemned for killing the baby. Scottish laws in that time will have her sentenced to death for child murder. If she can prove that she told someone about her pregnancy and so showed some maternal feelings, she might be spared execution. If her sister Jeanie swears to court that Effie told her about her pregnancy, she might save Effie's life. Jeanie loves Effie dearly but Jeanie is a pious, truth-loving Presbyterian and she cannot make herself tell a lie, despite the horrible consequences this will have for Effie and for the rest of the family. Effie is sentenced to death; she is imprisoned and awaits execution. Jeanie decides to do something else to save her sister: she walks on foot to London to plead for Effie with the Queen. The Queen is touched by Jeanie's sincerity and secures a royal pardon for Effie. The book ends with Jeanie being happily married to a minister; Effie is married to her former lover. Here the happy ending is disrupted with a tragic motif: Effie's lost son reappears; he is a criminal and unwittingly kills his father. Effie then decides to become a nun.

Here is an excerpt from the moment when Jeanie visits Effie in prison just before the court trial; Effie wants to hear about her lover Robertson. Jeanie discloses that Robertson pressed her to lie to court to save Effie and she confesses that she cannot bring herself to do that.

Again Effie threw herself into her arms, and kissed her cheek and forehead, murmuring, "O, if ye kend how lang it is since I heard his name mentioned?—if ye but kend how muckle good it does me but to ken onything o' him, that's like goodness or kindness, ye wadna wonder that I wish to hear o' him!"

Jeanie sighed, and commenced her narrative of all that had passed betwixt Robertson and her, making it as brief as possible. Effie listened in breathless anxiety, holding her sister's hand in hers, and keeping her eye fixed upon her face, as if devouring every word she uttered. The interjections of "Poor fellow,"—"Poor George," which escaped in whispers, and betwixt sighs, were the only sounds with which she interrupted the story. When it was finished she made a long pause.

"And this was his advice?" were the first words she uttered.

“Just sic as I hae tell’d ye,” replied her sister.

“And he wanted you to say something to yon folks, that wad save my young life?”

“He wanted,” answered Jeanie, “that I suld be man-sworn.”

“And you tauld him,” said Effie, “that ye wadna hear o’ coming between me and the death that I am to die, and me no aughten year auld yet?”

“I told him,” replied Jeanie, who now trembled at the turn which her sister’s reflection seemed about to take, “that I daured na swear to an untruth.”

“And what d’ye ca’ an untruth?” said Effie, again showing a touch of her former spirit—“Ye are muckle to blame, lass, if ye think a mother would, or could, murder her ain bairn—Murder!—I wad hae laid down my life just to see a blink o’ its ee!”

“I do believe,” said Jeanie, “that ye are as innocent of sic a purpose as the new-born babe itsell.”

“I am glad ye do me that justice,” said Effie, haughtily; “ifs whiles the faut of very good folk like you, Jeanie, that, they think a’ the rest of the warld are as bad as the warst temptations can make them.”

“I didna deserve this frae ye, Effie,” said her sister, sobbing, and feeling at once the injustice of the reproach, and compassion for the state of mind which dictated it.

“Maybe no, sister,” said Effie. “But ye are angry because I love Robertson—How can I help loving him, that loves me better than body and soul baith?—Here he put his life in a niffer, to break the prison to let me out; and sure am I, had it stude wi’ him as it stands wi’ you”—Here she paused and was silent.

“O, if it stude wi’ me to save ye wi’ risk of my life!” said Jeanie.

“Ay, lass,” said her sister, “that’s lightly said, but no sae lightly credited, frae ane that winna ware a word for me; and if it be a wrang word, ye’ll hae time eneugh to repent o’t.”

“But that word is a grievous sin, and it’s a deeper offence when it’s a sin wilfully and presumptuously committed.”

“Weel, weel, Jeanie,” said Effie, “I mind a’ about the sins o’ presumption in the questions—we’ll speak nae mair about this matter, and ye may save your breath to say your carritch and for me, I’ll soon hae nae breath to waste on onybody.”

put his heart in a niffer – at hazard

The Brontë sisters: Charlotte (1816-1855), Emily (1818-1848), and Anne (1820-1849)

The three sisters were daughters of a minister and lived in a remote village in Yorkshire. After the death of their mother the household was run by their aunt. Out of the six children, two girls died in infancy, the only son in the family died as a young man and the three writer-sisters also died quite young—their father survived all of his children. All the family members suffered from tuberculosis. The girls were educated at home but also in schools; Charlotte and Emily even studied privately in Brussels for a period of time. Charlotte fell in love with her teacher (who was married) and wrote letters to him after she returned to Britain.

