

“Hail Horrors”:
From the Sublime to the Grotesque and Back

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Abstract

This thesis explores the complex relationship between the sublime and the grotesque in literature. While the two might at first appear to have little in common, they frequently intersect in literary theory and history. My thesis considers that convergence in *Paradise Lost* (1674), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and *Hannibal* (2013-2015). Written in very different time periods and social milieus, they each approach the sublime and the grotesque from a unique perspective. Milton was foundational in early scholarship on the sublime, but the grotesque is equally important throughout his epic poem. In *Wuthering Heights*, both the sublime and the grotesque become more psychological as Brontë engages with the legacies of the Enlightenment, the Gothic period, and Romanticism. Finally, my discussion of the television series *Hannibal* examines the role of the two aesthetic categories in today's world. By putting these three works into dialogue with one another, my thesis follows the evolution of the overlap between the sublime and the grotesque, exploring the ways in which the two inform and affect one another.

Résumé

Cette thèse examine la relation complexe entre le sublime et le grotesque dans la littérature. Bien qu'à première vue les deux aient très peu en commun, ils s'entrecroisent souvent dans la théorie et l'histoire littéraires. Ma thèse réfléchit à cette convergence dans les œuvres *Paradise Lost* (1674), *Wuthering Heights* (1847) et *Hannibal* (2013-2015). Écrits à des moments et dans des milieux sociaux très différents, ils adoptent, chacun, une perspective unique du sublime et du grotesque. L'œuvre de Milton a posé la première pierre du savoir du sublime, mais le grotesque est tout aussi important dans son poème épique. Dans le roman *Wuthering Heights*, le sublime et le grotesque deviennent tous deux plus psychologiques, puisque Brontë reprend le legs du Siècle des lumières, de la période gothique et du romantisme. Finalement, mon étude de la série télévisée *Hannibal* considère le rôle de ces deux catégories esthétiques aujourd'hui. En mettant en dialogue les trois œuvres, ma thèse suit l'évolution du chevauchement du sublime et du grotesque et explore les façons dans lesquelles les deux s'influencent et s'entre-pénètrent.

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Preface

This thesis is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, Danna Petersen-Deeprise.

Introduction:

A Brief History of the Sublime and the Grotesque

In 1872, Victor Hugo wrote “it is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types that modern genius is born” (364). Despite Hugo’s claim, there has been relatively little critical interest in the relationship between the two aesthetic categories. Few scholars juxtapose them as directly as Hugo, but attempts to define the sublime and the grotesque separately inevitably use similar language. Burke’s description of the sublime as “delightful horror” (2.8), for example, is remarkably similar to Ruskin’s assertion that under the influence of the grotesque, “the mind . . . *plays with terror*” (*Stones* 140). Regardless of time period, this overlap between the sublime and the grotesque remains. I will explore the nature of this convergence by focusing on three texts of different genres and media and from different time periods: *Paradise Lost* (1674), *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and *Hannibal* (2013-2015). *Paradise Lost* has long been identified as one of the greatest examples of the sublime, particularly by Burke and Kant, while Voltaire calls it “Milton’s sublime and grotesque poem” (“Brahmins”). Much of the development of these aesthetic categories took place in the centuries following the publication of *Paradise Lost*, with the emergence of Gothic and Romantic literature, which led to Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. Recently, the psychological horror series *Hannibal* reflects the long development of the sublime and grotesque and brings the two types together through contemporary technology. Each of the three works displays elements of both the sublime and the grotesque and demonstrates the ways in which the two aesthetic principles interact.

Writers and philosophers have repeatedly opposed the sublime and the beautiful, but there have been no extensive studies of the relationship between the sublime and the grotesque. In order to fully examine that relationship, some background is necessary. After giving a brief

history and definition of each term, I will examine specific moments in literary history when their convergence is particularly relevant.

The term *sublime*, which comes from the Latin words *sub* and *limen*, literally means *up to the limit* (Shaw 119). The first known treatise on the subject is *Peri Hupsous*, or *On the Sublime*, a Greek text written around the first or third century AD. In it, the author Longinus asserts that “[it] is natural to us to feel our souls lifted up by the true Sublime” (12). It is that uplifting quality of the sublime that contains the implication of rising up to or beyond *the limit*. Exactly what sort of limit the sublime interacts with is an issue that remains essential to theory of the sublime to the present day. For Longinus and many others, it is related to human reason. Longinus’s treatise includes the idea that “the Sublime, acting with an imperious and irresistible force, sways every reader whether he will or no” (2) and that it “does not convince the reason of the reader, but takes him out of himself.” While limited, Longinus’s treatise provides a good basis for subsequent scholarship, by establishing the overwhelming nature of the sublime and foregrounding the tension between reason and emotion, ideas which later scholars, particularly Immanuel Kant, would further develop. The treatise was mostly forgotten, however, until the sixteenth century, when it was rediscovered and published in Italy in 1554. Even then, the concept of the sublime remained relatively unknown and untheorized for another century. The treatise “aroused little critical interest until it was translated into French by Boileau in 1674” (Doran 8)—the same year that John Milton published the final twelve-book version of *Paradise Lost*. Following Boileau’s edition, the sublime began to play more of a role in aesthetic theory, most notably in John Dennis’s two works *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) and *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry* (1704) (Doran 23). While interest in the sublime did slowly build over the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it only began to truly

flourish when Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant each wrote a treatise about it in the mid eighteenth century. Taking rather different approaches, they both attempted to define the sublime.

Together, the two of them form the basis of scholarship on the sublime. Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757) asserts that "whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime" (1.7). Kant tackled the idea less than a decade later with *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) and again in *Critique of Judgement* (1790). While Burke insists that "terror is in all cases whatsoever . . . the ruling principle of the sublime" (2.2), Kant focuses instead on the grand and overwhelming qualities, positing that "we call **sublime** which is **absolutely great**" (*Critique* 131; original emphasis). He identifies two types of sublime, the mathematical and the dynamical. In both cases, he argues that feelings of sublimity arise from the tension between reason and that which the human mind simply cannot grasp. The mathematical sublime deals with the idea of the infinite. Logic and reason attest to the reality of infinity, but the human imagination is unable to fathom it:

. . . because there is in our imagination a striving to advance to the infinite, while in our reason there lies a claim to absolute totality, as to a real idea, the very inadequacy of our faculty for estimating the magnitude of the things of the sensible world awakens the feeling of a supersensible faculty in us; and the use that the power of judgment naturally makes in behalf of the latter (feeling), though not the object of the sense, is absolutely great . . . (134)

Kant was not alone in discussing the sublimity of the infinite. Burke argues that anything

immensely large, like mountains or the oceans, can cause a feeling of sublimity by suggesting infinity. Repeated patterns can have the same effect, because the mind can imagine them stretching into infinity. For both Kant and Burke, the infinite is sublime, but for different reasons: for Kant because the concept of infinity threatens to overwhelm reason, and for Burke because it terrifies. Kant's dynamical sublime involves a similar intersection of reason with emotion. It is caused by a tension between awe-inspiring and dangerous aspects of nature (natural disasters, mountains, thunderstorms, etc.) and the rational knowledge that we are safe and need not be afraid; between "physical powerlessness" and an understanding of our own "superiority over nature . . . whereby the humanity in our person remains undemeaned" (145). For Kant and subsequent critics, dangerous natural settings and phenomena are essential elements of the sublime. My interpretation of the sublime will rest largely on the foundations that Burke and Kant built, which see the sublime as terrifying, awe-inspiringly grand, overwhelming, and "**absolutely great**" (Kant, *Critique* 131).

The word *grotesque* originated after the late fifteenth century rediscovery of a series of Roman grottos that were decorated with fantastic and extravagant frescoes (Kayser 19). As with the sublime, however, the concept has been retroactively applied to art and literature throughout history. As Hugo argues, "the grotesque is found everywhere" (365). The frescoes in the grottos consisted of curving lines, leaves, vines, flowers, and human/animal or human/plant hybrids. The term *grotto-esque* at first applied to art and architecture reminiscent of that style. Although interest in the grotesque grew in the centuries following the rediscovery of the grottoes, it garnered little critical attention until the nineteenth.

John Ruskin was one of the first modern scholars to write about the grotesque, which he commented on in both *Modern Painters* (1843-60) and *The Stones of Venice* (1851-3). Most

relevant to my discussion is his theory that the grotesque deals with an intersection of the comic with the frightening:

It seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; that, as one or other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque and terrible grotesque; but . . . there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements . . . (*Stones* 126)

Ruskin examines grotesque art and architecture, rather than literature, but his comments are applicable to the grotesque in any medium.

Although the term was known and often used in criticism in earlier years, it was not until the twentieth century that scholars began to write extensive treatises devoted to the subject.

Wolfgang Kayser and Mikhail Bakhtin were the first to write lengthy analyses focusing on the grotesque. For that reason, scholars often treat their theories as foundational. Their interpretations differ radically, in part because, to use Ruskin's terminology, Kayser focuses on the terrible grotesque while Bakhtin focuses on the sportive. In scholarship from the later twentieth century leading up to the current day, their two definitions of the grotesque are often the basis of analysis.

Bakhtin's book *Rabelais and his World* (1965) was and remains extremely influential. His assertion that "[t]he grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (24) became an established part of grotesque theory. The grotesque is incomplete, forever poised between two states or two realities. This unfinished, changing state is "ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of 'classic' aesthetics" and includes "copulation, pregnancy, birth, growth, old age, disintegration, [and] dismemberment" (25). All of these bodily aspects can be and often are grotesque, because

they are taboo, because they show the body in a state of change, and because they break down the barriers between the body and the world. For Bakhtin, fluidity between the body and the world (through eating, drinking, and excretions) or between different bodies (through sex, pregnancy, and childbirth) mirrors the grotesque human/animal and flora/fauna hybrids from the original grottos. Bakhtin foregrounds the role of the grotesque body in folk culture and in literature, including analyses of sweat, excrement, urine, and blood. None of this is negative, however: “[t]he very material bodily lower stratum of the grotesque image (food, wine, the genital force, the organs of the body) bears a deeply positive character” (62). It is, Bakhtin argues, cleansing and regenerative, a means of breaking through societal and artistic conventions.

Kayser approaches the grotesque from an entirely different angle. While Bakhtin sees it as regenerative, Kayser sees it as a threatening, destructive force. The two critics recognize many of the same elements as grotesque, but for Kayser the implications are sinister. He discusses the grotesque as “a world totally different from the familiar one—a world in which the realm of inanimate things is no longer separated from those of plants, animals, and human beings, and where the laws of statics, symmetry, and proportion are no longer valid” (21). He means not that the grotesque is a world separate from our own, but that it shows our world in the process of changing—a process which is, for him, nightmarish. We have not suddenly migrated to a world where humans can have animal attributes; instead, everything we thought we knew about our world and its laws is proven false, because “the grotesque presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable” (185). The suggestion is that it is not human/animal/plant hybrids themselves that evoke the grotesque, but rather the idea that the laws of the universe, which keep these species separate, have ceased to hold true—or perhaps were

never true to begin with. In this regard, Kayser's grotesque is more psychological than Bakhtin's. For Kayser, traditionally grotesque ingredients like "the mixture of heterogeneous elements, the confusion, the fantastic quality, and even a kind of alienation of the world" (51) do not, on their own, make a work of art or piece of literature grotesque. Those are only surface elements; they are not grotesque without "the abysmal quality, the insecurity, the terror inspired by the disintegration of the world" (52). The essential elements of the grotesque are not transformation or bodily fluidity, but alienation and estrangement. Indeed, Kayser concludes that "[t]he grotesque is the estranged world" (184), a claim that became and remains an important aspect of scholarship on the grotesque.

The fact that Kayser and Bakhtin interpret the same material so differently suggests that there can be no single definition or interpretation of the grotesque. Indeed, some theories of the grotesque flatly contradict each other, not least because what is grotesque to one audience can be commonplace to another. This is in part because the grotesque only remains grotesque as long as it is an unusual and alien. If the same type is repeated and conformed to, "the incongruity with the conventional type then disappears, and what was impossible and ridiculous at first takes its place among recognized ideals. The centaur and the satyr are no longer grotesque; the type is accepted" (Santayana 260). Partly because of its complexity and inexactitude, it is a term which is frequently used simply as a synonym for "revolting" or to describe anything generally deformed or disfigured. This simplification ignores several crucial aspects of the grotesque: it is not only revolting and disfigured, but also uncanny, playful, and strongly associated with laughter. While the sublime is terrifying but pleasurable, the grotesque is disturbing but delightful. Kayser touches on this opposition:

The true depth of the grotesque is revealed only by its confrontation with its opposite, the

sublime. For just as the sublime . . . guides our view toward a loftier, supernatural world, the ridiculously distorted and monstrously horrible ingredients of the grotesque point to an inhuman, nocturnal, and abysmal realm. (58)

This conception of the sublime and the grotesque as opposites is useful for my study. I submit, however, that their extremes can meet. There is in fact only a thin line between them. Geoffrey Galt Harpham argues that “[i]t is one characteristic of revolutions, whether literary, political, or scientific, that they liberate, dignify, and pass through the grotesque. A shift in vision . . . and suddenly the deformed is revealed as the sublime” (*On the Grotesque* 20). When pushed, one can create or become the other.

That slippage between the sublime and the grotesque becomes especially evident in late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. During the Romantic period, both the sublime and the grotesque underwent radical changes. Indeed, the Romantic sublime is perhaps the most well-known manifestation of the sublime in literary history. The Romantic poets, most famously William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, emphasize the sublimity of nature. In Wordsworth’s words,

. . . the opposite sides of a profound vale may ascend as exact counterparts, or in mutual reflection, like the billows of a troubled sea; and the impression be, from its very simplicity, more awful and sublime. Sublimity is the result of Nature’s first great dealings with the superficies of the earth. (*The Prose Works* 181)

The Romantic conception of the natural sublime is intricately linked to solitude. The Romantics often present sublime experience as a solitary encounter with the natural world: as Wordsworth wrote, “I stand alone / Upon the summit of this naked cone” (*Collected Poetry* 16). Similarly, representations of the grotesque became less concerned with the body and more with the mind.

Bakhtin claims that “[p]re-Romanticism and Romanticism witnessed a revival of the grotesque genre but with a radically transformed meaning. It became the expression of a subjective, individualistic world outlook very different from the carnival folk concept of previous ages” (37). The solitude and solitary contemplation that play a key role in the Romantic sublime have a darker side, which the Romantic grotesque explores: isolation and alienation. Bakhtin argues that “[u]nlike the medieval and Renaissance grotesque, . . . the Romantic genre acquired a private ‘chamber’ character. It became, as it were, an individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation” (37).

Tightly braided together with Romantic literature is the Gothic. As Bakhtin points out, one “variety of the new grotesque [witnessed by pre-Romanticism and Romanticism] was the Gothic or black novel” (37). Traditionally, the Gothic period began in 1764, the same year Kant published *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*. In that year, Horace Walpole applied the term *gothic* to literature by giving his novel *The Castle of Otranto* the subtitle “A Gothic Story” (Hume 288). The genre combines horror with romance and is characterised by ominous settings, intense emotions, and supernatural creatures like vampires and ghosts (which may or may not have rational explanations). It also frequently contains many traditional elements of the grotesque—deformed bodies, animated corpses, humans with animal traits or abilities, and madness, which “is inherent to all grotesque forms, because madness makes men look at the world with different eyes” (Bakhtin 39). Similarly, Gothic literature often contains many of the classic elements used to invoke the sublime. Writers regularly drew on Burke, whose “illustrations of the sublime have provided something like a readers’ guide to the Gothic novel: vast cataracts, raging storms, lofty towers, dark nights, ghosts and goblins, serpents, madmen” (Morris 300-301).

