

Spatial and Mental landscapes: Constructing Identity in Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Gaskell's *North and South*

Ms. Barsha Paul

Research Scholar

English

The Assam Royal Global University

Abstract

In Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), landscapes are dynamic forces that shape and deconstruct identity rather than passive settings. This paper examines how the moors of Yorkshire and industrial landscapes resemble the geographical isolation as explored through the works of Homi. K Bhabha, in a way drawing attention to mental trauma to frame characters' identities and relationships, which can be understood through the lens of Cathy Caruth. The psychoanalytical perspective can be achieved through the works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan that attempts to explore the realm of the mental landscapes in both novels by delving into the characters' lives and understanding of the social contexts. The interplay of the spatial landscapes on the mental landscapes shaped by the individual's traumas that is responsible in shaping the identities of the characters is explored through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's works on intersectionality. These geographies become not only reflective of mental trauma and physical displacement but also instrumental in reshaping character identity across intersecting lines of class, race, and gender. By positioning landscape as an active force rather than a passive backdrop, this paper demonstrates how both novels employ landscape as a narrative and symbolic device to explore the fluidity of identity and the complex entanglement of the psyche with societal structures.

Key words: Landscapes, Identity, Mental Trauma, Intersectionality, Geographical Isolation

1. Introduction

Wuthering Heights (1847) by Emily Brontë is a tale of intense love, revenge, and the destructive power of passion between two families living on the wild English moors. And *North and South* (1855) by Elizabeth Gaskell depicts the clash between rich and poor, love and pride, in England's industrial north through Margeret's eyes. Both of the novels feature landscapes that are as much a character as the protagonists themselves. The spatial landscape, whether geographical or architectural, play an important role in shaping individual identity and influences various aspects of life. The Yorkshire moors, with their rugged beauty

and unforgiving climate, serve as a stage for the tumultuous relationships in *Wuthering Heights* (1847). Similarly, the industrial landscape of Milton-Northern in *North and South* (1855) reflects the changing urban environment and its impact on social relationships. These spatial landscapes influence the characters' perceptions, experiences, and understanding of self. Beyond spatial landscape, both the novels delve into the mental landscapes of their characters, exposing the complex interplay between trauma, memory, and identity. Heathcliff's troubled past and Catherine's fragile mental state caused by their obsessive love and misunderstandings in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) illustrate the lasting impact of trauma on individual psyche. Their unresolved past creates a cycle of pain and obsession, not only damaging themselves but also impacting those around them. Similarly, Margaret Hale's struggles with displacement and identity in *North and South* (1855) demonstrate the fragility of mental landscapes. The internal conflict in her adjusting herself to the harsh realities of Milton forces her to reevaluate her values, social views, and personal identities. These inner worlds transcend spatial boundaries, revealing the fluidity of human experience. The boundary-crossing that occurs between these categories' challenges traditional notions of identity, revealing the complexities of human existence. Drawing insights on literary and theoretical frameworks, including studies related to geographical isolation, trauma theory, and psychoanalysis. The works of Homi. K. Bhabha inform the analysis of spatiality. The psychoanalytical and traumatic perspectives can be achieved through the understanding of works of Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud, and Cathy Caruth respectively which illuminates the mental landscapes and inner worlds of the characters. The novels show how social class, gender, and spatial identity intersect, influencing individual experiences. It can be understood through the lens of Kimberle Crenshaw's works of how overlapping social identities create unique experiences of discrimination in both the novels.

The novels offer profound insights into the human experience, transcending boundaries between spatial and mental realms. It seeks to shed light upon the complex relationships between spatiality, psychology, and trauma, demonstrating the enduring relevance of these novels in understanding the human condition. Thus, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) are two seminal novels that penetrate the complexities of spatial landscape, mental landscapes, and trauma, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. This paper will allow us to understand how these novels transcend boundaries, navigating the complex relationships between spatiality, psychology, and trauma.

2. Literature Review

In the book *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi K. Bhabha challenges traditional notions of culture, identity, and nationhood. He argues that cultures are not fixed or essential, but rather hybrid and ambivalent. Introducing concepts like "cultural difference", "hybridity", and "third space", Bhabha theorizes the complex, liminal nature of cultural identity. Mary Jean Corbett, in her article "Class and Spatial Conflict in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*" (2008) examines the intersection of class and spatial conflict in Gaskell's novel. She argues that the novel's depiction of the industrial North and the gentrified South reflects the spatialized class conflicts of Victorian England. The paper explores how Gaskell's narrative navigates these conflicts, revealing the complex relationships between class, space, and identity. In the article, "Wuthering Heights and the Landscape of Childhood" (2000), J.E Booth analyses the representation of children in *Wuthering Heights* under genre of Childhood Studies. She