Brontë parsonage

<https://www.bronte.org.uk/>

The Brontë children spent a lot of time by themselves and much of the time was spent in making up stories, writing tales and poems. The first text that the sisters published was a collection of their poems, published collectively under the male pseudonyms of Acton, Ellis, and Currer Bell, and then they used these pseudonyms to publish their novels.

Charlotte Brontë's famous *Jane Eyre* (1847) is a fictional autobiography of the title character. Jane Eyre is an orphan, brought up in the family of her aunt and uncle. After the death of the uncle her aunt, Mrs Reed, treats her cruelly, privileging her own children, always blaming Jane and saying that she will go to hell for being such a terrible girl. Here is an excerpt from a climactic event of Jane's childhood, a terrible punishment she receives from Mrs Reed: she is locked up alone in the Red Room, a scary room in the house, she is afraid and finally breaks down in a panic attack. She is 10 years old at this moment.

Daylight began to forsake the red-room; it was past four o'clock, and the beclouded afternoon was tending to drear twilight. I heard the rain still beating continuously on the staircase window, and the wind howling in the grove behind the hall; I grew by degrees cold as a stone, and then my courage sank. My habitual mood of humiliation, self-doubt, forlorn depression, fell damp on the embers of my decaying ire. All said I was wicked, and perhaps I might be so; what thought had I been but just conceiving of starving myself to death? That certainly was a crime: and was I fit to die? Or was the vault under the chancel of Gateshead Church an inviting bourne? In such vault I had been told did Mr. Reed lie buried; and led by this thought to recall his idea, I dwelt on it with gathering dread. (...)

A singular notion dawned upon me. I doubted not—never doubted—that if Mr. Reed had been alive he would have treated me kindly; and now, as I sat looking at the white bed and overshadowed walls—occasionally also turning a fascinated eye towards the dimly gleaming mirror—I began to recall what I had heard of dead men, troubled in their graves by the violation of their last wishes, revisiting the earth to punish the perjured and avenge the oppressed; and I thought Mr. Reed's spirit, harassed by the wrongs of his sister's child, might quit its abode—whether in the church vault or in the unknown world of the departed—and rise before me in this chamber. I wiped my tears and hushed my sobs, fearful lest any sign of violent grief might waken a preternatural voice to comfort me, or elicit from the gloom some haloed face, bending over me with strange pity. This idea, consolatory in theory, I felt would be terrible if realised: with all my might I endeavoured to stifle it—I endeavoured to be firm. Shaking my hair from my eyes, I lifted my head and tried to look boldly round the dark room; at this moment a light gleamed on the wall. Was it, I asked myself, a ray from the moon penetrating some aperture in the blind? No; moonlight was still, and this stirred; while I gazed, it glided up to the ceiling and quivered over my head. I can now conjecture readily that this streak of light was, in all likelihood, a gleam from a lantern carried by some one across the lawn: but then, prepared as my mind was for horror, shaken as my nerves were by agitation, I thought the swift darting beam was a herald of some coming vision from another world. My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears, which I deemed the rushing of wings; something seemed near me; I was oppressed, suffocated: endurance broke down; I rushed to the door and shook the lock in desperate effort.

Afterwards Jane is sent to a boarding school for orphaned girls; the conditions at the Lowood school are terrible, children are severely punished, they don't get enough to eat, etc. But there Jane for the first time finds a friend, Helen Burns, an angelic character who never objects to the teachers' treatment, always looks for faults in herself, accepts her suffering, and eventually dies. Jane is a very bright girl and eventually she succeeds to be a teacher at Lowood; by then the conditions have improved. Then she leaves to find a job as a governess and is hired by a wealthy man, Mr Rochester, who is bringing up an orphaned girl, Adele. Rochester is a haughty, somewhat mysterious and whimsical character but eventually he falls in love with Jane. Rochester lives at Thornfield Hall, a grand old mansion. Sometimes Jane notices strange sounds in the house but when she asks the servants about it, no one will tell her anything. Later Jane finds out the truth: there is a dangerous madwoman who is secretly kept in the attic, and the woman turns out to be Rochester's wife. Mr Rochester tries to persuade Jane to stay with him and live with him as his de facto wife after the truth about his mad wife is revealed; he makes an impassioned speech in which he speaks of his love for Jane and explains that he was tricked into marrying his first wife (he didn't know she was insane and dangerous). Jane feels pity for him, she loves him, but she knows that they cannot be married and that it would be sinful for her to live with him without being properly married. In a painful inner struggle herself, she resolves to leave him.