The Gothic approach to the sublime, however, took a dark turn. Vijay Mishra argues that the Gothic sublime is a counterpoint to the Kantian sublime, “to which all theorizations of the sublime return” (20), which emphasises reason above all else. Kant’s argument ultimately makes the subject experiencing the sublime more powerful than the sublime object itself: “The extraordinary emphasis on the primacy of reason meant that the subject, though scarred, nevertheless emerges from the encounter with the sublime more or less triumphant” (Mishra 38). The Gothic sublime, according to Mishra, tells the other side of the story: what happens when reason is *not* triumphant. Instead, the encounter with the sublime leaves the subject fractured: “The Gothic narrative is to be located at the indeterminate moment of the near-abyss where the subject says, I am my own abyss, and is faced with a horrifying image of its own lack of totality” (38). In that abyss, I would argue, lies the possibility of the grotesque. The subject is confronted with the “eternal incomplete unfinished nature of being” (Bakhtin 52). Mishra argues that in the Gothic period, the very etymology of the term *sublime* takes on new implications:

. . . the Gothic sublime is . . . not the vast oceans and tempests of Longinus or Kant, but the subterranean passages and the grotesque deformations contained in the dreamscape of the Gothic imagination. The Gothic sublime is the *sub*, not as “up to” (as in *sub + limen*, the Latin etymology of sublime), but rather as the *below*, the underneath, of the *limen*, of the limit of one’s perception . . . From the depths of the underworld/abyss/unconscious the Gothic invades the discourses of the sublime. (39)

Through its association with the underworld, the Gothic sublime encounters that which is literally of the caves: the grotesque. In Gothic literature, the psychological sublime and grotesque are both employed to explore the limits of perception. The sublime, which is *up to the limit*, and the grotesque, which “transgresses its own limits” (Bakhtin 26), are both essentially concerned

with the limits of human perception and understanding, and the depths of the mind. The Romantics had already grappled with the idea that the sublime “calls upon the mind to grasp at something towards which it can make approaches but which it is incapable of attaining” (Wordsworth, *The Prose Works* 354), but Gothic literature developed this further through fear, passion, mystery, and the supernatural.

Intricately connected to the Gothic sublime and grotesque is the concept of the uncanny. In 1919 Sigmund Freud published his influential essay “Das Unheimliche,” in which he develops the idea of the uncanny through an analysis of Hoffmann’s Gothic story “The Sandman.” While the uncanny is often discussed in relation to the sublime and the grotesque separately, the concurrence of the three is generally overlooked. I would argue that the uncanny presents a psychological version of both the sublime and the grotesque. Freud’s argument that “the uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar” (123) and that it is “actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it” (148) is strikingly similar to theory of the grotesque. The grotesque, like the uncanny, is associated with “[t]he alienation of familiar forms” (Kayser 122) and “an estranged world” (184). Kayser posits that the grotesque

. . . does not constitute a fantastic realm of its own (for there is none such). The grotesque world is—and is not—our own world. The ambiguous way in which we are affected by it results from our awareness that the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence. (37)

Even Bakhtin, who focuses primarily on the carnivalesque aspects of the grotesque, agrees that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, those aspects faded in favour of more sinister elements:

The world of Romantic grotesque is to a certain extent a terrifying world, alien to man.

All that is ordinary, commonplace, belonging to everyday life, and recognized by all

suddenly becomes meaningless, dubious and hostile. Our own world becomes an alien

world. Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure. (38-39)

It is in the alienation of the familiar world that the grotesque intersects with the uncanny. In fact, the very word *Unheimliche* contains these implications. The word is a reversal of *heimlich*, which literally means *homely*. *Das Unheimliche* therefore has its roots in “the domestic space of the home, . . . which is homely, comfortable and familiar” (Edwards 7). The uncanny is not merely strange and unfamiliar, but specifically an inversion of the familiar, which “negates feelings of comfort, triggering an estrangement of the feeling of not being at home, ‘unhomely.’” Both the uncanny and the grotesque rely not on fear of the completely alien, but the distortion of a familiar world. At the same time, the uncanny intersects with the sublime through the power of repressed or suppressed memories and emotions. The uncanny is frightening, unsettling, and always obscure, because it is suggestive of that which we do not know that we do not know. The sublime terror of the uncanny is psychological, unlike than the physical terror of the natural world or the intellectual terror of Kant’s mathematical sublime. In another sense, though, it presents a psychological version of the mathematical sublime, because it is concerned with the infinite depths of the human psyche and the infinite possible versions of the self. I will further explore these issues, along with the impact of the uncanny and the Gothic on the sublime and the grotesque, in Chapter Two.

A direct descendant of the Gothic and a common avenue for the uncanny in twentieth-century and contemporary literature is horror fiction (Carroll 4). Through horror fiction, the traditional grotesque tropes like deformed bodies, crazed villains, and supernatural monsters

were carried into contemporary fiction. In the early twentieth century, the advent of film revolutionized horror fiction, and indeed horror played an important role in the popularisation of film, especially in the 1930s (Young 136). Film was a particularly important invention for the grotesque, because the grotesque is so concerned with physicality and transformation. For the first time, audiences could actually watch bodies undergo grotesque changes. Despite its low place on the literary totem pole, horror is also one of the areas in which the sublime is most present in contemporary fiction. Like Gothic fiction, horror relies in large part on fear, which is an important ingredient in both the sublime and the grotesque. H.P. Lovecraft, perhaps the most influential horror writer of the early twentieth century, writes that “[t]he oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (“Introduction”). My third chapter will focus on the ways in which horror television uses degrees of fear, pleasure, and beauty to tip the grotesque into the sublime.

It may seem as if there are few texts as dissimilar as an epic poem from the seventeenth century, a Gothic/Romantic novel from the nineteenth century, and a television series from the twenty-first century. Their differences, however, suggest that the connection between the sublime and the grotesque is not limited to a particular time period or genre. While *Paradise Lost* was written before either the sublime or the grotesque had been well theorized, it would become foundational to the theory of the sublime. By the time *Wuthering Heights* was written, the sublime was clearly defined and well established as an aesthetic category. In the post-Enlightenment environment, Brontë engaged with the seemingly clear line between the sublime and the grotesque. Both the sublime and the grotesque are essentially concerned with limits—the limits of the ordinary, of morality, of fear, and of what the human mind can grasp—and with how the mind reacts when forced to confront or surpass those limits. When they are used

together, the mind is obliged to grapple with the limits between the two. A century and a half after Brontë, *Hannibal* was created in an era of post-postmodernism and new media, in which the critical history had analysed and disseminated the sublime to the point of rendering it very difficult to achieve in art. In that literary landscape, *Hannibal* creates a sublime that is founded on the fear, pain, and paradoxical pleasure evoked by the grotesque. While I will elucidate the three works in their separate historical contexts, comparing them allows us to trace the relationship between the two aesthetic categories and explore their aesthetic implications.

Chapter One

“A Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n”: The Sublime and the Grotesque in *Paradise Lost*

When *Paradise Lost* was published in 1674, it was almost immediately associated with the sublime. John Toland, one of its earliest editors, identified “the unparallel’d Sublimity and Force of the Expression, with the delicacy of his [Milton’s] Thoughts, and the copiousness of his Invention” (119); soon after, Joseph Addison argued that Milton “has carried out Language to a greater height than any of the *English* poets have ever done before or after him, and made the Sublimity of his stile equal to that of his Sentiments” (290; original emphasis). It was, in fact, in large part through *Paradise Lost* scholarship that the idea of sublimity began to take shape. Milton remains essential to theory of the sublime to this day. In contrast, there have been no substantial studies of the grotesque mode in *Paradise Lost*. Considering Milton’s extensive use of the grotesque, from the traditional fusion of human with animal bodies to the subtler representations of estrangement and alienation, this is surprising. His presentation of the grotesque is often the more positive, generative grotesque championed by Bakhtin, while his presentation of the sublime is developed primarily through the characters of Satan and Death. Through an examination of the sublime and the grotesque in the allegory of Sin and Death, the chariot of the Son, the fallen world, and Satan, I will argue that in *Paradise Lost*, the sublime and the grotesque do not merely coexist but repeatedly create, inform, and augment one another.

The clearest representation of the grotesque and the sublime in the poem is in the allegory of Sin and Death. Milton’s Death has been an essential element in scholarship on the sublime since Edmund Burke’s landmark treatise on the sublime and the beautiful. Burke focuses at length on the passage in Book Two when Satan first encounters his son, Death:

The other shape,

If shape it might be call'd that shape had none
 Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb,
 Or substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,
 For each seem'd either; black it stood as Night,
 Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,
 And shook a dreadful Dart; what seem'd his head

The likeness of a Kingly Crown had on. (Milton, *Paradise Lost*¹ 2.666-73)

The description, according to Burke, is “dark, uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree” (2.3), though the word *description* is perhaps inaccurate. This is, rather, a lack of description, a suggestion that the “king of terrors” (2.3) cannot be described. Milton deliberately chose not to use the typical personification of death, an animated skeleton. By making Death obscure and formless instead, Milton hits at one of the reasons humans fear death in real life: we do not know what lies beyond. Milton makes sure that an understanding of Death always lies just beyond the reader’s grasp. The implication, in fact, is that it is *impossible* to grasp. The sublime is essentially concerned with the limits of human understanding and imagination. As Burke argues, “[t]o make anything very terrible, obscurity seems in general to be necessary. When we know the full extent of any danger, when we can accustom our eyes to it, a great deal of the apprehension vanishes” (2.3). No skeleton or gruesome monster could be as terrifying as the shapeless mystery. Because we can never accustom our eyes to Death, we can never know the full extent of the danger he poses.

In his discussion of the scene, however, Burke makes no mention of the other figure present: Sin. In *Paradise Lost* she is described as

¹ Henceforth “PL.”

Woman to the waste, and fair,
 But ended foul in many a scaly fould
 Voluminous and vast, a Serpent arm'd
 With mortal sting . . . (2.650-52)

Sin, a beautiful woman fused with a revolting serpent, recalls the hybrid animals of the Roman grottos to which the concept of *grotto-esque* first applied. Her body is double, a mixture not only of human with animal but also of the beautiful with the repulsive. She is, in short, a confusion of categories. At the same time, Sin exhibits gaping wounds open to the world: her son, Death, “Tore through [her] entrails” in birth (2.783), while her other children, the Hell Hounds, repeatedly “creep . . . into her womb, / And kennel there” (2.656-58), where they “gnaw / [her] Bowels, thir repast” (2.799-800). Bakhtin places great emphasis on bodily orifices as elements of the grotesque, because “it is within them [orifices] that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome” (317). The original grottos depicted images of bodies breaking boundaries by merging with one another. In real life, orifices, including wounds, are the most apparent way that the limits of the body can be breached. As Bakhtin argues, “the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” (26). The process of exposing organs is part of the disordered, inverted world of the grotesque: “inside out, vice versa, upside down” (370). In Sin’s case, her injured body is rendered even more grotesque because the wound lays open the “the grotesque knot of the womb” (Bakhtin 225). The womb is the one place in which the body’s boundaries truly break, creating two separate beings where there was only one. On top of that, Sin’s children are of a different species and exist in an infinite cycle of birth and reentry into the womb. By giving birth to dogs, Sin further mixes the human with the animal; by

giving birth repeatedly to the same children, she breaches the limits between her body and the outer world.

While Sin and Death might at first appear to represent a very clear dichotomy of grotesque and sublime, their relationship is in fact far more complex. Sin quite literally creates Death, and it is only through that creation that she becomes grotesque. Before his birth, Sin was beautiful and well-formed. It was when Death ripped his way from her womb that “all [her] nether shape thus grew / Transform’d” (2.784-85) into the body of a serpent.² The two create each other, and following their creations they serve to enhance each other through contrast. As seen above, it is principally the use of obscurity that so strikes Burke in the description of Death: “[n]o person seems better to have understood the secret of heightening, or of setting terrible things . . . in their strongest light by the force of a judicious obscurity, than Milton” (2.3). In contrast, Sin is drawn in utmost clarity. By first describing her and then having her present an account of her own history, Milton dwells not once but twice on the gruesome details of her torn entrails and gnawed innards, her perversion of maternity, and her fusion of human with animal. Though her body is shocking and disturbing, it can be and is encompassed by the English language. Death remains obscure, beyond our ability to understand. In *Paradise Lost*, the lurid details of Sin’s body and the dark mystery of Death’s shapelessness throw each other into relief. Death’s sublime obscurity would not be so striking without the contrast with his grotesque mother, nor would Sin’s grotesque physicality be as powerful without the formless spectral shadow beside her. Though they are distinct beings, they are “Inseparable” (10.250) and “Death from Sin no power can separate” (10.251).

² One might argue that Satan’s creation of Sin is grotesque, because springing fully formed from Satan’s head was a transgression of bodily limits. I would posit, however, that the act of transgression alone does not make Sin herself grotesque. Rather, the “Goddess arm’d” (2.757), a clear reference to Athena, seems to represent the classical body against which the grotesque is defined.

The idea of the sublime and the grotesque creating and enhancing one another is most evident in the allegorical figures of Sin and Death, but it is present in more subtle ways throughout the poem. Although grotesque imagery is perhaps to be expected in Hell, in Heaven it is surprising. Milton nonetheless uses it just as readily to depict the divine as to depict the profane. In Heaven, traditionally grotesque imagery appears in a deeply positive way. Through Sin, Milton creates a horrifying image of two creatures merged together. The unfallen angels, however, can merge with one another in a way that is not horrifying in the least. When Adam asks Raphael if angels can have sex, he replies:

Whatever pure thou in the body enjoy'st
 (And pure thou wert created) we enjoy
 In eminence, and obstacle find none
 Of membrane, joynt, or limb, exclusive barrs:
 Easier then Air with Air, if Spirits embrace,
 Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure
 Desiring; nor restrain'd conveyance need
 As Flesh to mix with Flesh, or Soul with Soul. (PL 8.622-629)

There are grotesque elements at play here, because the description recalls grotesque transgression and fusion of bodies. This type of fusion, however, is nothing like the half-woman, half-serpent body of Sin, or the grotesques of the original grottos. For Bakhtin, the bodily grotesque is manifest when “the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation” (317). Milton takes this very grotesque concept and turns it into an airy, spiritual mingling that, in its confusion and obscurity, approaches the sublime. The fusion of separate entities is the essential, original principle of the

grotesque but, for angels, it is something pure, “unimpeded by gross earthiness” (Olmsted 180), that does not transgress boundaries but transcends them. Through the angels, Milton takes a grotesque concept and demonstrates how a slight change can render it sublime.

Where the angels present a sublime version of a grotesque idea, the Son and his chariot present a distinctly grotesque image that yet produces a sublime scene. “The Chariot of Paternal Deitie” (6.750) is one of the most grotesque images in the poem:

Flashing thick flames, Wheele within Wheele undrawn,
 It self instinct with Spirit, but convoyd
 By four Cherubic shapes, four Faces each
 Had wondrous, as with Starrs thir bodies all
 And Wings were set with Eyes, with Eyes the wheels
 Of Beril, and careering Fires between . . . (6.751-56)

The Son is riding a chariot carried by four-faced cherubim completely covered in eyes, and the whole thing is on fire. The winged, quadruple-faced creatures with their countless eyes could have been lifted from the Roman grottos themselves. The fusion they present is even more grotesque than that of Sin: Sin is a combination of only two creatures, a woman and a snake, while the cherubim are a blend of multiple faces, bird parts, and innumerable eyes, creating a vivid “sense that things that should be kept apart are fused together” (Harpham, *On the Grotesque* 11). In particular, creatures “with eyes on their shoulders or on their backs” are classic examples of “grotesque character[s]” (Bakhtin 345). Milton takes great pains to draw attention to the eyes: “the fourfold-visag’d Foure, / Distinct with eyes, and from the living Wheels, / Distinct alike with multitude of eyes” (6.845-47). The eyes are not even confined to the cherubim’s bodies—they spread to the wheels of the chariot, too. Can the cherubim see out of the eyes on

the wheels? Are the cherubim, in fact, not just carrying the chariot but part of it? Can the wheels themselves see? The presence of human features on an inanimate object, especially a feature which suggests the capacity for sight, is an even clearer fusion of “things that should be kept apart” (Harpham, *On the Grotesque* 11). Milton based this representation of the Son’s Chariot on Old Testament sources, drawing on images of divine power and strength which are grotesque rather than sublime. The Chariot is largely taken from Ezekiel 1:

And I looked, and, behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire infolding itself, and a brightness *was* about it, and out of the midst thereof as the colour of amber, out of the midst of the fire. Also out of the midst thereof *came* the likeness of four living creatures. And this *was* their appearance; they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. (*King James Bible*, Ezek. 1.4-6; original emphasis)

Milton’s use of this source, instead of any of the many other biblical images of divinity, makes the Son’s appearance truly alarming. Instead of relying on the New Testament or on Christian representations of God or Christ, he chose to refer back to a grotesque image from the Old Testament. Just as he could have depicted Death in the obvious form of a skeleton, Milton could easily have portrayed the Son in a more classic light, like the calmly stoic guise he takes in *Paradise Regain’d*, for example, or a purely majestic warrior like Michael. There is a strong contrast between the Son as he appears in *Paradise Lost* and traditional representations of Jesus Christ, which makes the grotesque Chariot even more disturbing and astonishing.

