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**Ghost Writing: Emily Brontë and Spectrality**

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Abstract

This article considers the role of spectrality in Emily Brontë’s writing, focusing on her Gondal poem ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ (1842-3) and *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë’s use of spectrality demonstrates both her understanding of Gothic narrative conventions and her awareness of popular traditions of haunting. These influences are reflected in her use of sceptical narrators who encounter versions of sublime terror and in her insistence upon a connection between haunting and place. Yet ghosts also disrupt the places in which they appear, rendering the home ‘unhomely’ to its present inhabitants and disrupting clear divisions between past and present. Indeed, the disruption of boundaries is integral to Brontë’s use of the spectre and reflects her familiarity with the apocalyptic tradition as well as the ghost story. The article concludes by arguing that spectrality in Brontë’s writing is inseparable from the Romantic impulse to see beyond the surfaces of things: to open oneself to the experience of the sublime in nature is also to open oneself to the possibility of ghosts.

Keywords

Gothic, Spectrality, Ghosts, Romanticism, Uncanny, Sublime

 From the castles and crypts of Gondal to the window of Catherine Earnshaw’s childhood bedroom at Wuthering Heights, Emily Brontë’s imagined worlds contain numerous sites of haunting. Brontë’s penchant for the spectral has at least some of its origins in her familiarity with Gothic fiction and poetry, but it also draws upon the apocalyptic tradition of her father’s evangelical Christianity and on the popular ghost stories and sightings that proliferated in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When ghosts appear in Brontë’s writing, they often do so in order to reveal secret histories, deliver

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warnings and pronounce judgments; all familiar roles of ghosts in Shakespearean tragedy as much as in nineteenth-century Gothic. Spectrality, however, has a significance in Brontë’s poetry and novel that is not limited to the appearances of particular ghosts. Indeed, as I will attempt to demonstrate, some of Brontë’s most uncanny moments of haunting feature no literal ghosts at all. Haunting becomes for Brontë an aspect of perception that articulates both the persistent intuition that the natural landscape is more than it seems and the awareness that spectres are invoked in the act of telling stories. This article examines the significance of spectrality for Brontë’s writing by focusing primarily on her Gondal poem ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ (1842-3), while also considering the ways in which the poem anticipates the hauntings of *Wuthering Heights*. ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ is at the same time a ghost story without a ghost and a text in which, or from which, ghosts can never quite be expelled or laid to rest. In its depiction of this tension, the poem reveals the paradoxical place of the spectre in Brontë’s writing.

 The manuscript of ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ bears two dates, 20 August 1842 and 6 February 1843. Brontë appears to have begun writing the poem while studying at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels in 1842, with the later date suggesting that she resumed work on it in the two months following her return to Haworth in November of the same year. Coincidentally, the year in which Brontë completed the poem also saw the publication of what would become one of the nineteenth century’s most popular and influential ghost stories: Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* (1843). The contrast between the two hauntings is illuminating. *A Christmas Carol* is a tale of Victorian London; its *mise-en-scène* is the modern industrial city. As Andrew Smith has argued of *A Christmas Carol* and other Victorian tales of haunting, the ‘ghost story’s way of making the invisible visible is linked to [a] culture in which commentators were attempting to make the apparently secret processes

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of the financial system visible to a wider public’.[[1]](#endnote-1) Brontë’s spectres inhabit a different landscape, one that evokes a rural, feudal society haunted by the tragic history of its ruling family. Its ghosts are not those of invisible structures of economics and labour in the modern industrial city, but of histories of violence and neglect within the (aristocratic, ancestral) home. Where *A Christmas Carol* is a Victorian ghost story both artistically and politically, ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ has its roots in Romantic concepts of perception and the imagination.