examines the role of the Yorkshire moors in shaping the childhood experiences of the novel's characters. Booth argues that the moors serve as a symbol of the freedom, wildness, and vulnerability of childhood, and that Emily Brontë uses the landscape to explore the complexities and challenges of growing up. Mary Jacobus, in her work "Psychoanalysis and the Subject of Literature" (1986) explores the intersection of psychoanalysis and literary theory. Jacobus argues that psychoanalysis offers a significant understanding of the subject's formation and fragmentation, and examines how literary texts, in turn, reflect and shape these processes. She critiques traditional notions of the self and advocates for a more fluid, displaced understanding of subjectivity. John.P. Kanwit, in his article "Mere Outward Appearances"? Household Taste and Social Perception in Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (2009) explores how domestic spaces and material possessions reflect social class and status in Gaskell's novel. He argues that the characters' households serve as extensions of their personalities and values, influencing how others perceive them. He examines how Gaskell uses descriptions of household taste to comment on the social conventions and class divisions of Victorian England, revealing the tension between outward appearances and inner character.

3. Research Gap

While existing research on *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Brontë and *North and South* (1855) by Elizabeth Gaskell has explored themes of spatial and psychological boundaries, a comprehensive analysis of how landscapes actively shape and deconstruct identity remains underexamined. Previous studies have often treated geographical settings as passive backdrops or focused narrowly on individual aspects of border crossings, such as physical or psychological thresholds, without fully interrogating the dynamic interplay between spatial landscapes and mental trauma. This project examines how landscapes actively reshape

identity rather than serving as passive settings. It analyses how geography, trauma, and social hierarchies intersect to complicate characters' self-perception and relationships. The study reveals how both novels use their environments as dynamic forces that expose the fluidity of identity across divisions of class, race and gender.

4. Research Questions

1. How do spatial landscapes in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) by Emily Bronte and *North and South* (1855) by Elizabeth Gaskell serve as psychological reflections of trauma, identity, and emotional isolation?
2. In what ways do the mental landscapes in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *North and South* (1855) reflect the personal and social identities of the characters, and how do these internal struggles influence their actions?
3. How does the interplay between spatial and mental landscapes in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *North and South* (1855) reveal tensions between individual identity and affect character dynamics?

5. Aims and Objectives

1. To explore the spatial landscapes in shaping the identities of the characters in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *North and South* (1855).
2. To analyse the mental landscapes and the identities of the characters in both novels.

3. To examine the intersectionality of spatial and mental landscapes and the complex relationships in the novels.

6. Methodology

This comparative study employs an analytical approach to examine the representation of geographical isolation, trauma, and identity in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855). The analysis is grounded with the close reading of both novels employing the theoretical frameworks of Homi. K Bhabha's the concept of "hybridity" (*Location of Culture*, 1994, pp.1-27) and "third space" (*Location of Culture*, 1996, pp. 36-39) that provide a lens to analyze the Yorkshire moors in *Wuthering Heights* and the industrial landscape of Milton-Northern in *North and South* as transitional zones highlighting the area of spatial landscape. Trauma Theory (*Unclaimed Experience*, 1996) as proposed by Cathy Caruth, Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytical Theory (*Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, 1917) and Jacques Lacan's concept of "mirror stage" (*The Mirror Stage*, 1977, pp. 75-81) explores how mental landscapes are shaped by the traumatic experiences and their effects in complicating the relationships. Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory (*Demarginalizing*, 1989) examines how the characters' experiences of trauma are shaped by their intersecting identities and oppressions, including class, gender, and ethnicity. The theoretical frameworks used would allow us to understand the complexities and uncertainties of the characters struggling to navigate through multiple identities and realities.

Spatial Landscapes in Shaping the Identities of the Characters in *Wuthering Heights*

and *North and South*

In *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the Yorkshire moors serve as a dynamic spatial landscape that mirrors the emotional and psychological turmoil of the characters, particularly Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. The moors function as a "third space" (Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 1996), a liminal zone between civilization and wilderness where identities are negotiated and transformed. This is evident in Catherine's declaration, "I've dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they've gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the color of my mind" (Brontë 89). The moors symbolize freedom and wildness for Catherine, reflecting her inner conflict between societal expectations and her passionate connection to Heathcliff. However, they also become a site of emotional chaos, highlighting her fragmented identity. Her marriage to Edgar Linton, driven by social ambition, fractures her bond with Heathcliff and the moors, illustrating the tension between her true self and societal norms. Heathcliff's identity is similarly shaped by the moors, embodying hybridity and marginalization. As an orphan of ambiguous racial and social status, he is both an insider and outsider at *Wuthering Heights*. His deep connection to the moors reflects his untamed nature and emotional isolation, as seen in his vengeful actions following Catherine's betrayal. The moors, therefore, are not just a setting but an active force that shapes the characters' identities, emotions, and relationships.