The grotesque Chariot is not just a mode of transportation for the Son, but a means of expressing his divine power. The Son not only rides the Chariot and controls the cherubim, but also appears to merge with them. He looks through the eyes on the wheels and on the cherubim,

controlling them with his spirit: “One Spirit in them rul’d, and every eye / Glar’d lightning, and shot forth pernicious fire” (6.848-49). In this moment, “the multiple creatures of the Chariot merge with the Son to form a unit” (Butler 111). After taking the traditionally sublime Son of God and conveying his power through the grotesque chariot, however, Milton uses that image to evoke the sublime. Once he has created a sense of confusion and astonishment, it is easy to shift it away from the grotesque and towards awe-inspiring power. When the Son begins to charge, what was grotesque becomes sublime:

At once the Four spread out their Starrie wings
 With dreadful shade contiguous, and the Orbes
 Of his fierce Chariot rowld, as with the sound
 Of torrent Floods, or of a numerous Host.
 Hee on his impious Foes right onward drove,
 Gloomie as Night; under his burning Wheelles
 The stedfast Empyrean shook throughout . . . (6.827-833)

Glorious, powerful, and terrifying, the Son takes on sublime qualities. As Barbara Lewalski posits, “the Son obtains surpassing glory when he rides in his mystic, triumphal chariot” (127). The focus is no longer on the bizarre physicality of the angels, but on the speed and strength of the Son and the impact he has on his enemies. The fact that the Son does not actually attack the rebel angels is perhaps the clearest indication of his power. His arrows fall “on either side” (PL 6.844) but do not strike. “[D]ivine omnipotence,” as Lewalski comments, “defeats the rebels by its awful manifestation more than by its exercise” (129). The Son does not need to attack them directly. The mere sight of him terrifies the rebels so much that they throw themselves “headlong” (6.864) into “the wastful Deep” (6.862). I would argue that in a regular chariot, or

even a regular flaming chariot, the Son would not be as overwhelming and terrifying as he is when “riding the grotesque Chariot of Paternal Deity” (Butler 115). The Son does not actually do anything in this scene other than ride the Chariot. His power, in this moment, comes from the Chariot and the cherubim with whom he merges. When his “Spirit in them rul[es],” (6.848), they become his weapons, shooting fire and arrows. Rather than taking the obvious route and presenting the Son in a more traditionally sublime form, Milton uses disturbing grotesque imagery from the Bible itself to create a moment of astonishing, confusing, and glorious sublimity.

The Son’s power is grotesque not only in his moments of fury, but also in his moments of creation. In his depiction of the creation of the material world, Milton uses grotesque imagery in a very positive fashion. For Milton, as for Bakhtin, bodily functions like childbirth and defecation, though grotesque, can be generative and regenerative. The Son’s creation of the material world contains clear elements of the grotesque, particularly through the references to bodily functions. As Kent Lehnhof puts it, the creation “involves an instance of divine defecation” (437). In a very scatological image, “downward purg[es] / The black tartareous cold Infernal dregs” (7.237-238). This type of scatological imagery is also found in Hell, where it contributes to the Hellish terrain and tone. Hell is described as follows:

. . . Land that ever burn’d
 With solid, as the Lake with liquid fire;
 And such appear’d in hue, as when the force
 Of subterranean wind transports a Hill
 Torn from *Pelorus*, or the shatter’d side
 Of thundring *Ætna*, whose combustible

And fewel'd entrails thence conceiving Fire,
 Sublim'd with Mineral fury, aid the Winds,
 And leave a singed bottom all involv'd
 With stench and smoak . . . (1.228-37)

The landscape's entrails are on display, much like Sin's, and they cause stenching, smoking "Winds" that "leave a singed bottom." "[D]ebasement," Bakhtin argues, "is the fundamental artistic principle of grotesque realism; all that is sacred and exalted is rethought on the level of the material bodily stratum or else combined and mixed with its images" (370-71). For Satan and his cohort to be banished to a world of flatulence and singed bottoms is an ultimate debasement, adding insult to what is already a profound injury. When Milton uses scatological metaphors in his description of Creation, however, he reveals that they are not exclusively debasing. That description presents the same use of "the material bodily stratum" as generative, rather than degrading.

The positive bodily functions associated with Creation are not limited to the scatological, but also include pregnancy and birth: "The Earth was form'd, but in the Womb as yet / Of Waters, Embryon immature involv'd, / Appeer'd not" (7.276-78). As seen above in the case of Sin, copulation, pregnancy, and childbirth are some of the most standard examples of the grotesque, because they are the only states in which humans actually merge and split into separate beings. The Son's very physical creation of the world draws on the grotesque mode, but it is very different from the other images of birth: Satan's creation of Sin and Sin's birthing of Death and the Hell Hounds. It is still grotesque, but that energy is now generative rather than destructive. Instead of making it a sexless, bodiless creation, Milton revels in the bodily imagery: "Rather than suppressing the offices of the lower bodily stratum in his representation of divinity,

Milton frequently foregrounds them, elaborating an idea of divinity that owes as much to the grotesque as it does to the classical” (Lehnhof 437). Once again, the Son’s power is distinctly grotesque. Milton demonstrates how the grotesque, in different contexts, can be either positive or negative, and either sacred or profane.

Although the Son’s power is grotesque, his actions serve to bring balance and boundaries to a previously disordered world:

He [the Son] took the golden Compasses, prepar’d
 In Gods Eternal store, to circumscribe
 This Universe, and all created things:
 One foot he center’d, and the other turn’d
 Round through the vast profunditie obscure,
 And said, thus farr extend, thus farr thy bounds,
 This be thy just Circumference, O World. (7.225-231)

The created world, despite the grotesque process of creation, is one of absolute order, where the “Earth self ballanc’t on her Center [hangs]” (7.242). There is neither sublime nor grotesque in Eden because, with everything in balance, there are no extremes. Until Adam and Eve fall, the Earth is in perfect equilibrium. The animals live in harmony with one another. The vegetation is lush and abundant, but it is neither threatening nor overgrown. As David Simpson argues, “Milton’s paradise [is] governed by the aesthetics of the beautiful” (248). In Eden, there is nothing to terrify Burke or to overwhelm Kant. Everything is lovely, which means there is no opportunity for confusion or terror—no opportunity for either the sublime or the grotesque. *Paradise Lost* tells the story of that beautiful, picturesque world as it transforms into one that is both sublime and grotesque.

The Fall disrupts the peace and throws off the balance. The immediate results are markedly grotesque. Kayser's conception of the grotesque as an "estranged world" (184) is literally realized in the postlapsarian Earth. The sun, the moon, and the winds all change their behaviour and "Some say he [God the Father] bid his Angels turne ascense / The Poles of Earth twice ten degrees and more / From the Suns Axle" (10.668-70). Adam and Eve themselves, like the world, become grotesque after the Fall. Through their act of transgression, they disfigure and pervert God's image:

Therefore so abject is thir punishment,
 Disfiguring not Gods likeness, but thir own,
 Or if his likeness, by themselves defac't
 While they pervert pure Natures healthful rules
 To loathsom sickness, worthily, since they
 Gods Image did not reverence in themselves. (11.520-25)

Adam and Eve are spiritually disfigured and alienated from God and from the world they knew. Adam's vision of the future reveals that there is still worse to come for humanity. He witnesses a "monstrous crew" (11.474) of "Numbers all diseas'd, all maladies / Of ghastly Spasm, or racking torture" (11.480-81). All of this clearly shows the world that Adam and Eve knew being changed, estranged, in a perfect example of "the familiar and apparently harmonious world [being] alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence" (Kayser 37). With the Tower of Babel, that alienation reaches a new height:

Forthwith a hideous gabble rises loud
 Among the Builders; each to other calls
 Not understood, till hoarse, and all in rage,

As mockt they storm; great laughter was in Heav'n
 And looking down, to see the hubbub strange
 And hear the din; thus was the building left
 Ridiculous, and the work Confusion nam'd. (12.56-62)

The very language of the humans is distorted. Unable to understand or make themselves understood, the builders become estranged from one another. This brings in another element of the grotesque: the comic. Bakhtin argues that the comic and laughter are essential to the sublime, stating that the “grotesque is based” on “[t]he principle of laughter and the carnival spirit” (49). The builders are ridiculous, causing laughter that is not regenerative, but mocking. The fallen world is diseased, fragmented, deformed, estranged, and ludicrous.

There is another consequence, however. While the Garden of Eden was beautiful and picturesque, the fallen world is finally sublime. This is an estranged world, a world that has shifted on its very axis. Those very grotesque elements, however, create the opportunity for the sublime, because the sublime requires extremes. Though the immediate result of the Fall is estrangement and a reversal of the previous order, the ensuing chaos is terrifying, dark, and obscure. Adam's observation that “the Winds / Blow moist and keen, shattering the graceful locks / Of these fair spreading Trees” (10.1065-67) presents a clear picture of the sublime shattering the beautiful. The sublime has traditionally been opposed to the beautiful. Burke, for example, argues that the sublime is fundamentally terrifying and compelling, no matter its form, but that the beautiful must be well-formed and pleasing to behold, possessing “[s]moothness” (3.14) and “*delicacy*” (3.16). According to Kant, the experience of the sublime “does violence to our imagination” (*Critique* 129), while the beautiful “constitutes an object of satisfaction” (129).

Milton's prelapsarian world is calm, well-formed, aesthetically pleasing, and altogether beautiful. After the Fall, the powerful extremes of nature make it confusing and overwhelming:

The Sun

Had first his precept so to move, so shine, order

As might affect the Earth with cold and heat

Scarce tollerable, and from the North to call

Decrepit Winter, from the South to bring

Solstitial summers heat. (10.651-656)

Unfallen nature was calm and temperate and offered no threat to Adam and Eve, but now the fierce winds come "arm'd with ice / And snow and haile and stormie gust and flaw" (10.697-98). This new world typifies Burke's terrifying sublime, Kant's overwhelming sublime, and in particular the natural sublime so celebrated by the Romantics, which is "synonymous with dramatic natural phenomena, with mountains and oceans, storms and deserts" (Duffy, "Introduction"). Sublimity on Earth is only possible after grotesque estrangement and alienation. Symbolizing the joint entrance of the grotesque and the sublime, Sin and Death, the clearest physical manifestations of the grotesque and the sublime in the poem, arrive together. Sin enters first, but Death follows "pace for pace" (10.589), for the two are "Inseparable" (10.250). Together, they further disturb the peace, calm, and beauty that reigned before their arrival, bringing with them disease and mortality. Their inseparability suggests the connection between the sublime and the grotesque.

The grotesque elements in Satan's temptation of Eve foreshadow the sublime's dependence on the grotesque in the fallen world. Satan is described as "Squat like a Toad" (4.800), whispering to Eve in her sleep. His goal, to "reach / The Organs of her Fancie" (4.801-

802), and there to engender “misjoyning shapes” (5.111), is described in language indicative of the grotesque. By inhabiting the serpent, Satan mixes his angelic spirit and intellect with that of an animal, thus fusing “things that should be kept apart” (Harpham, *On the Grotesque* 11) in a traditionally grotesque act. He himself certainly views it as grotesque, crying,

O foul descent! that I who erst contended
 With Gods to sit the highest, am now constrained
 Into a Beast, and mixt with bestial slime,
 This essence to incarnate and imbrute . . . (9.163-66)

The fact that he enters the serpent through its mouth (9.187), listed by Bakhtin as the most grotesque feature (317), renders the possession even more grotesque. The serpent’s ability to speak is what first attracts Eve’s attention and allows Satan to lure her to the forbidden fruit, claiming that eating it gave him the power of speech. Thus the temptation itself, which causes the Fall and allows the sublime to enter the world, is reliant on Satan’s grotesque combination of speech—a human or in this case angelic attribute—with the form of the animal.

Indeed, in his temptation of Eve and throughout the poem, Satan is one of the most grotesque characters. Simultaneously, however, he is one of the most sublime. Satan has been associated with sublimity since the earliest scholarship, to the point of becoming “an ‘objective correlative’ of the very experience of the sublime” (Bruffee 255). According to Burke, “[w]e do not anywhere meet a more sublime description than this justly celebrated one of Milton, wherein he gives the portrait of Satan with a dignity so suitable to the subject” (2.4). The portrait in question is from the second book of *Paradise Lost*, when Satan presides over a council in Hell:

. . . he above the rest
 In shape and gesture proudly eminent

Stood like a Tower; his form had yet not lost
 All her Original brightness, nor appear'd
 Less then Arch Angel ruind, and th' excess
 Of Glory obscur'd: As when the Sun new ris'n
 Looks through the Horizontal misty Air
 Shorn of his Beams, or from behind the Moon
 In dim Eclips disastrous twilight sheds
 On half the Nations, and with fear of change
 Perplexes Monarchs. (1.589-99)

The piling up of comparisons to a tower, the rising sun, an eclipse, revolution, and fearful kings creates a rapid succession of powerful and majestic images. Like Death, Satan is only described through simile and metaphor. His appearance is never defined in concrete terms. The overall effect is not so much one of obscurity, as it is with Death, but of confusion. As Burke argues, the essence of the sublimity in this passage lies in the fact that “[t]he mind is hurried out of itself, by a crowd of great and confused images; which affect because they are crowded and confused. For, separate them, and you lose much of the greatness; and join them, and you infallibly lose the clearness” (2.4). The passage is preoccupied with limits, which serves to enhance the confusion and uncertainty. Satan has not completely lost his brightness *yet*, but is losing and will lose it. The similes involve dawn, the time in between night and day, and an eclipse, when the categories of day and night are confused. Satan exists in a liminal state, impossible to see distinctly or categorize effectively. If Death’s sublimity is rooted firmly in ideas of terror, Satan’s is rooted in an onslaught of powerful images that confuses and overwhelms the mind.

One of the reasons Satan is difficult to imagine and to describe is that his body is literally changing. He is no longer the bright archangel that he was in Heaven. Physically, he has changed so completely that the other angels do not recognize him. When the angels confront him in the Garden of Eden, they say to him,

Think not, revolted Spirit, thy shape the same,

Or undiminisht brightness, to be known

As when thou stoodst in Heav'n upright and pure;

That Glorie then, when thou no more wast good,

Departed from thee, and thou resembl'st now

Thy sin and place of doom obscure and foule. (4.835-840)

Because his form is changing, he is in transgression of his own bodily limits. Though he does not mix animal with human, like Sin, he is in the midst of an “unfinished metamorphosis” (Bakhtin 24). Sin is changed, but she is not changing: her form, half woman and half serpent, is fixed by the time the reader meets her. Satan, on the other hand, is still in the midst of a transformation both internal and external. He no longer has his previous angelic form, and throughout the poem he willingly takes the shape of a cherub, a cormorant, black mist, a “Plebeian Angel militant” (10.442), a serpent, and a toad, before being forcibly transformed into a serpent in Book 10. His body is never stable, and his physical metamorphosis reflects his grotesque inner journey of alienation and estrangement. According to Kayser, “the observation of a soul in the process of being estranged from itself and thus ineluctably bound for destruction” is a necessary ingredient of the grotesque (143). Could there be a more apt description of Satan’s state? Over the course of the poem, he becomes increasingly estranged from himself: “From hero to general, from general to politician, from politician to secret service agent, and thence to a thing that peers in at

bedroom or bathroom windows, and thence to a toad, and finally to a snake—such is the progress of Satan” (Lewis 99). Satan, despite his early assertions that he is “still the same” (1.256), is conscious of and tormented by the fact that he has changed and is changing, wracked by “the bitter memorie / Of what he was, what is, and what must be” (4.24-25). His “progressive degradation, of which he himself is vividly aware” (99), is not just in his physicality, position, and relation to God, but is also internal. The narrator lingers on the “Hell within him” (4.20) and on Satan’s “inward grieffe” (9.97). The reader is presented with a portrait of Satan’s soul in the process of being estranged from God and good.