Noting the popularity of ghost stories among women writers in the nineteenth century, Melissa Edmundson Makala points out that in their supernatural writings these women ‘frequently transgress the cultural boundaries of their day, just as the spectral forces in their writings transgress the boundary between life and afterlife’.[[2]](#endnote-2) Brontë had not begun to write for publication by 1843, but her poem’s interests in the disruption of boundaries and in making visible the concealed histories of domestic spaces echo common themes in the supernatural fiction by female authors in the mid-nineteenth century. Though Brontë knew Gothic literary tropes well, the significance of hauntings in her work is not reducible to Gothic effect or genre convention. I will argue in the first section of this article that spectrality is for Brontë a means of exploring relationships with landscapes and their histories. Her ghosts encapsulate both the exiled individual’s longing for home and the ways in which familiar landscapes and domestic spaces are rendered uncanny by the intrusion of the past into the present. The second section considers the spectre’s appearance at and across boundaries and barriers. Spectrality for Brontë is a liminal state that disrupts stable categories of life and death, presence and absence, past and present, nature and civilisation; the geographical liminality of the spectre manifests the psychological and metaphysical disruptions that it provokes. As I will argue in the concluding section, however, this

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disruption is also a refusal to limit possibilities of meaning to the empirical and material. In Brontë’s work, landscapes and words alike are haunted by indefinable otherness that hints at fuller realities irreducible to surface appearances. Brontë’s characters include those who would expel ghosts and those who would invite them in and live with them.[[3]](#endnote-3) Her writing, however, finally does neither. Instead, it allows its ghosts to haunt its margins, rendering familiar places strange and hinting at other ways of perceiving and encountering the world.

**Gothic Landscapes**

 ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ reflects Brontë’s familiarity both with Gothic narrative conventions and with popular superstition and folk belief in ghosts. The speaker of the poem, apparently the present owner of the fictional Aspin Castle, is a sceptic who enjoys the pleasurable thrill of indulgence in the local shepherds’ tales of the supernatural. The shepherds, the speaker claims, refuse to walk at night on a ‘fairy path’ that is said to be haunted by the ghost of a previous Lord of Aspin:[[4]](#endnote-4)

For round their hearths they’ll tell the tale

And every listener swears it true

How wanders there a phantom pale

With spirit-eyes of dreamy blue –

It always walks with head declined

Its long curls move not in the wind

Its face is fair – divinely fair;

But brooding on that angel brow

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Rests such a shade of deep despair

As nought divine could ever know

 (30-39)

Dismissing the shepherds’ stories as superstition, the sceptical speaker often walks the haunted path. There, he sees the spectre for what it is; a phantasmagoria created by mist and moonlight:

How oft in twilight lingering lone

I’ve stood to watch that phantom rise

And seen in mist and moonlit stone

Its gleaming hair and solemn eyes

 (40-43)

 The sceptical speaker’s tale of his twilight walks displays Brontë’s familiarity both with the narrative conventions of Gothic literature and with popular belief in hauntings. The speaker is a version of the Gothic reader, seeking out what Carol Margaret Davison calls the ‘pleasurable, sublime terror’ theorised in the eighteenth century by Edmund Burke and integral to early Gothic fiction.[[5]](#endnote-5) As writers and readers of the Gothic knew well, the dread of what might happen next was central to the experience of the genre; the prospect of impending terror kept readers turning the pages. Jane Austen had depicted such a reader in Catherine Morland, the heroine of Austen’s affectionate Gothic parody *Northanger Abbey* (1817). Mistakenly assuming Gothic fiction to be a reliable guide to reality, Catherine sees dark family secrets in every hallway and longs for the terrifying thrill of revelation. The present Lord of Aspin is similarly a seeker of Gothic sensation, enjoying the terror of the spectre’s rise even as he knows it to be a trick of the moonlight. In this way, the poem not

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only reveals Brontë’s familiarity with Gothic narrative conventions, but also internalises the experience of the Gothic reader.

 In this respect, the poem suggests a distinction between a sophisticated, sceptical reader of Gothic literature and the popular traditions of ghost sightings reflected by the fears of the shepherds. The Lord of Aspin indulges himself in the sublime thrill of haunting because he does not really believe that the stories of ghosts are true. The shepherds, who do believe, avoid the path at night and will not walk it alone even in daylight. Brontë returns to this distinction between modern scepticism and popular belief in the final chapter of *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood, an educated middle-class man of the modern city, never quite brings himself to believe in the narrative’s ghosts, but the shepherd-boy who claims to have seen ‘Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t’ Nab’ certainly does.[[6]](#endnote-6) Curiously, the boy’s sheep seem to agree with their shepherd, as Nelly notes that ‘neither the sheep nor he would go on’ (299); Nelly attributes this refusal to the sheep being skittish. Rather than confirming or denying the reality of the novel’s ghosts, Brontë allows belief and scepticism to co-exist as mutually challenging interpretations of the landscape and its characters.