In contrast, *North and South* (1855) explores the industrial landscape of Milton-Northern as a transformative space for Margaret Hale. Initially repelled by Milton's grim environment, Margaret's perspective evolves as she confronts the realities of industrialization and class struggle. The town embodies Bhabha's concept of

hybridity, blending rural and urban cultures, and serves as a “third space” where Margaret’s identity is reshaped. Her interactions with working-class characters like Bessy Higgins and Nicholas Higgins expose her to the harshness of industrial life, fostering empathy and social awareness. For instance, Bessy’s lament about factory labor- “I think if this life is th’ end, and that there’s no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes- yo’ wench, yo’! I could go mad, and kill yo’, I could” (Gaskell 116) highlights the psychological toll of Milton’s spatial landscape. Margaret’s journey from the pastoral South to the industrial North mirrors her internal transformation, as she navigates intersecting identities of class, gender, and geography. Her relationship with John Thornton, a mill owner, further underscores this interplay, as their conflicting worldviews gradually converge through mutual understanding.

Both novels use spatial landscapes to interrogate social hierarchies. In *Wuthering Heights*, Thrushcross Grange symbolizes refinement and social privilege, contrasting with the wild moors. Catherine’s attraction to the Grange reveals her desire for status, while Heathcliff’s exclusion from it fuels his resentment. Similarly, in *North and South*, Milton’s factories and slums expose the brutality of class divisions, while Margaret’s southern gentility is challenged by the industrial North’s realities. The intersection of spatial and mental landscapes in these novels reveals how environment shapes identity, trauma, and relationships, offering profound insights into the human condition.

Mental Landscapes and Identities of the Characters in *Wuthering Heights* and *North and South*

This chapter explores the psychological dimensions of trauma and identity in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *North and South* (1855) through the lenses of psychoanalytic theory and trauma theory. Sigmund Freud’s *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* (1917) provides a framework for understanding how repressed desires and unconscious conflicts shape the characters’ actions. Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) highlights how trauma disrupts self-perception, leading to fragmented identities, while Jacques Lacan’s “mirror stage” (*The Mirror Stage*, 1977) illustrates how societal expectations distort characters’ sense of self.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff’s identity is fractured by childhood abandonment and social ostracization. Lacan’s “mirror stage” explains his internalized sense of inferiority, as he sees himself through the distorted perceptions of others- first Mr. Earnshaw, then Hindley, and finally Catherine. His obsession with Catherine stems from her role as his idealized “mirror”, a reflection of his lost wholeness. When she dies, his identity collapses, as seen in his agonized cry: “May you not rest as long as I am living! ... I cannot live without my soul!” (Brontë 171). Catherine, too, suffers from unresolved trauma, torn between her wild passion for Heathcliff and societal expectations embodied by Edgar Linton. Her insomnia and delirium: “You are talking in your sleep!” (Brontë 131)) reveal Freud’s “borderline dynamics”- emotional instability fueled by repressed conflicts. Her declaration, “I am Heathcliff,” blurs self-boundaries, illustrating how trauma fragments identity.

Freud’s theory of the ‘unconscious’ further unravels their destructive relationship. Heathcliff’s vengeful actions are compulsive repetitions of childhood wounds, while Catherine’s erratic behavior stems from guilt over betraying her true self. The moors, often a refuge, amplify their turmoil, reflecting Caruth’s notion of trauma as an “unclaimed experience” that resurfaces unpredictably.

In *North and South*, Margaret Hale's mental landscape is reshaped by displacement and loss. Her father's crisis of faith, "I've let one or two of them know before now that they might think it an honour to be even there" (Gaskell 42)) shatters her stability, forcing her to confront industrial Milton's harsh realities. Caruth's "traumatic awakening" applies here, as Margaret's grief- "a dull cold pain ... pressed the youth and buoyancy out of her heart" (Gaskell 50)) forces her to rebuild her identity. Her strained relationship with her mother, who favors the maid Dixon -"Mrs. Hale did trust in Dixon more than in Margaret" (Gaskell 231)), deepens her isolation, mirroring Lacan's "mirror stage"-Margaret's self-worth is undermined by external rejection.

Margaret's growth emerges through her empathy for Milton's working class, particularly Bessy Higgins, whose suffering- "I thirst to death for one long deep breath o' the clear air" (Gaskell 116)) challenges Margaret's genteel prejudices. Her defense of Thornton during the strike as she claims "I walk pure before God!" (Gaskell 213), defies gender norms, showcasing her evolving resilience. Unlike Heathcliff, Margaret integrates trauma into a stronger identity, though her repressed feelings for Thornton reveal lingering conflicts.