That estrangement is not preordained or unstoppable. It is not too late for Satan to repent and return to Heaven, and he is very aware of this.³ In Book 4, he agonises over his desire to return home and his knowledge of the fate that awaits him if he continues on his course, crying, “O then at last relent: is there no place / Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?” (4.79-80). It is only with great pain that he admits to himself the impossibility of surrender: “So farwel Hope, and with Hope farwel Fear, / Farewel Remorse: all Good to me is lost” (4.108-109). This is not a speech meant to sway another character, because he is entirely alone, which means that he is being honest—or at least as honest as he can be to himself. The lines are remarkably sympathetic, for they reveal that he still does feel hope, fear, and remorse, and can both recognize and desire goodness. As Satan succeeds in suppressing those feelings, he participates in his own self-alienation. It is a path he follows voluntarily, starting when he “becomes aware of himself as other, during the revolt and the build-up to the War in Heaven; that is, when he realizes he cannot applaud the values that result in the Son being promoted above him” (Forsyth 55). In that moment, he recognises that he is alienated from God for reasons that appear to him to

³ Satan’s transformation is explored in detail in John Creaser’s excellent essay “‘Fear of change’: Closed Minds and Open Forms in Milton,” to which my own discussion is indebted.

be arbitrary. Following that initial realization, he chooses to alienate himself still further both physically, by throwing himself into “the wastful Deep” (6.862), and psychologically and spiritually, by choosing evil.

Throughout the poem, Satan is determined to violate boundaries: his fall was caused by an attempt to raise himself above God, he insists on his capacity to “make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n” (1.255), and his goal is “to confound the race / Of mankind in one root, and Earth with Hell / To mingle and involve” (2.382-4). In the process of doing so, he crosses boundaries within himself. By bidding farewell to hope, fear, and remorse and declaring “Evil be thou my Good” (4.110), he deliberately changes his own category and renders himself grotesque. Satan’s divine punishment physically represents the choices he himself has made. Though God chooses it, it is a fate that reflects the internal changes that he has already wrought on himself. In a moment of cruel poetic justice, he is forcibly transformed into a serpent, a form he originally took willingly. He challenges traditional limits in ways that are grotesque both physically and spiritually, and reaps the consequences. In punishment, he is not only miserable, abject, and permanently alienated from God and good, but also condemned to undergo a grotesque transformation into a serpent every year.

It is also, however, by crossing boundaries and confusing categories that Satan evokes the sublime. Indeed, critics often hail as sublime the precise passages in which Satan’s alienation from God and from his own former state is most agonising. One such example is his “Noble Apostrophe to the sun” (Dennis 46). When Satan comes to the Garden of Eden, the narrator describes how “his grievd look he fixes sad, / Sometimes towards Heav’n and the full-blazing Sun” (4.29-30), in a moment that indicates how far he has fallen and how much he mourns his loss:

O thou that with surpassing Glory crown'd,
 Look'st from thy sole Dominion like the God
 Of this new World; at whose sight all the Starrs
 Hide thir diminisht heads; to thee I call,
 But with no friendly voice, and add thy name
 O Sun, to tell thee how I hate thy beams
 That bring to my remembrance from what state
 I fell, how glorious once above thy Spheare;
 Till Pride and worse Ambition threw me down
 Warring in Heav'n against Heav'ns matchless King . . . (4.32-41)

The apostrophe is one of the most sublime moments in the poem. After being imprisoned in Hell and then making his way through Chaos, Satan is in a far better position to appreciate the glory of Heaven and the sun than he was before his fall. The resulting soliloquy is laden with dread and melancholy, both of which Kant identifies as elements of the terrifying sublime (*Observations* 47). The apostrophe deliberately calls attention to the boundaries Satan has crossed, by mentioning the “state” (4.38) from which he fell. Satan’s state of alienation and his internal transformation and degradation, all results of his fall from Heaven, are what allow this moment of sublimity. He is miserable and terrified, and Milton uses those intense extremes of emotion to create sublime poetry. In the process of breaking down barriers and crossing categories, Satan remains a sublime figure who pushes at the limits of perception, imagination, and emotion, thereby illuminating the connection between the sublime and the grotesque. In Satan’s deepest moments of grotesque alienation there lie the seeds of the sublime.

In Heaven, Hell, and Earth, Milton presents the interaction of the sublime with the grotesque. The two aesthetic categories work to make each other more striking and potent through contrast. Milton mixes the two together, demonstrating how they inform and create each other. He locates one within the other, creating a universe where any sublime moment has grotesque roots, and those grotesque roots contain the seed of sublimity. As we shall see, the complex relationship between the sublime and the grotesque is evident in the centuries following the publication of *Paradise Lost* and remains essential to literature that grapples with ideas of sublimity: because the sublime in *Paradise Lost* is as “Inseparable” from the grotesque as Death is from Sin (10.250) and because *Paradise Lost* is fundamental to scholarship on the sublime, elements of grotesquery echo through later portrayals.

Chapter Two

“Exquisite Extremes”: Sublime Depths and Wuthering Heights

Almost two centuries passed between the publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667 and *Wuthering Heights* in 1848. In that time, theory of both the sublime and the grotesque underwent many changes. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the focus placed on each became far more internal, as writers and artists further developed the psychological aspects that Milton introduces in *Paradise Lost*. The post-Enlightenment world saw a far stricter categorization of ideas and themes than Milton’s time. *Wuthering Heights* was written at the crossroads of Gothic and Romantic literature, after the sublime had been well established as an aesthetic principle—even *the* aesthetic principle. It is not surprising, then, that “[e]verything associated with *Wuthering Heights* is akin to the sublime: the natural setting and the passion of Catherine and Heathcliff—dangerous, destructive, mysterious, awe-inspiring” (Williams 125). At the same time, *Wuthering Heights* presents a deadly cycle of death and abuse, driven by characters who, in their violence, vengefulness, and self-loathing, embody the grotesque. The grotesque, though not as central as the sublime, was also gaining critical attention in the nineteenth century, most notably through Hugo, with Ruskin soon following. Whereas Milton unknowingly created the basis of subsequent theory of the sublime, Brontë was interacting with aesthetic categories that were firmly in place. Neither the sublime nor the grotesque, however, is conducive to strict limits and clearly defined categories. The sublime, which is *up to the limit*, pushes or transcends them, while the grotesque breaks them, violates them, or “transgresses its own limits” (Bakhtin 26). *Wuthering Heights* presents both the sublime and the grotesque as extremes that dismantle traditional structures and boundaries. Brontë builds a world that constantly tests or tears down limits and categories, and presents a set of characters who either find sublimity in grotesquery or

perceive any challenge to traditional boundaries as grotesque. The two frame narrators, Mr. Lockwood and Nelly Dean, both struggle to maintain traditional categories, while the tumultuous, “wuthering” setting persistently undermines them. Catherine and Heathcliff thrive on the combination of sublimity and grotesquery that is *Wuthering Heights*, while Lockwood and Nelly firmly reject it. Through these different viewpoints, the novel examines the thin line between sublimely transcending limits and grotesquely breaking them.

Brontë frames the story with two narrators: the stranger Lockwood, who comes to *Wuthering Heights* after most of the action has taken place, and the housekeeper Nelly, who has known virtually all the other characters since they were children. Both narrators are perturbed by the transgression of boundaries that takes place at *Wuthering Heights*. As an urban man from the south, Lockwood is unaccustomed to the dangerous extremes on the moors. Christopher Heywood argues that “Emily [Brontë] framed her story within Lockwood’s experience of a Sublime or terrifying at the beginning and a complementary calm at the close of his narrative.” Indeed, Lockwood’s experience in the early chapters, before he begins to hear the convoluted history of *Wuthering Heights*, foregrounds classic elements of sublimity, most notably in the dangerous but awe-inspiring natural setting, while contrasting that sublimity with a constant undercurrent of grotesque imagery. The first chapter describes Lockwood’s arrival at *Wuthering Heights*, where he observes both the “atmospheric tumult” and “a quantity of grotesque carving” above the threshold of the house (Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*¹ 4). The word “grotesque” is here used in the original sense, referring to “a wilderness of crumbling griffins,” and the carvings foreshadow the grotesquery within the house. The threshold of *Wuthering Heights*, which should mark the boundary between the outside and the inside, is destabilized by the fantastic, grotesque

¹ Henceforth “WH.”

creatures that guard it. Because of their placement above the threshold, however, the carvings also recall the sublime: in Latin, the word *limen*, one of the roots of the word *sublime*, literally means “the top piece of a door” (Shaw 119). The carvings are directly on the *limen*, symbolically mixing the sublime with the grotesque and implying that thresholds at Wuthering Heights, be they doors or windows or limits of a more psychological kind, are not to be trusted. Lockwood enters the house with very clear, domestic ideas about limits and categories, and struggles to impose them on the tumultuous world of Wuthering Heights, which pushes everything to its limit and leaves no boundaries uncrossed.

In the early chapters, Lockwood pays particular attention to the name of the house, from which the title of the novel is derived: “‘Wuthering’ being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its [the house’s] station is exposed in stormy weather” (WH 4). The sublime has long been firmly connected to the immense and terrifying aspects of the natural world. Kant, for example, associates the sublime with “thunder clouds towering up into the heavens, bringing with them flashes of lightning and crashes of thunder, volcanoes with their all-destroying violence, hurricanes with the devastation they leave behind, the boundless ocean set into a rage, [or] a lofty waterfall on a mighty river” (*Critique* 144). Towering mountains, vast landscapes, and tempestuous oceans arouse a sense of grandeur and suggest infinity. Stormy weather can have the same effect while also imparting an intense excitement. Kant’s dynamical sublime deals specifically with dangerous extremes of nature. For Kant, natural phenomena evoke the sublime when, dangerous and powerful, they threaten to overwhelm our reason.

Lockwood’s experience of the house is deeply coloured by the geographic location and weather, which exemplify that traditional natural sublime. In order to reach Wuthering Heights,

he must “wad[e] through heath and mud” to “that bleak hill-top [where] the earth [is] hard with a black frost, and the air [makes him] shiver at every limb” (7). The sublime is traditionally associated with terror and danger, but when Lockwood first arrives at Wuthering Heights, he fails to understand that the sublime storms can be fatal. Because he is not a native of the moors, he is entirely unprepared for how dangerous the sublime landscape really is. He therefore makes a perilous trip on foot across the countryside, before realizing the danger to which he is subjecting himself. That realization only comes when he observes the “dark night coming down prematurely, and sky and hills mingled in one bitter whirl of wind and suffocating snow” (12) and dares not leave, for fear of “being discovered dead in a bog or a pit full of snow” (13). Lockwood’s introduction to Wuthering Heights and the reader’s introduction to *Wuthering Heights* are in fact an introduction to the sublimity of nature, and in particular to the danger implicit in that sublimity. From the beginning, Lockwood foregrounds the dangerous natural world, which remains a powerfully sublime backdrop even when the action moves to the more temperate Thrushcross Grange.

At Wuthering Heights there is also persistent grotesque transgression of boundaries. The intensity of the storm forces Lockwood out of his comfort zone, leaving him trapped overnight in a house where he is unwelcome and poorly treated. The inside of the house is just as stormy as the outside, but while the extreme and dangerous setting “suggests the limit of the habitable” (Vine 340), inside the house, the storminess leads to a grotesque confusion of categories:

. . . there can be no stable distinction between the inside and outside of Heathcliff’s dwelling; for . . . the difference between interior and exterior, attack and convulsion, becomes indeterminate as the exterior enters in and as the within comes to share the properties of the without. Trembling between internality and externality, wuthering

becomes a movement of othering: a passing of boundaries that takes the outside in and the inside out, where the familiar is made strange (the domestic interior Lockwood encounters is riven by the storms it should exclude) and the strange comes to inhabit the familiar. (340)

That confusion and transgression of boundaries, which seem strange to an outsider, are normal at *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood finds himself alone in the sitting room, a room of confusion and disarray. A dresser, with “its entire anatomy [laid] bare” (4) is heaped with “oatcakes and clusters of legs of beef, mutton, and ham,” along with “sundry villainous old guns,” “a couple of horse-pistols,” and, “by way of ornament, three gaudily-painted canisters.” There are dogs scattered in corners of the room, and directly underneath the dresser there lies “a huge liver-coloured bitch pointer, surrounded by a swarm of squealing puppies,” which Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue “seems to be a parody of Milton’s grotesquely maternal Sin, with her yapping brood of hellhounds” (261). This juxtaposition of raw meat and weapons with oatcakes and dishes, with violent dogs swarming beneath, immediately presents a bizarre mixture of categories. As Gilbert and Gubar would have it,

[d]ead or raw flesh and the instruments by which living bodies may be converted into more dead flesh are such distinctive features of the room that even the piles of oatcakes and the “immense pewter dishes . . . towering row after row” (ch. 1) suggest that, like hell or the land at the top of the beanstalk, *Wuthering Heights* is the abode of some particularly bloodthirsty giant.

As Gilbert and Gubar suggest, *Wuthering Heights* is a very different world from the one Lockwood is accustomed to, a world where “incompatible elements [are] juxtaposed, [and] the existing world estranged” (Kayser 161). Even the architecture presents confusing boundaries.

Lockwood spends the night in a bedroom within a bedroom, but even that room-within-a-room-within-a-house is not *interior* enough to keep him safe from the invasive *exterior*: the tapping of a branch on his window makes him feel compelled to smash the window open, letting in the storm and perhaps a ghost. It is in that room that he discovers Catherine's diary, which is in fact a text within a text: "a pen and ink commentary . . . covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left" on the pages of the books in her "library," which seems to be made up of religious texts (16). It is this odd diary, "in its state of dilapidation," that gives both Lockwood and the reader the first small pieces of information about Catherine, Heathcliff, and the Earnshaw family. A "Testament" is simultaneously the record of a child's rebellious thoughts and transgressions, including an account of her reluctance to read the Bible. Nothing is put to its right use and nothing is as it seems, at Wuthering Heights. The interior of the house proves to be just as grotesque and unstable as the carvings above the threshold imply. Just as Lockwood does not know to stay at home when a storm is coming, he does not know how to handle the grotesque interior of Wuthering Heights.

The inhabitants of the house, who are just as incompatible with the categories Lockwood expects and desires, further augment the grotesqueness of the situation. Lockwood, accustomed to normative family relationships, does not know how to react to his uncouth hosts. He tries desperately to foster civility and understand the relationships between the odd, bitter, angry family members. He repeatedly attempts to impose order and familiarity, assuming that Catherine is married to either Heathcliff or Hareton and that Hareton is Heathcliff's son, and describing them in typically domestic terms that clearly do not apply. He waxes lyrical, for example, about how happy Heathcliff must be "surrounded by [his] family, and with [his] amiable lady as the presiding genius over [his] home and heart" (10). Lockwood's desperate

attempts to impose domesticity include referring to the younger Catherine, who has shown herself to be nothing but bitter and angry, not only as an “amiable lady” but also as a “beneficent fairy” (11). His vain attempts to box everyone into traditional categories serve only to highlight the unconventional household. The most grotesque moment is perhaps when Lockwood sees a basket of kittens and assumes they are the younger Catherine’s pets, only to discover that what he beholds is, in fact, a pile of dead rabbits. There is a dark humour to the moment, but also a creeping sense of death, implications of transformation, and a sense that all is not as it should be. Lockwood’s experience recalls Kayser’s assertion that “the grotesque presupposes that the categories which apply to our world view become inapplicable” (185).