 The historian Owen Davies argues that in popular stories and sightings England’s ghosts have commonly been associated with particular kinds of location, particularly those associated with death (such as graveyards or battlefields) and those that marked geographic boundaries. Beyond their geographic significance, such boundaries could be invested with mythic, ritual and religious significance as meeting places between the worlds of the living and the dead. As Davies observes, both human-made and natural boundaries ‘served as liminal places where the two worlds met, and where people gathered to either reinforce the separation between them or to try to permeate it briefly for religious or magical purposes’.[[7]](#endnote-7) In popular traditions of haunting, then, location was recognised as significant: not only the

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identity of a ghost, but the site of its appearance required explanation. Brontë’s writing echoes this tradition. The identification of the spectre prompts questions about its attachment to Aspin Castle:

The ancient men in secret say

’Tis the first chief of Aspin grey

That haunts his feudal home

But why, around that alien grave

Three thousand miles beyond the wave –

Where his exiled ashes lie

Under the cope of England’s sky –

Doth he not rather roam?

 (44-51)

By locating the ghost of Aspin’s first lord at his family home rather than in the place of his death or burial, the poem establishes a connection between haunting and home that is also integral to *Wuthering Heights*. The experience of exile, literal for the first Lord of Aspin, becomes for the adult Catherine a metaphor for the separation and alienation that resulted from her marriage to Edgar Linton. With marriage, she claims, she has become ‘an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world’ (111). As in the poem, spectrality in *Wuthering Heights* is closely associated with the longing for home, though the novel more explicitly broadens this term to include natural landscapes as well as domestic spaces. Catherine’s ghost appears at the window of her childhood bedroom; Heathcliff and Catherine in death are sighted together on the moors where they experienced the most freedom in life. For Brontë, the geography of haunting is shaped not by the location of the body’s physical

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remains, but by the individual’s connection to familiar landscapes. Individuals separated and exiled from their familiar places in life seek to return to it in death, the ghost persisting as a manifestation of the alienated subject’s desire for home.

**Ghosts in the House**

 For all his apparent scepticism, the present Lord of Aspin Castle finds himself unable entirely to lay to rest the ghost that is said to haunt his ancestral lands. His reminiscences of twilight ghost-walks seem to raise the very spectre that they dismiss as a trick of moonlight and mist. The location of the haunting shifts from the path known by the local shepherds to the interior domestic space of Aspin Castle. The first Lord of Aspin never manifests in a recognisable form like Jacob Marley in *A Christmas Carol*; at the literal level, ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ is a ghost story without a ghost. Yet the castle is haunted nonetheless. The speaker who sought the pleasurable terror of the ghost on the path has a more disturbing experience of the past becoming present within his own home as he reflects upon the tragic life and death of his predecessor:

I’ve seen his picture in the hall;

It hangs upon an eastern wall

And often when the sun declines

That picture like an angel shines –

And when the moonbeam chill and blue

Streams the spectral windows through

That picture’s like a spectre too –

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 (52-8)

Where moonlight had provided a rational explanation for the haunting of the path – the supposed ghost was merely an effect of moonlight shining on mist – the moonlight in this scene becomes a catalyst for a different kind of haunting. Brontë subtly invokes the liminality of haunting and its characteristic disruption of boundaries: the ‘spectral’ window marks the border between inside and outside, yet the moonlight passes through it and illuminates the portrait of Aspin’s first Lord. The portrait itself becomes spectral, not only as an image of the dead imbued with uncanny life by the moonlight, but as an increasingly-permeable boundary between past and present, or between life and death. As Julian Wolfreys observes:

The act of haunting is effective because it displaces us in those places where we feel most secure, most notably in our homes, in the domestic scene. Indeed, haunting is nothing other than the destabilization of the domestic scene, as that place where we apparently confirm our identity, our sense of being, where we feel most at home with ourselves.[[8]](#endnote-8)

As the moonlight shines on the portrait, the present Lord of Aspin experiences the uncanny presence of his ancestral home’s history. The concept of the uncanny, of course, derives from Freud’s use of the German term *unheimlich*, or ‘unhomely’: the uncanny experience is one in which the familiar, or homely, becomes disturbingly strange.[[9]](#endnote-9) As the poem progresses, the domestic space of Aspin Castle seems temporarily to belong more to its past residents than to its present. The spectral, Wolfreys argues, is ‘a matter of recognizing what is disorderly within an apparently straightforward temporal framework’.[[10]](#endnote-10) In the act of telling his story, the present Lord of Aspin displaces himself within his own home as the story gives spectral life to the castle’s long-dead former inhabitants.

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 Glimpsed in the moonlight, the portraits in the hall become images of a tragic family history:

The hall is full of portraits rare;

Beauty and mystery mingle there –

At his right hand an infant fair

Looks from its golden frame –

And just like his its ringlets bright

Its large dark eye of shadowy light

Its cheek’s pure hue, its forehead white

And like its noble name –

Daughter divine! and could his gaze

Fall coldly on thy peerless face?

And did he never smile to see

Himself restored to infancy?

[…]

No; turn towards the western side

There stands Sidonia’s deity!

In all her glory, all her pride!

And truly like a god she seems

Some god of wild enthusiast’s dreams

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And this is she for whom he died!

For whom his spirit unforgiven,

Wanders unsheltered shut from heaven

An outcast for eternity –

 (59-70, 75-83)

The first Lord of Aspin, we learn, neglected and abandoned his daughter in favour of his lover, who is likely to be Brontë’s central Gondal protagonist A. G. A. This devotion ultimately led him into exile and death far from home in England. In ‘Filial Love’, one of her French essays written for her teacher Constantin Heger while in Brussels in 1842, Brontë had described the love between parent and child both as a natural duty and as an aspect of the divine life in humanity; to refuse or reject such love, Brontë argued, was to undo the divine work of creation and reduce the one guilty of this rejection to a moral and spiritual void.[[11]](#endnote-11) ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ explores the same theme, depicting the first Lord’s rejection of his daughter both as an appalling moral failure and, through the striking resemblance between father and daughter, as a rejection of his own best self. As the poem has already shown, however, this rejection is not only an individual failure, but a history that calls into question the status of the family itself. The speaker refers to the ‘noble name’ of the daughter being as ‘white’ as the child’s face. Yet the family’s name now bears the stain of the first Lord’s betrayal and exile, events that live on in the ghost stories told by the local shepherds. In early Gothic, Carol Margaret Davison argues, ‘the castle is associated with inheritance in its various manifestations – material/economic, familial and spiritual/religious’.[[12]](#endnote-12) The tragic history of Aspin Castle unsettles both the nobility of the family name and the hierarchical social order that is sustained by narratives of tradition and noble heritage.

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 In telling the story of Aspin Castle, the speaker adopts the language of Christian apocalypse, demonstrating the extent to which Brontë’s uses of spectrality had roots in this theological tradition as well as in the Gothic. In a study of the biblical book of Revelation in Victorian literature, Kevin Mills finds in the works of the Brontë sisters echoes of ‘the manifold edginess of the Apocalypse, its isolated geographical matrix, its relationship to the canon [and] its plying of the boundary between human and inhuman worlds’.[[13]](#endnote-13) Like the ghost story, apocalyptic literature is concerned with the lifting of the veil between the present world and the eternal, or between the living and the dead. The window through which Lockwood sees Catherine’s ghost in *Wuthering Heights* is perhaps the best-known instance in Brontë’s work of a physical border that becomes a permeable boundary between life and death, but similar sites of encounter occur elsewhere in her writing. In the early Gondal poem ‘The night of storms has passed’ (1837), for example, a marble tomb becomes the setting of a spectral return of the dead:

And still it bent above

Its features full in view

It seemed close by and yet more far

Than this world from the farthest star

That tracks the boundless blue

Indeed ’twas not the space

Of earth or time between

But the sea of death’s eternity

The gulf o’er which mortality

Has never never been[[14]](#endnote-14)

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Simultaneously close and distant, the spectre is unlocatable, separated from humanity and time by the very boundary – death – that it paradoxically disrupts by its presence. The spectre, for Brontë, represents not only the return of the dead, but the collapse of a clear distinction between time and eternity.