Both novels depict trauma's cyclical and transformative effects. Heathcliff and Catherine are destroyed by unprocessed pain, while Margaret adapts, illustrating how mental landscapes are shaped by resilience or repression. The intersection of Freudian repression, Lacanian alienation, and Caruth's traumatic disruption reveals identity as fluid- a negotiation between internal wounds and external pressures. These narratives underscore literature's power to map the psyche's terrain, where geography and trauma intertwine to forge or fracture the self.

Intersectionality of Spatial and Mental Landscapes: The Complex Relationships in *Wuthering Heights* and *North and South*

This chapter examines the intersection of spatial and mental landscapes in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) through Kimberlé Crenshaw's Intersectionality Theory (Demarginalizing, 1989) and Homi Bhabha's concept of "otherness" (Location of Culture, 1994). While Crenshaw's original framework focused on the legal and social marginalization of Black women, its application has expanded into literature and cultural studies to explore how characters inhabit and navigate multiple, overlapping forms of oppression. The analysis reveals how geography, trauma, and social hierarchies intertwine to shape characters' identities and relationships. This framework recognizes that social hierarchies are not mutually exclusive, but rather intersect and compound, resulting in unique experiences of oppression, marginalization and privilege.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the Yorkshire moors symbolize both freedom and emotional turmoil, serving as a "third space" (Bhabha) where identities blur. Heathcliff's connection to the moors reflects his marginalization as a racial and class "other". Described as a "dark-skinned gypsy" (Brontë 21), his hybrid identity is forged through abandonment and Hindley's abuse, which reduces him to a servant. The moors mirror his untamed psyche, offering escape but also reinforcing his isolation. Catherine's relationship with the moors is equally fraught. They represent her wild, unrestrained self, yet her marriage to Edgar Linton- driven by class ambition—severs this bond, fracturing her identity. Her declaration, "I am Heathcliff" (Brontë 91), underscores their psychic fusion, but societal pressures force her to reject him, exacerbating his trauma. Thrushcross Grange, with its "crimson-covered chairs" (Brontë 60), embodies the genteel

world that excludes Heathcliff, amplifying his vengeful obsession. The novel thus critiques Victorian hierarchies by showing how space perpetuates cycles of oppression, particularly for marginalized figures like Heathcliff and women like Catherine, who are torn between passion and propriety.

North and South explore similar tensions through Margaret Hale's displacement from rural Helstone to industrial Milton. Milton's "smoky air" (Gaskell 54) disrupts Margaret's mental landscape, forcing her to confront class and gender norms. Initially repulsed by the North's "otherness" (Bhabha), her empathy grows through friendships with working-class characters like Bessy Higgins, whose suffering- "fluff filling my lungs" (Gaskell 116)- exposes industrialization's human cost. Margaret's evolving perspective challenges her Southern gentility, particularly in her clashes with John Thornton. Her defense of striking workers and physical intervention during the riot: "I saved one cruel action" (Gaskell 213) defy gendered expectations, positioning her as a mediator between classes. The Thornton home, with its "alabaster groups" (Gaskell 129), contrasts sharply with the Higgins' cramped quarters, illustrating spatialized class disparities. Margaret's journey reflects Crenshaw's intersectionality: her identity is reshaped by overlapping struggles of gender, class, and geography, culminating in a nuanced understanding of social justice.

Both novels use spatial landscapes to interrogate power dynamics. In *Wuthering Heights*, the moors and estates literalize psychological boundaries, while *North and South* contrasts pastoral and industrial worlds to critique capitalism. Heathcliff and Margaret exemplify how trauma and environment intersect to forge resilient yet fractured identities, revealing literature's enduring power to map the human psyche onto physical and social terrains.

7. Conclusion

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) demonstrate how spatial and mental landscapes shape identity through trauma, hybridity, and intersectionality. In *Wuthering Heights*, the Yorkshire moors reflect Heathcliff and Catherine's emotional turmoil, symbolizing freedom and confinement while highlighting their marginalization through race, class, and gender. Catherine's struggle between societal norms and passion, alongside Heathcliff's vengeful isolation, reveals how landscapes perpetuate psychological fragmentation. In *North and South*, Margaret Hale's transition from rural Helstone to industrial Milton forces her to confront class disparities and gendered expectations, transforming her into an empathetic advocate for social justice. The industrial landscape reshapes her mental resilience, mirroring her intersectional growth. Both novels use theoretical frameworks- Bhabha's hybridity, Caruth's trauma theory, Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytical lenses and Crenshaw's intersectionality- to underscore identity as fluid and contested. The moors and Milton act as dynamic spaces where characters negotiate power, trauma, and self-perception, transcending their settings to explore universal human struggles. Ultimately, these narratives reveal how environment and psyche intertwine, offering timeless insights into identity formation amid societal constraints.

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