The structure of the novel itself mirrors the grotesque architecture and interior of *Wuthering Heights*. The confusing double (and occasionally triple) frame narrative and the repetition of names and events contribute to the grotesque tone, by fracturing the narrative and conflating characters. When Lockwood goes to sleep at *Wuthering Heights*, he is plagued and disoriented when “the air swarm[s] with Catherines” (16). Catherines abound in the novel itself, and are difficult at first to keep straight; as do Lintons and Heathcliffs. Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton, Heathcliff, Edgar Linton, Linton Heathcliff, Catherine Heathcliff, Hindley Earnshaw, Hareton Earnshaw—it is a dizzying mix. *Wuthering Heights* exemplifies what Freud describes as “the constant recurrence of the same thing, the repetition of the same facial features, the same characters, the same destinies, the same misdeeds, even the same names, through successive generations” (Freud 142). This repetition and mirroring represent the idea that each doubled character has alternate possible destinies, a phenomenon that Freud discusses in his essay on the uncanny (143). The infinite possibilities of the human mind, including the various paths that each human might take and the different people they might eventually become, is

expressed in *Wuthering Heights* through uncanny mirroring and fracturing. Heathcliff could have been Hareton, had things gone slightly differently, but instead he becomes Hindley; Hareton comes very close to being Heathcliff; Linton almost manages to be Edgar; Catherine Earnshaw becomes Catherine Linton, denying the possible existence of Catherine Heathcliff, but Catherine Linton becomes Catherine Heathcliff against her will before finally returning to the beginning of the circle and making herself Catherine Earnshaw. This uncanny fracturing and mirroring creates an alien world, both familiar and estranged.

The complex double frame narrative fractures the story even further. The narrative is unreliable and nonlinear. As Lockwood tries to sort out who is who and what happened to whom, characters and names are confused, creating a grotesque mixture of identities. Lockwood comes to Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange expecting both solitude and an immersion in the natural world, but is completely unprepared for the reality of life on the moors. The world of Wuthering Heights appears to him as a strange and alien blend of terrifying extremes and shattered conventions. He is driven away by both the sublimity of the stormy landscape, which is far more dangerous than he expected, and the grotesque attitudes of the inhabitants.

Throughout the book, Brontë demonstrates how both the sublime and the grotesque work in opposition to Lockwood's expectations. Even the storms and heights that he expected escalate beyond the limit of what he can conceive or handle, and are intermingled with grotesque elements. The framing device allows Brontë to set up the interplay of sublime and grotesque against the normative backdrop of Lockwood's expectations. From the first chapters, he has entered a world so different from the one he is used to that he cannot comprehend it. That new world is, however, not in fact "hell or the land at the top of the beanstalk" (Gilbert and Gubar 261), but simply the result of boundaries, limits, and categories being broken or confused. It

exemplifies Kayser's argument that under the influence of the grotesque, "the familiar and apparently harmonious world is alienated under the impact of abysmal forces, which break it up and shatter its coherence" (Kayser 37).

In *Wuthering Heights*, the abysmal forces in question are for the most part driven by Heathcliff. Lockwood immediately sees Heathcliff as a grotesque character who destabilizes the world around him. He notes that Heathcliff "is a dark-skinned gipsy in aspect, in dress and manners a gentleman" (5)—a confusion of categories in the mid-1800s. In his manner, Heathcliff reinforces the confusion. He bids Lockwood enter, but Lockwood comments that "[t]he 'walk in' was uttered with closed teeth, and expressed the sentiment, 'Go to the Deuce'" (3). Heathcliff's welcome to Lockwood is simultaneously a curse. When Nelly's story begins, the grotesque undercurrent becomes stronger. Like Lockwood, Nelly is a normalizing presence, not equipped to handle the ravaging extremes of *Wuthering Heights*. The main part of the story is filtered through her memory as she recounts it to Lockwood. Her perspective, as a relatively uneducated servant and a native of the moors, is vastly different from his educated southern outlook. Rather than demonstrating how confused the categories are in the present, Nelly clearly shows exactly how destabilizing Heathcliff's presence has been over the last decades. Even though she grew up at the Heights along with the Earnshaw children, she was already an adolescent by the time Heathcliff arrived. She, like Lockwood, views Heathcliff as grotesque from the moment they first meet, as children. Heathcliff the child is constantly presented as between human and animal or object, between life and death, and between divinity and profanity. Nelly refers to him not as "he," but as an "it": "its face looked older than Catherine's; yet when it was set on its feet, it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand" (29). The fact that Heathcliff at first speaks only gibberish further associates him with the

animal, the alien, and the other. Named for a dead Earnshaw son, he also blurs the boundaries between life and death. From the moment he appears like magic from Mr. Earnshaw's coat, he balances precariously between Heaven and Hell: "You must e'en take it as a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil," (29) says Earnshaw. As Steven Vine argues, "Heathcliff is an Earnshaw son and not an Earnshaw son, belongs to the Heights and does not belong to the Heights, is the fulfillment of Earnshaw's patriarchal desire and exceeds that desire as an unincorporated other" (343). The fact that on Heathcliff's first night at Wuthering Heights Nelly does not know where to put him, and just leaves "it on the landing of the stairs" (30), demonstrates her inability to place him in any defined category or role. Throughout the book, his liminality, animalism, and devilry are repeatedly emphasised and deepened. Isabella asks, "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (106) This question of *what* he is associates him with the grotesque, which is essentially concerned with uncertain categories and identities. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, "[u]niting human and animal traits, the skills of culture with the energies of nature, Heathcliff's character tests the boundaries between human and animal, nature and culture, and in doing so proposes a new definition of the demonic" (294). Through his association with animals and demons and his consistent challenge to traditional boundaries, Heathcliff is a grotesque character.

In direct opposition to Lockwood, who tries to impose boundaries and stability, Heathcliff breaks them down. He disrupts the ordered, patriarchal world, shattering its coherence, by violently challenging boundaries and confusing categories. Heathcliff exemplifies Bakhtin's claim that "[d]own, inside out, vice versa, upside down, such is the direction of all [grotesque] movements. All of them thrust down, turn over, push headfirst, transfer top to bottom, and bottom to top" (370). His role in the story is to turn the world inside out, putting

himself, the outsider, inside Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, while casting *down* and *out* Hindley, Hareton, and Edgar, the rightful heirs, and calling Catherine *up* from her grave. Heathcliff is fatherless and therefore “threatens the fabric of the patriarchal society that has excluded him, even as he threatens more specifically the patriarchal structure of the Earnshaw family” (Heiland 117). After usurping Hindley’s place, he goes on to corrupt Hareton, who should be the landowner and was at first a good and intelligent child, turning him into an uncouth servant who cannot speak a sentence without spewing profanity. Heathcliff admits to taking particular pleasure in debasing Hareton because the child is naturally intelligent. Degrading Hareton is pleasurable because it is a reversal and a corruption of his nature, not just because Heathcliff enjoys seeing his enemies in disgrace. Heathcliff compares Hareton to “gold put to the use of paving stones” and exalts in the knowledge that he “takes pride in his brutishness” (169). Catherine, a rebel in her own right, develops a deep friendship with Heathcliff. According to Nelly, even as a child, Catherine was “a wild, wick slip” (33), who could ride “any horse in the stable” and who asked her father for a whip as a gift (29). Heathcliff’s encouragement of Catherine’s unfeminine rebellion, which challenges the patriarchal system and the societal gender norms, often involves the literal breaking of boundaries. When Heathcliff is locked into a garret in punishment, for example, Nelly finds that Catherine managed to break in to be with him: “Instead of finding her outside, I heard her voice within. The little monkey had crept by the skylight of one garret, along the roof, into the skylight of the other” (47).

Catherine and Heathcliff both challenge ideas of identity, by breaking down traditional ideas of personality and individuality. Here, however, they do not violate boundaries, but transcend them. They each identify so strongly with the other that they feel they have a single identity, a single soul shared between the two of them. “[H]e’s more myself than I am,”

Catherine declares. “Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same” (63). This intimate connection she shares with Heathcliff does not seem at all strange to her. She says to Nelly, “[S]urely you and everybody have a notion that there is or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here?” (64) To be a singular entity is an alien thought to Catherine. She says:

My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff’s miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it . . . My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! He’s always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being.

For Catherine and Heathcliff, their oneness constitutes not a transgression of boundaries but rather a sublime transcendence of the limits of identity. As Vine puts it, Catherine “exceeds the bounds of her own being” (349). Heathcliff experiences the same attachment. He identifies her as his “life” and his “soul” (WH 130). When Nelly suggests that Catherine’s marriage to Edgar would separate them, her response is one of absolute shock: “‘He [Heathcliff] quite deserted! we separated!’ she exclaimed, with an accent of indignation. ‘Who is to separate us, pray? They’ll meet the fate of Milo’” (64). Daniela Garofalo comments that “Catherine alludes to the Greek myth about the athlete who attempted to uproot a tree, was trapped under it, and eaten by wolves. Milo, famous as the strongest athlete in Greece, is finally defeated by forces of nature he cannot control” (Garofalo 832). In this moment, Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship is compared to powerful, dangerous, and overwhelming forces of nature. By transcending the limits between

their identities, they become the single unit that Gilbert and Gubar refer to as “Catherine-Heathcliff” (265).

Together, Catherine and Heathcliff attain a sublime transcendence of individual identity. Their separation leaves Catherine emotionally fractured and delirious. Her separation from Heathcliff is “impracticable” (64), as she puts it, because the two share an identity. To identify so strongly with Heathcliff, however, Catherine must exist in a state of constant division: “[i]f she *is* Heathcliff, what she is is to be perpetually divided from herself. If their separation is impracticable, they are also always already separated, beyond any hope of joining” (Miller 96-97). She cannot be completely united with him, like Plato’s original humans, but must always live as half herself. When they are together, they experience their shared identity as a sublime merging, but separated, they experience themselves as grotesque and incomplete. When Catherine’s husband Edgar orders their separation, it sparks in her a vivid hallucination. She forgets the most recent years of her life and is brought back to the moment when she and Heathcliff were separated for the first time, after her father died: “my misery arose from the separation that Hindley had ordered between me and Heathcliff. I was laid alone, for the first time” (98). Claiming that “if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger” (64), she effectively describes an “estranged world” (Kayser 184). Catherine’s sense of herself disintegrates, exemplifying what Kayser describes as “a soul in the process of being estranged from itself” (143). She is terrified by her own reflection, which she is unable to recognize: “don’t *you* see that face?” she says to Nelly, certain that “the room is haunted” (96). Indeed, she is haunted not by a ghost but by an alternate version of herself, and “[f]ailing to coincide with herself in reflection, Cathy becomes other to herself, fractured into an alterity that is not resolved in identity” (Vine 355). This inevitably culminates in the realization

that she *is* the alien version of herself, that she has “become[] estranged from herself and from all the universe” (Kelly 25). Catherine is horrified by the thought of being Mrs. Edgar Linton of Thrushcross Grange, which is, of course, exactly who she is. As Gilbert and Gubar would have it, “the image Catherine sees in the mirror is . . . hideously familiar, and further proof that her madness may really equal sanity. Catherine sees in the mirror an image of who and what she has really become in the world’s terms” (282). Catherine is trapped, she says, in the “shattered prison” (125) of her body and her life as Mrs. Linton. The sequence, which Gilbert and Gubar call “the grotesque playing out of Catherine’s emotional fragmentation” (280), shows the different sides of Catherine fracturing as her personality splits apart. The fragmentation is occasioned by her separation from Heathcliff, which destabilizes her identity.

Even after Catherine’s death, the grotesque fragmentation continues. Her corpse is buried but her spirit, separated from her body, remains a presence haunting the moors, and versions of her are reincarnated in the younger generation. During her entire delirium, Catherine is pregnant. Catherine’s dying pregnant body recalls Sin, who literally gives birth to Death. Bakhtin argues that a dying pregnant woman is the epitome of the grotesque:

The individual is shown at the stage when it is recast into a new mold. It is dying and as yet unfinished; the body stands on the threshold of the grave and the crib. No longer is there one body, nor are there as yet two. Two heartbeats are heard: one is the mother’s, which is slowed down. (26)

Catherine splits into two, her dying self and her child, who bears her name and has her eyes. As Gilbert and Gubar put it, “birth is, after all, the ultimate fragmentation the self can undergo . . . She [Catherine] breaks apart into two Catherines—the old, mad, dead Catherine fathered by Wuthering Heights, and the new, more docile and acceptable Catherine fathered by Thrushcross

Grange” (287). Both the younger Catherine and Hareton have her eyes, a fact that haunts Heathcliff: “the fact that Catherine’s descendants ‘have’ her eyes tells Heathcliff not so much that Catherine endures as that she is both dead and fragmented. Catherine II has only her mother’s eyes, and though Hareton has more of her features, he too is conspicuously not Catherine” (300). A version of her even lives on in her brother, because “*his* eyes, too, [are] like a ghostly Catherine’s with all their beauty annihilated” (WH 108). She escapes her coffin to haunt the moors, both as a spirit and through her scattered family members. The impossibility of keeping her contained is symbolised by the placement of her grave:

The place of Catherine’s interment, to the surprise of the villagers, [is] neither in the chapel under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It [is] dug on a green slope in a corner of the kirk-yard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry-plant have climbed over it from the moor . . . (131)

Catherine is buried in a place of liminality, where the moors cross into the kirk-yard. Even in death, she constantly challenges categories and limits.

Amid all those fractured identities, Catherine and Heathcliff’s merging provides a sublime solution. They both refuse to be separated, and the very prospect all but destroys Catherine. In order to avoid separation, they aspire to break down the limit between life and death. Contemplating her imminent death, Catherine says, “I shall . . . take [Heathcliff] with me: he’s in my soul” (125). Similarly, Heathcliff’s reaction to her death is to invite her to haunt him. To request a haunting is to invite a shattered and uncanny world. Yet for Heathcliff, it is Catherine’s absence that creates an “estranged world” (Kayser 184), an “abyss where [he] cannot find [her]” (WH 130). He begs her to “take any form—drive [him] mad!” Madness, traditionally associated with the grotesque, is preferable to sanity without her. After Catherine’s death,

madness is sublime and sanity is grotesque, because to be sane would be to live on in the grotesque “abyss” without her. Unable to join with her in spirit, Heathcliff obsesses over her corpse. He digs up her grave, tears out part of her coffin and insists that his own body be eventually buried beside hers, so that their corpses can “dissolv[e]” together (220). This would lead to a grotesque merging of bodies, so that “by the time Linton gets to [them] he’ll not know which is which.” It would, however, simply be a grotesquely physical version of his true desire, which would entail a more sublime dissolving together, a complete merging of their identities and souls.

Catherine and Heathcliff’s mutual obsession is so powerful that it leads them both to reject the idea of Heaven, preferring to remain on the moors together. They challenge and confuse the categories of Heaven, Hell, and the mortal realm. Gilbert and Gubar describe Brontë as “Milton’s daughter” (253) and argue that *Wuthering Heights* is “a rebelliously topsy-turvy retelling of Milton’s and Western culture’s central tale of the fall of woman and her shadow self, Satan” (255). The “fall” of Catherine and Heathcliff mirrors Satan’s fall and rejection of Heaven, but with radically different implications. Satan wanted to rule Heaven and failed, and thereafter lives in agony and longs to return, prevented only by “*Disdain*” (PL 4.82); Heathcliff and Catherine reject Heaven because it holds no appeal for them. Catherine relates a dream of being “miserable” in heaven: “[H]eaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy” (63). This passage “reveals the mingling of agony and ecstasy” (Vine 349) that suggests sublimity. Catherine’s choice of afterlife is not motivated by a simple love for the Heights themselves—it is dependent on Heathcliff. During her delirium, she imagines her grave in the churchyard and

cries, “I’ll not lie there by myself: they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won’t rest till you [Heathcliff] are with me” (99). Heathcliff likewise says to Nelly, “I have nearly attained *my* heaven; and that of others is altogether unvalued and uncoveted by me” (255). *His* heaven, the reader understands, is to reunite with Catherine. He asserts that “existence, after losing her, would be hell” (117). None of the traditional categories can be applied to Catherine-Heathcliff. They transcend and surmount them. In doing so, they become less reminiscent of Satan and more reminiscent of the angels in Milton’s Heaven, who can attain a complete fusion and transcendence of boundaries:

. . . if Spirits embrace,

Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure

Desiring; nor restrain’d conveyance need

As Flesh to mix with Flesh, or Soul with Soul. (PL 8.626-629).