 While ‘Written in Aspin Castle’ similarly makes use of physical borders and objects – the window and portraits – as liminal spaces between time and eternity, the poem’s roots in Christian apocalyptic are perhaps more fully revealed by its depiction of the continuing exiled state of its former occupant. Emma Mason sees in the poem’s description of A. G. A. as a ‘god of wild enthusiast’s dreams’ a reference to the intense religious feeling associated with Methodism and known (often pejoratively) as ‘enthusiasm’. In Mason’s reading, the first Lord of Aspin’s fate is a critique of the obsessive pursuit of intense feeling; as attractive as this intensity of feeling may appear, it is ultimately unsustainable and destructive.[[15]](#endnote-15) Exiled from his homeland in life, the first Lord of Aspin is shut out from heaven in death. He is damned by his rejection of his daughter in favour of a lover whose own mortality the poem depicts in abject terms:

Those eyes are dust – those lips are clay –

That form is mouldered all away

Nor thought, nor sense, nor pulse, nor breath

The whole devoured and lost in death!

 (84-7)

In its vivid portrayal of the decaying body of the lover once worshipped as an idol, the poem contrasts the heaven from which the first Lord is exiled with the transient and ultimately doomed mortal love for which he condemned himself to a hopeless eternity. The portraits in Aspin Castle bear witness to a family history of betrayal, abandonment and obsessive love

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that becomes vividly present in the act of its telling. Aspin Castle is haunted not simply by the restless spectre of its former Lord, but by a history that calls into question the nobility of the family name and renders the ancestral home unhomely to its present inhabitant.

**Ghost Stories**

 ‘Written in Aspin Castle’, then, shows haunting to be inseparable from memory and history. It is in the act of telling stories and reading the signs and records of the past that the dead are raised. As Julian Wolfreys observes, ‘to tell a story is always to invoke ghosts, to open a space through which something other returns, although never as a presence or to the present’.[[16]](#endnote-16) Strikingly, for all the rumours of ghosts in Brontë’s poem, no ghost ever manifests itself definitively. The poem’s hauntings emerge in the telling of stories that hold the past alive in the present and through the reading of images and symbols in which those stories are recorded. Brontë, of course, was well aware that the telling and reading of stories could invoke ghosts. The haunting of Catherine’s childhood bedroom in *Wuthering Heights* begins not with the appearance of her ghost at the window, but with Lockwood’s reading of the multiple versions of her name scratched into the window frame:

In vapid listlessness I leant my head against the window, and continued spelling over Catherine Earnshaw – Heathcliff – Linton, till my eyes closed; but they had not rested five minutes when a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres – the air swarmed with Catherines; and rousing myself to dispel the obtrusive name, I discovered my candle wick reclining on one of the antique volumes, and perfuming the place with an odour of roasted calf-skin. (15)

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Lockwood’s attempt to rid himself of the ‘obtrusive name’ has the opposite effect, as it leads him to the books in which the young Catherine wrote her journal. Curiously, the book also invokes the dead in another, more literal way, the ‘odour of roasted calf-skin’ a reminder of its own material history as a living animal. Lockwood reads Cathy’s childhood diary and then, apparently falling asleep, sees the ghost of her childhood self (though using her married name) at the window. In its attention to the ability of story and symbol to raise the dead, this scene acts as a microcosm of the novel itself: *Wuthering Heights* is structured as a series of repetitions and returns, disclosed through multiple levels of narration and interpretation.[[17]](#endnote-17) Its story is not simply told, but retold; Lockwood, who narrates every word of the novel, is a direct witness to almost none of its events. In both poem and novel, Brontë employs a storyteller who is unable entirely to contain or banish the spectres raised by his own act of storytelling.

