

The Heterotopia of Victorian Landscape

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Abstract:

The paper attempts to define “the other spaces” of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and to qualify the difference between the real and illusory parts of Victorian landscape. It should also hint at the clash between the Romantic illusions and Victorian values.

I. Foucault’s “Other Spaces” in Victorian Novels

Speaking of places being just the relations between placements of things, Michel Foucault suggests that there are places that put all those relations they reflect in question. At the same time, however, they are somehow connected to those places they put in question and, moreover, they deny all other existing places. The first example of this theory is utopia as a site “with no real place”. Many literal examples of utopias can be traced in H. G. Wells, Jonathan Swift, etc. - they demonstrate the social need for utopias as an ideal society reflecting perfection or a society completely reversed. From the literal examples we can derive the notion that space has basically two components: the real or particular part and the illusory, or we can say virtual part. Utopia is in fact a place “with no real place” because it exists “nowhere” but at the same time it perfectly resembles any “country” in its geographical or “physical” aspects. Thus we can always find analogy of utopias in our “reality”. Nevertheless, utopia is always unreal.

Apart from utopia Foucault among his “other spaces” mentions the term heterotopia which he sees as created by every culture and civilization. Those places are real and are formed as the basis of the specific culture. They form a sort of counter-site of utopia (which is always unreal). The complexity of the term heterotopia is based on the fact that those sites represent and at the same time deny and reverse all sites we know. It is the “other” space because it is out of all sites.

To explain the terms heterotopia and utopia I would use Foucault’s example of the mirror, which can be used as a complex representation of both utopia and heterotopia. Foucault says that the mirror is in fact utopia because it is a place without a place. In the mirror people can see themselves where they are not, in the unreal, virtual world which is open behind the surface of the mirror – but is it really behind? You see yourself where you are physically not present, it is just a reflection - but is it real? Or virtual? Is it just an illusion? Those questions are even more intensified when Foucault explains the heterotopia of the mirror: The mirror is a real, existing thing which exactly from its point influences the place where you are standing; in that sense illusion influences reality: “From the point of view of the mirror I find my absence in the place where I am because I can see myself in the mirror” (Foucault 1986:24). Thus the place where you are standing at the moment you are looking at yourself in the mirror is in one respect completely real because you are there, physically standing, but at the same time absolutely unreal because to come to that conclusion that you are there, you have to come through the virtual point in the mirror. Generally speaking, every space, according to Foucault, seems to have the real and illusory dimension.

II. Encountering Victorian Values and Confronting Them with Romantic illusions

To interpret the heterotopia of landscape in the Victorian novel, I consider it necessary to confront the “realistic” features of the novels with the “illusions” of Romanticism. Such Romantic elements are clearly to be found in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* written by Emily’s sister Charlotte, among others.

In Victorian novels there seems to be a tendency of “limiting” the space within certain boundaries that are difficult to cross. The heterotopia of Victorian landscape is in my opinion based on the fact that it is real and at the same time illusory, it is present in the texts but not described in much detail. It is the part of space which is considered as a potential threat to the Victorian values. This space “outside” is detached from the “safe” homely environment by walls, cultivated gardens and parks and there seems to be hardly anything behind the walls, apart from roads that can take people to another safe place. Landscape seems to be isolated from the sphere of influence of the Victorian society and does not succumb to their rites. In the Victorian novel a garden or a park surrounding a family estate is the only space needed, it is enclosed and at the same time protecting, cultivated and caring. Landscape resembling a park or garden is described in some detail whereas natural features of landscape merely form the background, no matter how important they might be in the course of the narrative.

This is also the case of the landscape surrounding *Wuthering Heights* where the connection of the characters with the “outer space” seems to be essential for interpreting the novel. The Yorkshire moors where Heathcliff rambles in search of Catherine’s spirit lack more detailed descriptions; the attention of the narrators concentrates on houses - the first one being on *Wuthering Heights*, whereas the other one, Thrushcross Grange, corresponds with the description typical enough of the Victorian tradition. However, both houses can hardly reflect the family harmony and safety of a perfect home. The dwelling on *Wuthering Heights* seems to display some features of a fortress, being disturbed by continuously harsh climatic conditions and possibly also by the tumult of the characters’ feelings and affections toward each other. Moreover, the inhabitants need to protect themselves from the intrusions of the “other” - let us say supernatural forces which create another “illusory” level of *Wuthering Heights*. It can be said that the description of the house on the Heights displays many Romantic aspects which oppose the Victorian tradition.

In contrast to this space around *Wuthering Heights* stands Thrushcross Grange, the house of the Lintons, which is the embodiment of the Victorian values:

The light came from thence; they had not put up the shutters, and the curtains were only half closed... and clinging to the ledge 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 (Brontë 1992:33).