Spiritually, Catherine and Heathcliff achieve a similar transcendence. In their case, however, that merging of identity leads to a rejection of God and Heaven. In *Paradise Lost* the fallen angels lose the capacity to merge with each other, but Catherine and Heathcliff do not. Consumed by one another, they instead lose any desire for Heaven. They put each other above God, leading to a fall that, unlike Satan’s, is not regretted. Catherine and Heathcliff do not need to try to convince themselves that the mind “Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n.” (PL 1.255), because each other’s presence or absence accomplishes that. Their experience of paradise has nothing to do with divinity and everything to do with each other.

Catherine and Heathcliff’s rejection of Heaven and refusal to be separated results in the presence of ghosts throughout the novel. Ghosts, even when they are not grotesque in the traditional sense, imply an estranged and alien world. They disrupt the established laws of the

universe, breaching the boundaries between life and death. As remnants of the living, they both are and are not part of the real world. At the same time, the Gothic horror of ghosts can evoke the sublime. In his article “The Sublimity of Catherine and Heathcliff,” Patrick Kelly argues that “[t]ranscendent experiences also included the preternatural, a phenomenon that took a dark turn in the Gothic romance. The mystery in which ghosts were shrouded, for example, could not fully be grasped by the human mind, and so inspired in the terrified beholder both fear and awe” (25). Through the different ways in which various characters conceive of ghosts, Brontë examines the possibilities for both the sublime and the grotesque.

The novel establishes itself as a ghost story from the very beginning, when Lockwood spends his first night at the Heights and is visited by Catherine’s ghost. He experiences the haunting as an encounter with a grotesquely alienated world: “The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, ‘Let me in—let me in! . . . I’ve been a waif for twenty years!’” (21) The encounter demonstrates elements of both the sublime and the grotesque, as do Nelly’s experiences of witnessing the haunted Heathcliff. Nelly herself never sees the ghost, but she watches Heathcliff interact with it. She is horrified by “a strange joyful glitter in his eyes” (249) and again by “[t]hose deep black eyes! That smile, and ghastly paleness! It appear[s] to [Nelly], not Mr. Heathcliff, but a goblin” (251). Heathcliff becomes increasingly inhuman, to the point that Nelly even doubts her own memories of “tend[ing] him in infancy, and watch[ing] him grow to youth, and follow[ing] him almost through his whole course” (252). When she watches him stare at a ghost that she cannot see, he shakes her sense of her own reality. In their reactions to the haunting, Heathcliff, Lockwood, and Nelly demonstrate different conceptions of the sublime and the grotesque. For Lockwood and Nelly, the normalizing influences who do not want categories

to be mixed or boundaries to be crossed, the experience is primarily grotesque. The grotesque “intense horror of nightmare” (20) overshadows any sublime terror at the transcendence of life and death. As Kelly points out, “for Nelly, ghosts inspire only fear, not rapture” (29).

Heathcliff, however, experiences the haunting as sublime. He breaks and threatens boundaries and conventions in part because he does not wholly recognize them. For Heathcliff, the difference between grotesquely mixing categories and pushing limits to sublime heights is nonexistent. He begs the ghost to return: “Come in! Come in! Cathy, oh come. Oh do—once more! Oh! my heart’s darling, hear me *this* time—Catherine, at last!” (23). This yearned-for haunting creates a sense of the sublime by mixing terror with pleasure and presenting a character confronting the terrible without being terrified. For Heathcliff, it is a sublime experience to feel Catherine’s ghost haunting him. As Kelly puts it, “[h]aving heard his lodger describe his encounter with a Catherine Linton, Heathcliff wrenches open the lattice and does what no one with a normal fear of the supernatural would ever do” (28). Nelly is also witness to Heathcliff’s obsession with the dead Catherine. He says to her, “Her [Catherine’s] presence was with me . . . I felt her by me—I could almost see her, and yet I *could not!*” (221) Instead of feeling relieved that he cannot see the ghost, Heathcliff feels tortured. He cries, “I opened and closed [my eyes] a hundred times a night—to be always disappointed! It racked me!” Most people would be relieved to open their eyes and see that the ghost is not really there. For Heathcliff, however, any encounter with “his departed idol” (248) is a sublime experience. From his perspective, her ghost does not disrupt categories, but sublimely breaks the veil between life and death. Towards the end of Heathcliff’s life, Nelly witnesses him awed and overwhelmed by another ghostly visitation:

Now, I perceived he was not looking at the wall, for when I regarded him alone, it seemed, exactly, that he gazed at something within two yards distance. And whatever it was, it communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes; at least, the anguished, yet enraptured expression of his countenance suggested that idea. (253)

This conjunction of overwhelming pleasure and pain, of anguish and rapture, is the essence of the sublime.

When the boundaries between life and death are threatened, it creates a world both sublime and grotesque. Lockwood and Nelly represent normative fear of an estranged world where the rules do not apply. To them, it hardly matters if ghosts are grotesquely horrifying or sublimely terrifying; either way, they are unnatural and negative and challenge boundaries that should absolutely be left alone. Lockwood and Nelly demonstrate how some minds do not see the difference between the sublime and the grotesque. Both are frightening and disturbing, and to a mind that prefers neat categories, both are horrifying rather than transcendent.

The suggestion that Heathcliff reunites with Catherine after death, and that the two of them go on to wander the moors together, drives home the potential sublimity of ghosts while also demonstrating the mingled sublimity and grotesqueness of *Wuthering Heights*. According to Nelly,

the country folks . . . would swear on the Bible that he [Heathcliff] *walks*: there are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even within this house . . . [T]hat old man by the kitchen fire [Joseph] affirms he has seen two on-em looking out of his chamber window. (257)

Further, she encounters a young boy who is “crying terribly” because he saw “Heathcliff and a woman yonder, under t’nab.” Nelly herself insists that these are “[i]dle tales,” but nonetheless

she “[doesn’t] like being out in the dark” or “left by [herself] in [the] grim house.” The prospect of ghosts is frightening and undesirable to Lockwood and Nelly. Burke argues that “[w]hen danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible” (1.7). For Lockwood and Nelly, the terror of ghosts presses too close to be sublime. In their way of thinking, the strict categories of life and death are to be upheld above all. In the final paragraph of the novel, Lockwood denies the possibility that their spirits wander. He recounts his visit to Heathcliff’s and Cathy’s graves: “I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listening 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” (258). It is a beautiful and picturesque scene, undisturbed by ghosts. Lockwood is determined to box Catherine and Heathcliff into their coffins underground. He is disturbed by anything that challenges conventional boundaries and categories, and would far prefer to leave the dead in their graves. Instead of dwelling on the dead, his narration focuses more firmly on the second generation of lovers. The younger Catherine’s marriage to Hareton will restore the property to Hindley’s son, the rightful heir, and the family will withdraw from the sublime, grotesque Wuthering Heights to the more picturesque Thrushcross Grange. As Peter Grudin point out, if there are no ghosts and “if Heathcliff’s visions at the end of his life are the ‘fever ragings’ of a madman, the novel is informing us that all his passionate aspirations have been crushed, and subordinated to the healthier if less interesting standards implicit in the romance of Cathy and Hareton” (391). It is a shift that Grudin describes as a “change in focus, from the sublime to the banal . . .” In such a reading, the boundary-breaking sublime and grotesque of Wuthering Heights are shut away with the house itself. The doors are locked, the patriarchy is restored, and the destabilizing influences are laid to rest. The power of both the sublime and the

grotesque comes from challenging limits, boundaries, and categories, but Lockwood and Nelly would prefer that limits remain unchallenged. The characters' movement from sublime and grotesque to orderly and picturesque could represent a progression from the disordered, disruptive past to a future where everything has a clear place and definition.

What Lockwood fails to realize, however, is that "Heathcliff and Catherine manifest themselves only in turbulent weather" (Kelly 30). A "benign sky [with] moths fluttering among the heath and harebells" while "the soft wind [is] breathing through the grass" (WH 258) is not the circumstance in which Catherine and Heathcliff walk. Rather, Joseph has seen them "on every *rainy night* since his [Heathcliff's] death" (257; emphasis added), the little boy encounters the spirits on "a dark evening, threatening thunder," and Lockwood himself meets Cathy's spirit in the midst of a terrible storm. It is only in stormy weather that the ghosts will wander the moors. The estranged, grotesque, haunted world is made possible by the sublime natural setting. Grudin argues that if the ghosts *do* walk and "if the novel has objectified Heathcliff's visions, then he is not vanquished; he has attained something beyond the reach of the 'cloddish world' . . . of the younger lovers, and the emphasis of the novel remains on the grander subject" (391). No matter what choices the younger Catherine and Hareton make, and no matter what Lockwood and Nelly choose to believe, the threatening forces of the sublime and the grotesque cannot be neatly closed away, behind boarded windows or inside coffins underground. They burst forth, together, to threaten the neat boundaries of the picturesque world. Brontë ultimately suggests that despite attempts to impose order and limits, they will be overcome by grotesque violation, sublime transcendence, or a mixture of the two.

When *Wuthering Heights* was first published, it was so wildly unpopular that Emily Brontë's sister Charlotte wrote a strange defence of the book in the preface to the second edition.

She describes it as a “granite block” that “stands colossal, dark, and frowning, half statue, half rock: in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful” (“Editor’s Preface” 316). In a letter, she also writes that “the reader is scarcely ever permitted a taste of unalloyed pleasure; every beam of sunshine is poured down through black bars of threatening cloud” (*Selected Letters* 177). These descriptions, though unflattering in context, capture the sublime and grotesque elements so essential to the story. It is half terrible and half beautiful, always horribly compelling, and constantly mixing agony and ecstasy. Like the dying Heathcliff, the novel is “anguished, yet enraptured” with “both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes” (WH 253).

Chapter Three

“Praise the Mutilated World”: Sublime Murder and Grotesque Love in *Hannibal*

The twentieth century saw radical changes in the concepts of both the sublime and the grotesque, as both aesthetic categories were redefined by surrealism, modernism, and postmodernism. Current thinking about the sublime in particular seems worlds apart from the imaginations of Milton or Brontë. In contemporary art theory, the sublime has been divided into a range of distinct categories, including the technological sublime, the ecological sublime, the female sublime, the urban sublime, the suburban sublime, the cosmological sublime, and the nuclear sublime. Thomas McEvilley argues that “in the post-Modernist discourse . . . we are dealing with a kind of post-sublime. In the post-sublime every otherness is sublime—so each entity is sublime to every other entity, and the concept of the sublime has become a universal blank” (77). As a result, the meaning of each particular type of sublime is becoming increasingly narrow, while the concept of the sublime as whole becomes increasingly broad and indistinct.

Despite this vague twenty-first century understanding of sublimity, I will continue to treat the sublime in the more traditional sense, following Burke and Kant, as terrifying, overwhelming, and awe-inspiring. I submit that one of the factors contributing to the confused contemporary approach to sublimity is the fact that, in the post-sublime world, the traditional sublime that Milton presented and Brontë reacted against is difficult to attain. As Anthony Haden-Guest writes, in the contemporary world, technology and capitalism mediate the experience of the sublime:

Nowadays, I think, an honest artist would have to be aware of snow-mobiles and global warming as well as the fact that there is no landscape so savage, no “wilderness” so wild,

as not to bring a glitter to the developer's eyes, except for those places so remote and rugged . . . that they offer lucrative prospects for Extreme Sports promotions. (55-56)

In a world where CGI can reproduce any instance of natural sublimity, from tidal waves to volcanic eruptions to outer space, the sublime "seems mostly to have survived . . . in commercial media rather than in 'high' art" (53).

In this environment, one of the genres that still maintains the ability to evoke the sublime is horror, a direct descendant of the Gothic. I would argue that the reason horror retains its power is that it so often portrays the intersection of sublime with grotesque. As Susann Cokal puts it, "[h]orror works by exciting fear and sometimes pity through the grotesque, then building on that fear to create a sense of the sublime" (195). Horror fiction relies on a combination of fear, revulsion, discomfort, and fascination to frighten and horrify its audience. That combination, when done well, lends itself perfectly to the grotesque mode. Film was an important invention for the grotesque in works of horror. Physicality and transformation often play a key role in horror stories, and film radically changed the ways in which those forms of the grotesque can be portrayed. As Shai Biderman and William Devlin put it, "the cinematic appearance of the monster [is] an appearance that, for lack of better words, involves an unpleasant experience, and negative emotions like fear, dread, and disgust [which] anxiously draw[] [people] to sneak the excruciating peek." The pleasure viewers take in watching horror exemplifies those grotesque "phases of excitement" in which "the mind . . . *plays with terror*" (Ruskin, *Stones* 140). In horror fiction and particularly horror film, that excitement can develop into the sublime, which Burke describes as "delightful horror" (2.8). In order to entertain audiences, horror film uses the grotesque to arouse fear and fascinated pleasure, which can be intensified until it evolves into the overwhelming terror and awe of the sublime.

Bryan Fuller's television series *Hannibal* is a prime example of sublimity in contemporary horror film. The character of Hannibal the Cannibal, originally created by Thomas Harris in 1981, became a cultural icon after Anthony Hopkins's Academy Award-winning performance in the 1991 film adaptation of *The Silence of the Lambs*. Fuller's 2013-2015 television adaptation and re-imagining of the character expertly weaves together the sublime and the grotesque and, in doing so, both reveals and challenges the difficulties involved in creating sublimity in contemporary art. While *Paradise Lost* and *Wuthering Heights* begin with sublimity, *Hannibal* begins with the grotesque and builds very slowly towards the sublime. As a series that depends, both narratively and stylistically, on depictions of mutilated bodies, explorations of fractured minds, and portrayals of violent obsession, *Hannibal* relies on the grotesque. The series takes time to create conspicuously grotesque situations and images, working to highlight the elements that are artistic, beautiful, or compelling. It then carries them to an extreme in order to evoke the terrifying, overwhelming, transcendent feeling of sublimity, implying that in contemporary art, the only possibility for sublimity lies not in the grand and uplifting, but in terror and pain.

Hannibal addresses the grotesque in a very straightforward way, creating a blatantly grotesque backdrop against which it casts all the other action and themes. Two of the key symbols recurring throughout the show are animal hybrids: an elk stag with raven feathers and a Wendigo, a mythological monster with an emaciated human body, long claws for hands, hooves for feet, and the antlers of a stag. The Wendigo is a creature "from Algonquin myths surrounding the taboo of cannibalism. The Wendigo can either possess a person or the person can become the beast, most commonly when human flesh is eaten as a means of survival" (Breikss). As a part-human, part-animal, the Wendigo is grotesque in the most original sense. The two hybrid

creatures haunt the show, appearing in the protagonist's dreams and hallucinations in virtually every episode, and succeed in creating palpably grotesque overtones.

Aside from these instances of pure, traditional grotesquery, cannibalism, one of the greatest manifestations of the realistic grotesque, is an important theme and plot point. Bakhtin dwells at length on food and eating as forms of the grotesque, even in their non-cannibalistic forms. He argues that the act of eating blurs the boundaries between the self and the world, because “[t]he limits between animal flesh and the consuming human flesh are dimmed, very nearly erased. The bodies are interwoven and begin to be fused in one grotesque image of a devoured and devouring world” (221). For Bakhtin, “man triumphs over the world” when he “devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man’s advantage” (281). Cannibalism makes the act of eating even more grotesque, because it breaks taboos and transforms a human body into an inanimate food item. The focus on animal hybrids and cannibalism in *Hannibal* work to create a general atmosphere of grotesquery that is prevalent throughout all episodes.

It is in the artfully arranged corpses of murder victims, however, that the grotesque is most evident. In virtually every episode, bodies are twisted into complex “murder tableaux,” including a totem pole (SE1xE09) and a recreation of Botticelli’s *Primavera* (SE3xE02). Through these arrangements, the series immediately associates murder with the grotesque. The tableaux are grotesque in the most original sense, because they often include human bodies sewn into different shapes or merged with plants, animal remains, or inanimate objects: the skin and flesh is peeled off of several victims’ backs and arranged to look like angel wings (SE1xE05); Tobias Budge (Demore Barnes) not only turns human intestines into strings for instruments, but also kills a musician from the orchestra, forces the neck of a violin down his throat, chemically

treats the vocal cords, and plays them with a bow (SE1xE08); a human skull is repurposed as a bee hive (SE2xE04); a dead man is fused with a living tree, with branches threaded through his veins and limbs, and flowers replacing his organs (SE2xE06); a man's face and limbs are merged with the skeleton of a cave bear (SE2xE10); a corpse is sculpted into the shape of a shimmering firefly (SE3xE03); and these are only the most conventionally grotesque examples.