 In the closing lines of ‘Written in Aspin Castle’, the speaker attempts to dismiss the ghosts invoked by his story and to return his thoughts to the present, where the moonlight is now invested with a different kind of meaning:

O come away! the Norman door

Is silvered with a sudden shine –

Come leave these dreams o’er things of yore

And turn to Nature’s face divine –

O’er wood and wold, o’er flood and fell

O’er flashing lake and gleaming dell

The harvest moon looks down

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And when heaven smiles with love and light

And earth looks back so dazzling bright

In such a scene, on such a night

Earth’s children should not frown –

 (92-102)

The night sky features often in Brontë’s poetry as an image of tranquillity in contrast with the daylight that is associated with human conflict, suffering and violence.[[18]](#endnote-18) In these final stanzas, the poem shifts away from the Romantic Gothic of its middle section and into a different kind of Romantic mode, in which the divine becomes immanent in nature and the material world – to borrow a line from another of Brontë’s poems – ‘Instinct with spirit seem[s]’.[[19]](#endnote-19) Discussing Wordsworth’s use of the language of seeming, Gavin Hopps argues that Wordsworth ‘evinces an extreme scepticism towards that which “is”, in that he entertains the possibility that things may not exhaustively “be” as they customarily appear’.[[20]](#endnote-20) For Brontë, too, the language of seeming is a refusal to limit possibilities of meaning and being to visible surfaces. Brontë’s speaker never quite achieves the resolution that he seeks; the poem’s ending remains ambiguously open, the final line more a statement of intent (Earth’s children *should not* frown) than a definitive acceptance of nature’s consolation. The paradox of the poem is that both the haunting and the tranquillity of Aspin are rooted in imagination and subjective perception. Both belong equally to the Wordsworthian impulse to ‘see into the life of things’.[[21]](#endnote-21)In both instances, the imagination reaches toward depths of reality and meaning beyond material surfaces.

 *Wuthering Heights* similarly ends with a narrator unable finally to lay to rest the spectres raised by his story. Lockwood’s story ends, appropriately enough, at a graveside, a traditional meeting-place of the living and the dead:

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 I sought, and soon discovered, the three head-stones on the slope next the moor – the middle one grey, and half buried in heath – Edgar Linton’s only harmonized by the turf, and moss creeping up its foot – Heathcliff’s still bare.

 I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath, and hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth. (300)

In *Wuthering Heights* as in ‘Written in Aspin Castle’, Brontë holds in tension a scene of natural tranquillity and persistent rumours of unquiet spirits. Critics have often seen the ending of *Wuthering Heights* as a final confirmation of Lockwood’s inadequacies as a narrator: his failure to believe in the ghosts is an extension of his failure to understand the death-defeating love between Heathcliff and Cathy along with the world of the novel more generally.[[22]](#endnote-22) It is rarely mentioned in these critical readings, however, that the only one of the novel’s major characters to believe absolutely in the ghosts is Joseph, a fact that at the very least calls into question the notion that belief in the novel’s ghosts is to be taken as evidence of reliable interpretation. For the Calvinist Joseph, the ghosts are confirmation that Heathcliff and Cathy are reprobates in death as they were in life; like the first Lord of Aspin, they wander the earth because they are shut from heaven. Joseph’s perspective reminds us that the ghosts themselves are symbols available for different interpretations. They are not a resolution of meaning, but another beginning of reading. The novel’s final scene confronts the reader not simply with a failure of interpretation, but rather with the ways in which interpretation itself encounters paradox and uncertainty. Lockwood’s inability to believe in the ghosts is depicted here as an intuitive response to nature, in contrast with his previous dogmatic rejection of Nelly’s ‘heterodox’ speculations about Catherine’s afterlife (146). Listening to the sound of

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the wind ‘breathing’ through the grass, Lockwood finds the tranquillity of the landscape incompatible with the rumours of ‘unquiet slumbers’ for the dead that lie beneath it.