Luxury, comfort and glamour produce the illusion of a family harmony but those aspects go hand in hand with social status and prejudice: Heathcliff as a generally scorned person is not let in. It is obvious that his main desire to be “let in”, to be as close to the wealthy and powerful individuals as possible starts exactly at this point. However, the illusion that achieving higher social status can bring comfort and spiritual freedom may be the biggest disappointment for him.

Heathcliff is not the only person who tries to cross the boundaries, either social or physical. Similar aims are displayed by the characters of his kindred spirit Catherine, of her daughter Cathy and even of the narrator Mr. Lockwood who is considered an intruder on *Wuthering Heights* and has to face, if only in his dream, contact with the supernatural powers of the place on *Wuthering Heights*. Therefore the park and the walls are not the only boundaries that determine the environment just for the chosen ones. Crossing the boundaries may thus be the desire of those characters who long for other than earthbound ideas, those who long for freedom both in the physical and spiritual sense of the word.

In spite of not being stressed in Victorian novels, the “other” or “outer” space is large enough for the illusions of Romantic characters. The Romantic landscape displays a generosity of distance. It is open up to the horizon including the sky, offering the space for the illusory, mythical and

supernatural. To expand Foucault's general notion of heterotopia, i.e. the attitude between the illusory and factual, in *Wuthering Heights* I find it necessary to mention the relationship of the Romantic character of Heathcliff to the landscape around him. The reflection of the Yorkshire moors in his name is obviously symbolic and has been commented upon many times. However, it is more his character than just his name that is reflected in the landscape: Heathcliff's rambling on the moors in darkness, his mysterious absence, disappearing from the region, being haunted by Catherine's spirit who is the part of the "outside" world is connected with crossing the boundary of the Victorian society and becoming a part of the "illusory." Generally speaking, what is typical of the fate of the Romantic heroes is the fragmentation of their perception of both space and time, later followed by the deterioration of their consciousness. Their ability to escape the infinite sorrow is gradually becoming vain when their journey approaches the end (Procházka 2005:115). I think all those aspects are included in Heathcliff's personality; the intensity of his feelings, deeply bound with the space where Catherine's spirit dwells after her death, springs from the interconnection of his speed and being motionless in the landscape around *Wuthering Heights*. This intensity even emphasizes his pain and "constitutes the body as something absolute" (Deleuze, Guattari 1987:381).

III. Illusion, Dream and Reality in *Wuthering Heights*

It would be quite difficult to say what the real landscape of *Wuthering Heights* looks like. I have already mentioned that the real space is very limited in the course of the narrative; this can be caused by the fact that the narrators themselves (e.g. Mr. Lockwood, the tenant of Thrushcross Grange) have just limited knowledge of the country, and moreover, they came to the region with certain illusions about the place and its inhabitants. The moors, in contact with the stranger, seem to be rather treacherous and unfriendly; and the orientation e.g. in the fresh snow which looks like a white ocean, is for Mr. Lockwood nearly impossible. Being a typical Victorian, he prefers staying inside to walking on the moors without company.

As a newcomer, Mr. Lockwood has to face the apparent clash of his illusions with reality from the start. On his first night on *Wuthering Heights*, he is very much shocked not only by the behaviour of its inhabitants but also by a strange encounter in his dream. Here it is rather difficult to say whether it really was a dream or just an illusion caused by the interference of some supernatural forces surrounding the place. As Lockwood says: "I began to dream almost before I ceased to be sensible of my locality [...]" (Brontë 1992:17) and the dream is so intensively connected with the place where he slept that we can also say it was not a dream but reality. This interconnection of illusion and reality forms, in my opinion, the basis of the heterotopia of the place on *Wuthering Heights*.

In Lockwood's dream the heterotopia of *Wuthering Heights* becomes quite apparent; but what is interesting is that the illusory and real parts of space seem to be rather separated, or divided by borders. In contact with Catherine's "ghost," who/which should be rather ethereal, Mr. Lockwood has to use physical force to protect the ghost from getting inside. The house here displays the function of a fortress again, protecting its inhabitants from the supernatural. On the other hand, the function of the house is reversed later when it turned into a prison for some characters. Nevertheless, material barriers such as walls and windows divide the space not only in the sense of the inner and outer space; they also seem to separate the illusory and real parts of landscape and other environment.

As a conclusion I can say that the main aim of the Romantic characters of *Wuthering Heights* is to become a part of the illusory: Catherine's ghost after her death moves freely in the space above the heights; Heathcliff's desire is to achieve both spiritual and physical unity with Catherine after his death. Overcoming the boundaries between the real and illusory part of space would then be the symbolical parallel of overcoming the Victorian prejudice and convention.

The main characters of Victorian masterpieces written by the Brontë sisters (*Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre*) do not display such limited perception of reality, they do not settle for the simplifying contrast between the outside and inside environment the characters are supposed to live in. In the broad and spontaneously flowing imagination of the characters there exist worlds which have no limits, no walls, and the spaces they occupy in their dreams are not bound by either physical obstacles or social and moral conventions. Such is the clash between the Victorian realistic novel and its Romantic tendencies that create the illusory component.

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