Not only do the tableaux involve the combination of human with animal and plant, but the audience almost always sees them in the form of lurid transformation sequences.

Transformation, one of the most traditional ingredients of the grotesque, heightens the pervasive air of grotesquery. The protagonist, Will Graham (Hugh Dancy), whose job involves analysing crime scenes to profile serial killers, has a vivid imagination and suffers from hallucinations and nightmares. He has bizarre dreams and visions of dead bodies coming to life, human and animal features fusing into monsters, and separate humans merging together. In one particularly graphic episode, Will is at a crime scene where a corpse has been “skinned,” “[b]ent,” “twisted,” and “trimmed” into the shape of an anatomically correct human heart (SE3xE02). As he analyses the scene, he loses control of his imagination, slipping into a hallucination. The huge heart starts to beat, pulsating wetly in front of him, before beginning to change shape. It slowly transforms from a giant beating heart into a nightmarish monster made up of flayed human limbs and the hooves and antlers of a deer. Slowly, the bound and folded limbs snap through the cords that tie them into the shape of a heart. Still missing its hands, feet, and head, the skinned body unfolds and begins to crawl towards Will on the stumps of its limbs. As it approaches, black hooves grow out of the stumps and black antlers emerge from the headless back.

The scene exemplifies several of the basic principles of the grotesque: a transformation, an unfinished metamorphosis, the combination of human with animal, and the coexistence of

death with life and movement. The mismatched body parts and glistening blood are especially horrifying because of the sounds they make as the limbs unfold. Frayed skin dangles from the ends of limbs as the creature bears down on Will, accompanied by shrill and grating music that hints at screams. The show lingers on the moment, using sound and visual techniques to intensify the horror. The film medium amplifies the sheer grotesquery of these transformation scenes and produces an even more visceral reaction. It is profoundly different to actually watch skin and muscles lifting up and changing shape than it is to merely read about it. Most readers cannot fully visualise what it would look like, without both a detailed knowledge of anatomy and the right turn of imagination to picture dangling bits of torn skin. Paintings, while more visually explicit than writing, cannot capture movement or show the actual process of transformation. The series is aware of the opportunities film offers for creating the grotesque, and uses them to full advantage. Every episode foregrounds the grotesque.

The use of mutilated bodies to create grotesque works of art encourages the audience to consider the idea of murder not only from a moral perspective, but also from an aesthetic one. The crime scenes are not solely repulsive and unsettling, but also compelling and at times beautiful. The challenge to conventional aesthetics is a key element in the show. The cadaver angels in “Coquilles” (SE1xE05), for example, are elegantly arranged, kneeling with their hands together in prayer and their “wings” extended behind them. When Will mentally reconstructs the murder and arrangement of the bodies, in order to profile the killer, the viewer watches what he imagines in graphic detail. He sees the wings spread open in one slow, elegant motion, with a grace that seems incompatible with the bloody, torn skin from which they are made. The wings are held up by multiple fishing lines, which radiate from behind the angels, glowing with a

golden light. They are conspicuously grotesque, but also shockingly beautiful. Andrea Zanin discusses the issue in her article about the series:

Disembowelment, decapitation, facial reconstruction, a masticated tongue...how is this art? . . . Forget classic notions of aestheticism proposed by the likes of George Hegel . . . or at least be prepared to *imagine* with a postmodernist perspective, one that gives you license to open your mind to the notion that an invoked sense of revulsion is as much a symptom of the aesthetic as is gushing glorification.

The cadaver artworks “remain ambivalent and contradictory; they are ugly, monstrous, hideous from the point of view of ‘classic’ aesthetics” (Bakhtin 25). In spite of that, they are often beautiful. The series works to create a highly aestheticized grotesque by making murder artistic.

Several of the murderers in the series explicitly view murder as art. Most notably, Francis Dolarhyde (Richard Armitage), the final villain of the series, is a serial killer inspired by William Blake’s painting *The Great Red Dragon and the Woman Clothed in Sun*. He believes that when he commits murder, he becomes the Great Red Dragon from the painting. *Hannibal*’s focus on the great Romantic poet and on the Red Dragon from the Book of Revelation recalls both the Romantic sublimity of *Wuthering Heights* and the sublimity of Milton’s Satan. In *Hannibal*, however, both become grotesque. Dolarhyde, who suffers from hallucinations, feels himself actually transforming into a dragon. The viewer is therefore treated to sequences of the man transforming into a winged, lizard-like creature, in moments that are grotesque in the most traditional sense. These transformation sequences, which come only in the last half of the final season, cement the series’ association of the grotesque with art and aestheticism, because Dolarhyde is transforming into a figure from a classic painting. The series works to excite a

sense of horror mixed with admiration and aesthetic appreciation, which it then builds slowly towards the terrifying, painful pleasure of the sublime.

By making murder and human corpses beautiful, *Hannibal* engages with the traditional difference between the beautiful and the sublime. Traditionally, beauty is calming where sublimity is disturbing and disruptive to the mind. In certain extremes, however, beauty itself can achieve an intensity that terrifies and compels, rendering it sublime. Schopenhauer argues that the beautiful and the sublime in fact exist on a continuum: “there come to be various degrees of the sublime, and transitions from the beautiful to the sublime” (262). In *Hannibal*, the beauty of the murder tableaux is intricately linked to pain and fear. The tableaux exemplify the “[s]moothness” (Burke 3.14) and “delicacy” (3.16) that Burke associates with the beautiful. Because the viewer knows that they are made from the bodies of murder victims, however, there is an added element of pain. The tension between “disinterested” (Kant, *Critique* 95) appreciation of the beauty, which calms, and horror at the grotesque mutilation of human bodies, which disturbs and disrupts, succeeds in doing “violence to our imagination” (*Critique* 129). In his mutilation of his victims, Hannibal “the Cannibal” Lecter (Mads Mikkelsen) deliberately attempts to use the grotesque to create a type of beauty that is grand and disturbing and will “elevate [murder] to art” (SE1xE03). *Hannibal* thus creates a type of beauty that is terrible, painful, and open to the sublime. The pronounced grotesquery makes the beauty intensely disturbing, while the knowledge of how it was created adds the element of pain. Together, the pain, fear, and confusion open it up to the sublime.

The artistically arranged tableaux of bodies suggest that there is a connection between the grotesque, the beautiful, and the sublime in the act of murder itself. The series traces the developing relationship between the as-yet uncaught cannibal Dr. Hannibal Lecter, a renowned

psychiatrist, and his patient Will Graham. Will views killing as grotesque, but over the course of the series, Hannibal, who sees the sublime possibility of murder, slowly begins to sway him. The main drama of the series comes from the tension between these two conceptions of killing. By exploring these two approaches, the series demonstrates how the sublime and the grotesque are both essentially founded on pain, fear, and overwhelming emotion.

To begin with, the viewer sees events from Will's point of view and is therefore primarily exposed to the grotesque elements of murder. Will suffers from an empathy disorder, a form of intense emotional synesthesia that allows him to feel the emotions of people around him. As a result, he often loses his grasp of himself, slipping entirely into another's mind. He uses this skill to profile serial killers for the FBI, a job that involves voluntarily letting himself be consumed by murderers' emotions, motivations, and desires. He therefore has a very intimate understanding of killing long before he himself takes a human life. Will's experience of murder involves tearing down the boundaries between his own mind and that of the murderer: merging himself with another person, or absorbing that person into himself, in order to experience their emotions and understand their motivation. "[H]is own point-of-view disappears entirely," as Tim Jones puts it, and "[h]e's then Will Graham no longer, and is literally inhabiting the viewpoint of the killer" he is profiling. In order to profile the murderers, he imagines himself committing their crimes so vividly that he feels like a criminal himself. The viewer, watching the scenes as they play out in his imagination, repeatedly sees him mentally "become" another person.

Under such psychological pressure, Will begins to lose the capacity to understand the difference between himself and the killers he profiles, eventually believing that he himself is a murderer. At one point, during his reconstruction of a crime he gets so "lost in the reconstruction" (SE1xE10) that he loses his true memories and believes that he actually killed

the murder victim. Describing the experience, he says, “I remember cutting into her. I remember watching her die . . . There’s a grandiosity in the violence I imagined that feels more real than what I know is true.” His experience of the murder is so intense that it overwhelms his own reality. The cinematography emphasizes the collapse of Will’s ability to separate himself from others. In the early episodes, his dreams and imagined reconstructions of crime scenes take on a golden tone that is easily distinguishable from the cooler colour palette of the primary narrative. As the series progresses, however, that tonal difference disappears. By the end, Will’s reality is entirely indistinguishable from his fantasies, nightmares, and hallucinations about other people’s actions and emotions. As the cinematographer, James Hawkinson, describes in an interview, “the whole world [becomes] Will’s interior world” (Calhoun 94). Because the series is almost always shown from Will’s point of view, the entire show becomes an “estranged world” (Kayser 184), and the viewer is left to try to sort out what is real in the *Hannibal* universe and what is only in Will’s head.

Will’s hallucinations are not limited to the outside world, but extend to his own body. When he repeatedly finds himself in situations where he feels forced to resort to violence, thanks to Hannibal’s machinations, he begins to hallucinate that he is transforming into a Wendigo: while waiting for a murder to be committed, he suddenly falls to the ground on his hands and knees, shaking in pain, while an immense rack of black antlers grows out of his back. As Jeff Casey puts it, “[t]he antlers emerge out of his back, as if he is being pierced from the inside out and as if Lecter’s personality is growing inside Graham and bursting out like a butterfly from its chrysalis” (Casey 559). It is not real, of course, but the cinematography uses classic grotesque imagery of metamorphosis and animal merged with human to represent Will’s tortured state of mind. He experiences murder as not only psychologically grotesque, but also physically

grotesque. Because murder is almost exclusively shown through Will's reconstructions and discussed in reference to his own shattering mind, the audience is encouraged to view it in the same way.

While presenting killing as grotesque, the series also sets it up as a source of the contemporary sublime. Though Will sees killing as horrifying and grotesque, Hannibal desperately wants to prove to him that committing murder is a transcendent, uplifting experience. He believes that by killing his victims, he elevates himself above them. He tells Will that “[b]lood and breath are only elements undergoing change to fuel [his] radiance. Just as the source of light is burning” (SE2xE11). From his perspective, the lives of other humans are worthless except in their role as “fuel” to elevate the murderer. Committing murder, Hannibal argues, will allow Will to transcend humanity. He repeatedly describes the feeling of committing murder in terms of the divine, claiming that “[k]illing must feel good to God, too. He does it all the time” (SE1xE02). While his victims themselves are meaningless to him, killing them makes him feel powerful and godlike. Unlike Will, he is completely unconcerned with ideas of morality. His own psychiatrist, Bedelia du Maurier (Gillian Anderson), says to him: “You no longer have ethical concerns, Hannibal. You have aesthetic ones” (SE3xE01).

Once morality is removed from the equation, the act of killing becomes an opportunity for aesthetic experience. Will is repulsed by the grotesquery and immorality of murder but drawn to the elements of beauty in the tableaux and to the feelings of power that come from killing. Over the course of the series, under Hannibal's influence, he is slowly seduced by that beauty and power, until taking human life finally can become sublime. No matter how much pleasure he takes in killing, however, Will never stops condemning those feelings and condemning himself for feeling them. That tension creates constant pain and terror. The sublimity he experiences is

thus closer to the Burkean than the Kantian: one that is fundamentally “terrible” and “excite[s] the ideas of pain and danger” (Burke 1.7). In *Hannibal*, any sublimity instantly recalls not sublime mountain ranges, but rather Milton’s *Death*, held up by Burke as one of the great examples of the sublime.

Will has to confront the appeal of murder from the very beginning of the series. In the first episode, he shoots and kills the serial killer Garrett Jacob Hobbs (Vladimir Jon Cubrt). Even though he did it to save an innocent life, and even though Hobbs had already murdered and eaten eight teenagers, killed his wife, and begun to drag a knife across his daughter’s throat, Will is traumatized. He can deal with feelings of guilt, but he is deeply disturbed by the fact that in some ways, killing felt *good*. “I liked killing Hobbs,” he admits to Hannibal, trembling, practically in tears (SE1xE02). Taking a life was frightening, but he also felt, as Hannibal puts it, a “sprig of zest.” Will is horrified at himself for having killed a man and even more horrified that he enjoyed it. When asked what it felt like to kill Hobbs, he replies, “I felt terrified. And...I felt powerful” (SE1xE12). The feelings of pleasure and power increase each time Will kills. The first time, the emotions are so overwhelming that he is left shaking and trembling, hyperventilating as he tries to stop Hobbs’s daughter from bleeding to death but cannot hold his hands still. The trauma haunts him throughout the rest of the series. The second time he kills, this time in self-defence, Will chooses to throw his gun aside and kill his attacker with his bare hands. Will’s face is splattered with blood by the time it is over, but he is calm as he looks down at the dead man. This time, when Hannibal asks him how it felt, Will whispers, “I’ve never felt as alive as I did when I was killing him” (SE2xE10). This reaction suggests that the pleasurable feelings that will eventually develop into an overwhelming sublimity are already growing. Killing Hobbs was terrifying but made him feel powerful. When Will kills a second time, those feelings become

uplifting and invigorating. Horrified with himself, Will continues to resist the seductive emotions. At this point, killing is still more grotesque than sublime, but the scale is tipping.

The third and final time Will kills is in the series finale. Will and Hannibal work together to kill the serial killer Francis Dolarhyde in self-defence. The scene is framed by long shots of the ocean and of the towering seaside cliff above which the fight takes place. At its climax, a show that is mostly set in an urban world thus gains a background that evokes traditional concepts of the sublime. After the fight, Will is once again trembling and gasping for breath, but rather than panicked, he is ecstatic. Despite the fear and pain, the experience of killing this man with Hannibal was transcendent. Bloodied and euphoric, Will gasps the final words of the series: “It’s beautiful” (SE3xE13). It *is* beautiful, but also terrifying and empowering, and Will can finally understand Hannibal’s claim that “blood and breath” will “fuel [his] radiance” (SE2xE11). In the intense, horrifying, grotesque act of murder, there resides a “sprig of zest” (SE1xE02) and opportunity for beauty. By pushing those elements until they are as powerful as the horror, *Hannibal* draws the grotesque into the sublime.

Killing Dolarhyde is not only a moment of sublimity, but also a moment of intense intimacy between Will and Hannibal. The series uses murder as a device through which to explore ideas of isolation and connection in the contemporary world. The characters, who are almost all criminal profilers, psychiatrists, or forensic scientists, spend their time analysing and dissecting the emotions and motives of the people around them, in much the same way that the sublime is analysed and dissected in current scholarship. Doing so prevents them from forming meaningful connections with each other. When Will attempts to initiate a romantic relationship with his friend Alana Bloom (Caroline Davernas), for example, she refuses on the grounds that

she “wouldn’t be able to stop analyzing” him (SE1xE08). In this detached and analytical environment, murder is coded as an act of honesty and intimacy between people.

The series presents a contemporary version of Gothic doubling in which Hannibal and Will function as each other’s doppelgängers. It tracks the development of a profound intimacy between two people who are fundamentally very different but can think in the same way. In many ways, they are each other’s exact opposite: a psychopath and an empath, a serial killer and an FBI agent, a psychiatrist and a psychologically unstable man. As Jack Crawford puts it, “[t]hey are identically different” (SE3xE07). Visually, the cinematography consistently reinforces this. In their blocking, Hannibal and Will often mirror each other, particularly towards the end of the series, and reflective surfaces like glass are used to impose one reflection over the other. Despite their many differences, however, Will and Hannibal are not as opposite as they appear. As the production designer, Patti Podesta, writes in “The Attraction of Opposites,” “Lecter and Will compose a duality . . . Theirs is not a symmetrical opposition, but a pair of complementary colors whose qualities smear onto one another.” Much like the sublime and the grotesque themselves, Will and Hannibal appear to be antithetical to one another, but are in fact more similar than they seem. They develop a deep intimacy that is founded on discussions of murder. As their two ideas about murder clash, they come to realize that even though Will sees killing as grotesque and Hannibal sees it as sublime, they in fact experience it in much the same way.