“You see now how the case stands—do you not?” he continued. “After a youth and manhood passed half in unutterable misery and half in dreary solitude, I have for the first time found what I can truly love—I have found *you*. You are my sympathy—my better self—my angel. I am bound to you with a strong attachment. I think you good, gifted, lovely: a fervent, a solemn passion is conceived in my heart; it leans to you, draws you to my centre and spring of life, wraps my existence about you, and kindling in pure, powerful flame, fuses you and me in one.

“It was because I felt and knew this, that I resolved to marry you. To tell me that I had already a wife is empty mockery: you know now that I had but a hideous demon. I was wrong to attempt to deceive you (...). This was cowardly: I should have appealed to your nobleness and magnanimity at first, as I do now—opened to you plainly my life of agony—described to you my hunger and thirst after a higher and worthier existence—show to you, not my *resolution* (that word is weak), but my resistless *bent* to love faithfully and well, where I am faithfully and well loved in return. Then I should have asked you to accept my pledge of fidelity and to give me yours, Jane—give it me now.”

A pause.

“Why are you silent, Jane?”

I was experiencing an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning! Not a human being that ever lived could wish to be loved better than I was loved; and him who thus loved me I absolutely worshipped: and I must renounce love and idol. One drear word comprised my intolerable duty—“Depart!”

“Jane, you understand what I want of you? Just this promise—‘I will be yours, Mr. Rochester.’”

“Mr. Rochester, I will not be yours.”

She indeed leaves and finds another job, living elsewhere with the Rivers siblings. The brother, St John Rivers, is going to be a missionary in India and he asks Jane to go with him as his wife: there

are no romantic feelings between them, but St John finds this unimportant. As Jane thinks about this, she hears in her head Mr Rochester call for her. She can't explain it but she knows she must go to him immediately because he needs her. When she arrives to Thornfield Hall she finds it in ruins: Rochester's wife had set the house on fire and herself died in the fire. Rochester himself was wounded as he was helping people out of the fire. He again asks Jane to marry him, and the book ends with their happy marriage:

I have now been married ten years. I know what it is to live entirely for and with what I love best on earth. I hold myself supremely blest—blest beyond what language can express; because I am my husband's life as fully as he is mine. No woman was ever nearer to her mate than I am: ever more absolutely bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. I know no weariness of my Edward's society: he knows none of mine, any more than we each do of the pulsation of the heart that beats in our separate bosoms; consequently, we are ever together. To be together is for us to be at once as free as in solitude, as gay as in company. We talk, I believe, all day long: to talk to each other is but a more animated and an audible thinking. All my confidence is bestowed on him, all his confidence is devoted to me; we are precisely suited in character—perfect concord is the result.

Jane Eyre is a story in which the heroine seeks her way between the various social roles and modes offered to her: Christian meekness and acceptance of suffering (exemplified by her school friend Helen Burns), the perhaps Romantic possibility of an extramarital love affair with Rochester (which she refuses out of her sense of morality and self-esteem), or again the Christian way of self-renunciation and a life of service to others (which opens up for her when St John Rivers wants to marry her and take her as his missionary wife to India). Instead, Jane Eyre perseveres in her independence, a sense of which she developed in her childhood as an abused orphan. The concluding happiness of the novel is no compromise to her conscience and selfhood: she only marries Rochester when he has been broken in spirit and maimed in his body (and of course when his first wife is dead). He is no longer Jane's superior; if anything, one could say that Jane is now stronger than him, as her famous commentary also suggests: "Reader, I married him" (emphasizing her own decision). Importantly, too, Jane became financially independent while living the Rivers family, because they helped her receive her uncle's inheritance. She returns to Rochester as a truly independent woman; only then can there be a proper union—a marriage of equal partners.

This concluding transformation of passionate love into a more mature form and the reconciliation of female independence and male superiority is treated differently in Emily Brontë's novel *The Wuthering Heights* (1847). There the passions are even more intense and there is a very strong contrast between the passionate love between Catherine and Heathcliff and Catherine's marriage to the calm, amiable and devoted Edgar Linton. But the greatest dichotomy of the novel is that of love and hate, or revenge, and indeed horrific and cruel revenge. These two are shown to be essentially of one nature: it's the same capacity for unrestrained passion that is behind Heathcliff's love for Catherine and his revenge for losing her.