 The final line of Lockwood’s narrative reveals once again the difficulty of laying to rest the ghosts invoked by the telling of stories. The novel ends with Lockwood entertaining,

albeit sceptically, the beliefs that he seeks to dismiss; the unquiet slumbers of the dead are invoked by the very words that deny their possibility. In Emily Brontë’s writing, spectrality is an aspect of the imaginative relationship with the landscape and its histories. Ghosts are raised in the telling of stories and, once invoked, they are not easily dismissed. They reveal troubled and tragic histories, rendering familiar places strange and unhomely. Yet spectrality, for Brontë, is also a refusal to accept the surface appearance of things as the full extent of reality. To entertain ghosts, however reluctantly, is also to open oneself to the possibility of a world ‘[i]nstinct with spirit’. The significance of the ghosts of Aspin Castle and Wuthering Heights is not limited to the question of whether those ghosts are real; or, for that matter, what it might mean for a ghost to be ‘real’ in any case. Their meaning lies instead in the ways in which they open possibilities of sublime encounter, transforming the experience of familiar landscapes so that, as in the hall of Aspin Castle, ‘[b]eauty and mystery mingle there’.

1. Andrew Smith, *The Ghost Story 1840-1920: A Cultural History* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), p. 18. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Melissa Edmundson Makala, *Women’s Ghost Literature in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), p. 8. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. I have discussed these conflicting attitudes to ghosts, with some reflections on their theological and metaphysical significance, in *Emily Brontë and the Religious Imagination* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 51-6. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Emily Brontë, ‘Written in Aspin Castle’, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Janet Gezari (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 139-42, line 22. Further references are given parenthetically by line number. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Carol Margaret Davison, *Gothic Literature 1764-1824* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009), p. 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Ian Jack and Helen Small (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 299. Further references are given parenthetically. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Owen Davies, *The Haunted: A Social History of Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 45. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. by David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 123-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, p. 5. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë, *The Belgian Essays*, ed. by Sue Lonoff (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996), pp. 156-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Davison, *Gothic Literature 1764-1824*, p. 71. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Kevin Mills, *Approaching Apocalypse: Unveiling Revelation in Victorian Writing* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007), p. 166. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Emily Brontë, ‘The night of storms has passed’, in *Complete Poems*, ed. by Janet Gezari (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 38-40, lines 31-40. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Emma Mason, “‘Some god of wild enthusiast’s dreams”: Emily Brontë’s Religious Enthusiasm’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* 31.1 (2003), 263-77. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings*, p. 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. On the uses of repetition and return in the novel, see J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), pp. 42-72. I offer a response to Miller and a different reading of the novel’s repetitions in my essay ‘“A Strange Change Approaching”: Ontology, Reconciliation, and Eschatology in *Wuthering Heights*’, in Alexandra Lewis (ed.), *The Brontës and the Idea of the Human: Science, Ethics, and the Victorian Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 189-206. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. See, for example, ‘Stars’, ‘The Prisoner [A Fragment]’ and ‘How Clear She Shines’, all of which were included in *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell* (1846). [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Emily Brontë, ‘The Night-Wind’, in *The Complete Poems*, ed. by Janet Gezari (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 126-7, line 16. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Gavin Hopps, ‘“Je sais bien, mais quand même…”: Wordsworth’s Faithful Scepticism’, in Gavin Hopps and Jane Stabler (eds.), *Romanticism and Religion from William Cowper to Wallace Stevens* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 57-73 (p. 59). [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. William Wordsworth, ‘Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abey’, in *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 131-5, line 50. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. For an example of a critical reading that sees both Lockwood and Nelly as flawed interpreters because of their supposed failure to understand Cathy and Heathcliff, see Michael S. Macovski, *Dialogue and Literature: Apostrophe, Auditors, and the Collapse of Romantic Discourse* (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1994). Such readings tend to be shaped by the critical tendency, identified by Lynne Pearce, to read the overwhelming force of the Heathcliff-Cathy romance as the novel’s baseline truth. For a discussion of this tendency and a critical response to it, see Pearce, *Romance Writing* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), pp. 83-109.

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