Will and Hannibal’s connection is depicted visually in ways that make use of traditional grotesque techniques. Their faces are often confused and switched the one for the other and their features are merged together, creating the impression that they are becoming a single being. Hannibal’s effect on Will is so profound that it alters his own sense of self. Will says, “I used to

hear my thoughts inside my skull with the same tone, timbre, and accent as if the words were coming out of my mouth . . . Now my inner voice sounds like you” (SE2xE01). Will, because of his hallucinations and night terrors, also frequently sees Hannibal not as a human but as the monstrous Wendigo. As his connection with Hannibal develops, Will feels himself to be transforming into a Wendigo as well. After he willingly consumes human flesh for the first time, he dreams of tearing himself out of the womb of an elk, growing antlers, while the Wendigo watches.

The imagery surrounding Will and Hannibal’s relationship and its development connects the relationship with the other grotesque elements in the show: the murder tableaux, cannibalism, and the act of murder itself. The Wendigo, which Will is transforming into, is not just a symbol of Hannibal but a symbol of Hannibal’s cannibalism. Will and Hannibal are both familiar with grotesque versions of this type of merging—Will because of his empathy disorder, which forces him to fuse with other people all the time, and Hannibal through his cannibalism, which is a very grotesque forced union. Intimacy involves a dissolution of emotional boundaries between two people, but Hannibal and Will are more inclined to cross boundaries by force or trickery. In the earlier episodes, Hannibal attempts to consume Will emotionally in the same way he so often consumes his victims physically. Hannibal’s emotional desire for Will is deliberately associated with his cannibalism, most notably when Will asks Bedelia if Hannibal is in love with him, and her response frames love in terms of food and hunger: “Could he daily feel a stab of hunger for you, and find nourishment at the very sight of you? Yes” (SE3xE12). For Hannibal, even love is inevitably connected to consumption. To make matters worse, their relationship hinges on lies for the majority of the series: in the first season, Will does not know that Hannibal is a murderer, and Hannibal uses drugs, hypnosis, and illegal psychiatric techniques to manipulate Will into

depending on him; in the second season, Will pretends to be a murderer and cannibal himself in order to foster his relationship with Hannibal, in the hope of gathering enough evidence to arrest him.

What begins as a manipulative and grotesque violation, however, develops into a sublime transcendence of boundaries and identity. When Hannibal and Will's mutual friend Alana Bloom comments that their "relationship doesn't seem to have many" boundaries, Hannibal replies that "[c]rossing boundaries is different than violating them" (SE2xE09). That distinction is explored over the course of the series. *Hannibal* suggests that in the contemporary world, the possibility of merging identities is dark, painful, and terrifying. Will and Hannibal form an intense bond that overpowers their identities and causes "a breach of individual separateness" (SE2xE01). Will grows to depend on Hannibal, who is the only person who makes him feel less "alone" (SE2xE08). Even after he learns that Hannibal is a sadistic cannibal, Will is drawn to him. Their capacity to understand each other is the foundation of their relationship. Will views his own mentality and empathy disorder as grotesque, and is often treated as such by other characters, but Hannibal sees it as "beautiful" (SE1xE01). As a result, Will feels seen, recognized, and understood by another human being for the first time. He admits, "I've never known myself as well as I know myself when I'm with [Hannibal]" (SE3xE03). The show employs visual techniques to suggest the development of intimacy:

. . . as Hannibal and Will's relationship begins to evolve through Will's deliberate and deceitful appeal to Hannibal's desire for his friendship, so too does the show's cinematography transition to a visual intimacy characterized by shallow focal length and extreme close-ups, warm palette, and tight composition, heralding its slide into the murky, messy world of feelings. (Morimoto)

In spite of their manipulative intentions, Hannibal and Will's relationship becomes increasingly genuine as they come to see how well they understand one another. Nonetheless, the intimacy between them is always dark and tinged with horror. In the Season Two finale, for example, Hannibal tenderly caresses Will's face before stabbing him in the stomach, and then holds him, stroking his hair, while he bleeds (SE2xE13). That horror and pain are as essential to their relationship as the grotesquery is. It is a form of intimacy that is painful and terrifying for both of them, and slowly develops into the sublime.

The show in fact suggests that this sort of sublime experience of absolute intimacy cannot exist without pain and terror. Hannibal says to Will, "Freeing yourself from me and me freeing myself from you—they're the same," to which Will responds, "We're conjoined. I'm curious if either of us can survive separation" (SE3xE06). Their relationship is reminiscent of Catherine and Heathcliff, whose shared "'soul' cannot survive separation, and yet needs and creates too much love, too much pain. Logic collapses. They love and cannot love" (Gordon 52). Hannibal and Will's intimacy reaches a peak in the final moments of the series, as they share a euphoric embrace on a seaside cliff after slaughtering Dolarhyde together. It is that embrace that is the true climax of the series. "[S]uspended over the roiling Atlantic" (SE3xE13) in one of the few instances of natural sublimity, Will finally admits his sublime connection with Hannibal. In that moment, they fully understand and accept each other, including the most grotesque aspects of themselves and their history. By understanding and accepting it, they surmount it, which gives way to sublime intimacy.

Will and Hannibal's union, like that of Catherine and Heathcliff, recalls Milton's angels. *Hannibal*, however, casts the idea in a much darker light. The intimacy that, in *Paradise Lost*, is only possible in Heaven, is, in *Hannibal*, only possible for the grotesque and fallen. In *Paradise*

Lost, the merging of spirits is wholly sublime. In *Wuthering Heights*, it is sublime until Catherine and Heathcliff are separated, at which point it leads to the grotesque. *Hannibal*, however, suggests that sublime union can only grow out of grotesquery. Will and Hannibal's merging, unlike that of the angels and Catherine and Heathcliff, is not effortless and is not one that either would have chosen. Will values his independence and condemns Hannibal's psychopathic behaviour, and while Hannibal does crave a relationship with Will, he never imagines it to be one of equals. What he seeks is an emotional version of his cannibalism, which would allow him to "devour[] . . . without being devoured himself" (Bakhtin 281). As seen above, their relationship is predicated on grotesque behaviour and ideas, and its progression towards sublimity is filled with pain, betrayal, and manipulation. Only after experiencing the grotesque violation of boundaries, symbolized by Will's transformation into the Wendigo, can they progress towards a sublime fusion. Even if, like Catherine and Heathcliff, their souls "are the same" (WH 63), everything else about them is different. The grotesquery of their early relationship breaks down those differences, allowing a deep connection to grow between them.

In all three cases, the sublimity of spiritual union is connected to ideas of God, Heaven, and religion. In *Paradise Lost*, only the unfallen angels are allowed that union of spirits; the fallen angels are denied that sublimity. In *Wuthering Heights*, that merging leads to Catherine and Heathcliff's rejection of God and Heaven, because they prefer each other; the sublime is what causes them to fall from grace, and the fall does not rob them of their sublimity. In *Hannibal*, there is no Heaven to be rejected, and the only God is the chaotic God who collapses churches on congregations, creates both "[t]yphoid and swans" indiscriminately (SE2xE09), and never answers prayers because that would be "inelegant" and "[e]legance is more important than suffering" (SE3xE02). Will nonetheless undergoes a type of fall, as he struggles with his feelings

for a man who commits terrible crimes. When he finally succumbs to both his love for Hannibal and the idea that killing can be sublime, he experiences a fall from grace. It is a moral fall, however, and in *Hannibal*, the idea of God is wholly unconnected to morality. The show in fact frames Will's sublime intimacy with Hannibal as a possibility for divinity and sublimity in a godless world. The direction and cinematography take great pains to associate their relationship with religion. Towards the end of the series, the scenes between them are filmed alternately in reality, where Hannibal is imprisoned in a hospital for the criminally insane, and in a church that exists only in their minds. Although the viewer knows that they are in fact still in the hospital, with a glass wall between them, what we actually see is the two of them walking through the church together, bathed in golden light. Seemingly to drive the point home, Bedelia directly compares their relationship to divine worship in the final episode. When she learns that Will plans to have Hannibal released from the hospital, she says that he has "found religion" (SE3xE13). Such intense intimacy does not lead them to reject the divine, as it does Catherine and Heathcliff, but rather allows them to experience it. Will's fall is therefore a fall *into* divinity and sublimity.

It is, however, a painful, terrifying sublimity that comes at the expense of both Will's independence and his moral code. Ultimately, like Catherine and Heathcliff, Hannibal and Will can survive neither separation nor union. Will cannot escape the immorality of murder or his own guilt. The cognitive dissonance is too overwhelming, and Will feels compelled to pull them both over the edge of the cliff. The series thus ends with Will killing himself and Hannibal, an act that reinforces their connection and inseparability. Helena Bassil-Morozow writes,

[t]his [their deaths] makes *Hannibal* a traditional doppelganger narrative, at the end of which the protagonist, deformed by the darkness inside and no longer able to sustain the

painful moral duality, decides to kill his alter ego, thereby killing himself. This structure [is] replicated in many a famous story from classical novels (Robert Lewis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*) . . . (66)

Indeed, Will is "deformed" by the growing "darkness" that is his appreciation of the beauty and sublimity of murder and his love for a man who revels in it. Because of his union with Hannibal, he cannot destroy the murderer without also destroying himself. By this point, he has given Hannibal too much of himself, and absorbed too much of Hannibal in return, to live.

Steeped in death and moral ambiguity, the sublime in *Hannibal* is not uplifting. Horror fiction, like the Gothic fiction in which it has its roots, presents a sublime that conquers reason. According to Kant, the sublime is produced by a tension between reason and powerful emotion, in which reason is victorious: "The extraordinary emphasis on the primacy of reason meant that the subject, though scarred, nevertheless emerges from the encounter with the sublime more or less triumphant" (Mishra 38). In the Gothic sublime, however, reason is *not* triumphant. Instead, the encounter with the sublime leaves the subject fractured. The sublimity in horror fiction functions in the same way. The subject is overcome. The exploration of the sublime and the grotesque, their concurrence, and their consequences in *Hannibal* suggests that in the contemporary sublime, rationality cannot triumph. For Hannibal and Will, the intensity of their intimacy overcomes their reason. It overcomes Will's moral horror at Hannibal's actions and Hannibal's deep-seated need to control and consume everyone around him, while remaining invulnerable himself. Like the sublimity of Milton's *Death*, and like the Gothic sublime, the contemporary sublime is painful and terrifying.

At an exhibition of torture implements, Hannibal and Antony Dimmond (Tom Wisdom) discuss “[w]hat still slaps the clammy flab of our submissive consciousness hard enough to get our attention” in a world where “ceaseless exposure has calloused us” to violence (SE3xE01). The world has been calloused against the sublime, and it takes extremes of pain and fear to awaken those overwhelming feelings. *Hannibal* suggests that in order to do so, the sublime must first pass through the grotesque. *Hannibal* uses the grotesque to inspire fear, fascination, discomfoting pleasure, and moral and aesthetic cognitive dissonance. Those grotesque conditions build into the painful, terrifying contemporary sublime.

Conclusion

Although written in different centuries, the three works in this study share a common vision of the sublime and the grotesque as essentially dependent on one another. I hope that I have shown not only the similarities between the two and the ways in which one can create or become the other, but also that moments of tension between these two modes can challenge expectations and conventions. The sublime and the grotesque remain inseparable, although their relationship manifests itself differently in different cultural milieus. This is not to suggest that the sublime and the grotesque are just two words for the same concept, or that any of the three works present them as such. Although my thesis focuses on the similarities between the two categories, it does not intend to conflate them. Rather, all three narratives call attention to the complexities of the sublime and the grotesque, and the problems involved in aesthetic categorization. My argument aims to extend and broaden ideas about the sublime and the grotesque.

Paradise Lost was foundational in the establishment of the sublime as an aesthetic category to which *Wuthering Heights* and *Hannibal* both react. Milton is directly referenced in *Hannibal*, and while he is never actually referred to in *Wuthering Heights*, his influence on Brontë is clear. As Gilbert and Gubar argue, “despite the absence of Milton references, it eventually becomes plain that *Wuthering Heights* is also a novel haunted by Milton’s bogey. . . Milton’s absence is itself a presence, so painfully does Brontë’s story dwell on the places and persons of his imagination” (252-253). The importance of Heaven and Hell, the countless references to the Devil, and the themes of exile and rebellion “inevitably suggest[] those trail-blazing exiles and outcasts Adam, Eve, and Satan” (254). *Wuthering Heights* builds on the ideas that are introduced in *Paradise Lost*, but the focus shifts. For Brontë, the fragile line between the sublime and the grotesque is found in the human psyche. Brontë explores the idea that the line

between the two falls in a different place depending on the subject's unique perspective.

Wuthering Heights demonstrates how the sublime and the grotesque can exist in the same places or be evoked by the same triggers. A change in light or angle can reveal the sublimity in what at first appeared to be grotesque, or the grotesque in what appeared to be sublime. In *Wuthering Heights*, it is not so much that they inform and create each other, but rather that human experience of them depends on individual circumstance. One person can be blind to the sublimity that overwhelms another, just as one mind can be unperturbed by the grotesquery that horrifies another. That issue of perspective remains essential in *Hannibal*, which explores how one's perspective can change, and how the intense emotions that the grotesque excites can develop into a sense of the sublime.

In their examination of the boundaries between these two aesthetic categories, each work includes characters who challenge boundaries, whether divine (as in *Paradise Lost*), social (as in *Wuthering Heights*), or legal (as in *Hannibal*). Physical boundaries abound as well, in the form of walls, gates, and windows that symbolize psychological, metaphysical, and aesthetic limits. Satan needs to get through the gates of Hell, which are guarded by Sin and Death, the representatives of the grotesque and the sublime. It is Sin and Death, too, who build the road from Hell to Earth, creating a way to cross that chaotic boundary between the two. In *Wuthering Heights*, there are rooms within rooms and gates that need to be jumped. There is a wall between the land belonging to Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and a wall surrounding Thrushcross Grange itself to keep the younger Catherine contained inside. Catherine, Heathcliff, the younger Catherine, Linton, Isabelle, and Nelly are all locked up at various times, and rarely manage to escape. There are windows that fail to keep out ghosts and coffins that fail to keep them in. In *Hannibal*, both Will and Hannibal are locked up in the Baltimore State Hospital for

the Criminally Insane. In a scene that recalls both Satan entering Eden in “one slight bound” (PL 4.181) over the surrounding wall and Lockwood jumping over the gate to Wuthering Heights (WH 7), Will climbs over a closed gate to explore Hannibal’s ancestral home in Lithuania. *Hannibal* also extends the metaphor of walls and rooms to the realm of the human mind. Bedelia says, “You spend a lot of time building walls, Hannibal. It’s natural to want to see if someone is clever enough to climb over them” (SE1xE08). In every case, the physical boundaries that repeatedly fail to keep anyone either in or out reinforce the themes of challenging limits and breaking open categories. If the sublime and the grotesque are both essentially concerned with limits, then they are both concerned with the limit that lies between them. *Paradise Lost*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Hannibal* all grapple with where that line falls and with how one thing can become another.

I return now to Victor Hugo’s claim that “it is of the fruitful union of the grotesque and the sublime types that modern genius is born” (364). Despite his talk of “union,” Hugo ultimately presents the grotesque as simply a means of contrast by which the sublime can be shown in its strongest light: “Sublime upon sublime scarcely presents a contrast, and we need a little rest from everything, even the beautiful. On the other hand, the grotesque seems to be a halting-place, a mean term, a starting-point whence one rises toward the beautiful with a fresher and keener perception” (366). Conversely, Kayser argues that the sublime serves as a contrast through which the grotesque can be shown in its strongest light: “The true depth of the grotesque is revealed only by its confrontation with its opposite, the sublime” (58). I submit that neither viewpoint is comprehensive. The sublime and the grotesque are not merely two separate modes that can be used in combination for the purpose of highlighting each other. Neither one is subordinate to the other and their convergence has a much more powerful effect than simply

showing one to its strongest advantage. When the sublime and the grotesque interact, they challenge preconceived notions about beauty, boundaries, normative behaviour, human identity, and human intimacy. Just as each century draws conclusions about these issues, the following century will create art that challenges and breaks them down.

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