Set in the Yorkshire moors, the story focuses on two families: the Earnshaws, who live at Wuthering Heights, and the Lintons of Thrushcross Grange. Mr Earnshaw has a son, Hindley, and a daughter, Catherine, and he also raises an orphan boy called Heathcliff whom he prefers to his own son. Catherine and Heathcliff grow up together as siblings and become close friends. When Mr Earnshaw dies, his son Hindley takes revenge on Heathcliff and turns him out. Despite her love for

Heathcliff and their deep love for each other, Catherine eventually marries their neighbor Edgar Linton, a kind, modest, devoted man who sincerely loves Catherine. Heathcliff, in the mean time, has become rich (we don't know how) and after Catherine's wedding Heathcliff launches his revenge. He not only becomes owner of Wuthering Heights but also marries Isabella Linton so that he would also inherit Thrushcross Grange one day. Heathcliff treats Isabella cruelly, so that she eventually flees from him, and gives birth to a baby boy, Linton. Catherine dies shortly after giving birth to her daughter Catherine. When the young Cathy is adult, she falls in love with Linton, who now lives with his father Heathcliff (but Heathcliff also treats him cruelly). Heathcliff then manipulates things so that Linton is forced to marry Cathy; soon after that Linton and also Edgar Linton die, so that Heathcliff now owns both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, making Cathy work for him as if she were a servant. Finally Cathy finds a happy relationship with Hareton, the son of Hindley. Heathcliff has become obsessed with his continuing love for the dead Catherine, and dies.

Wuthering Heights is a novel which has many features of Romanticism. Heathcliff is a prime example of the tragic Romantic hero, a villain to some extent, a sufferer in another respect, an outcast (he is an orphan) who fights conventional society, who subverts even the institution of marriage when he keeps loving Catherine after her marriage to Linton and when he himself marries Linton's sister just as a way of executing his revenge. Catherine is a kindred spirit: like Heathcliff she is impassioned, strong willed, impulsive, unrestrained – however, the lure of a more genteel family and society is powerful, and that is the reason why she marries Edgar Linton.

There is also a very strong presence of nature and the landscape, and connections are made between natural phenomena and what the characters are experiencing—the underlying Romantic notion of a connection between the self and nature. In the novel's closing scene when one of the novels narrators, Lockwood, visits the graves of Catherine and Heathcliff, there is again a connection between the peaceful setting of the rural churchyard and the kind of catharsis that comes at the end of the story.

Among other Romantic elements in the story are the presence of the simple country people and their dialect, and also the ballad-like quality of the story, including its supernatural elements (the villagers claim that Heathcliff's and Catherine's spirits wander around in the moors).

Last but not least, the novel has a complex narrative structure. It covers the time span of three generations and is told by two narrators in several ways: Lockwood, a newcomer in the area, tells about himself and what he learns about Heathcliff and Catherine's story in the first person, but a large part of the story is narrated by Nelly Dean as what she remembers from their story and tells it to Lockwood. Nelly is a servant in the Linton household, and used to be Catherine's nanny. What we as readers learn from the story is mediated through these two narrators, Nelly and Lockwood, who both have but a limited perspective: Lockwood is ignorant of the history, and Nelly is a simple, devoted and practical kind of person, who can hardly said to be impartial in her recollections of the characters. The reader has to work with these biased and limited perspectives, learn to live without the reassuringly omniscient and reliable narrator, and instead be more alert and active in the act of reading.

Excerpt: Heathcliff, now an elderly man, feels that he will soon die. His mind is more and more out of this world, and his obsession with Catherine has grown even stronger:

“Nelly, there is a strange change approaching—I'm in its shadow at present—I take so little interest in my daily life, that I hardly remember to eat and drink (...) what is not connected with her

[Catherine] to me? and who does not recall her? I cannot look down on this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags! In every cloud, in every tree—filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day, I am surrounded by her image! The most ordinary faces of men and women—my own features—mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!” (...)

“Afraid! No!” he replied. “I have neither a fear, nor a presentiment, nor a hope of death—Why should I? (...) I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it. They have yearned towards it so long, and so unwaveringly, that I’m convinced it will be reached—and soon—because it has devoured my existence—I am swallowed in the anticipation of its fulfilment.”

The third of the Brontë sisters, **Anne**, is perhaps the least known today. She published only two novels during her short life time, out of which the second, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), has gathered appreciation in retrospect. Its narrator is a woman who has escaped from an abusive marriage to an alcoholic, she lives separated from him and attains happiness only after he dies. The novel was considered quite shocking at the time it was written because of its frank and bleak depiction of domestic violence caused by the man’s alcoholism; even Charlotte was appalled by the book and disapproved of it. From the present of view this pioneering frankness is what we appreciate the most.

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