

Yıldırım ÖZSEVGEÇ* 
Enfal ERKAN** 

NEW MATERIALISM AND WUTHERING HEIGHTS

ABSTRACT

Wuthering Heights (1847) has been regarded as a Victorian-Era novel due to the themes it has dwelled on. Emily Brontë, by bringing class differences, women's role in society, and the perception of men's superiority into the novel, has appealed to a wide readership. Critics and academics have frequently discussed this work for nearly 200 years. While the work has been analyzed by various approaches, its romantic, social, and gothic aspects are generally emphasized. However, Brontë prioritized setting and atmosphere while creating the plot and included plenty of geographical descriptions. She places great emphasis on nature in the setting, highlighting the influential role of each natural element on humans, who are integral parts of the natural world. New Materialism is the approach that argues that the "things" that we consider inert and passive in nature are actors of the network that creates each phenomenon. According to new materialism, it is the objects around one that they are in constant contact with that form their thought structure and motivate them. The functions of these objects and even their mere existence motivate people. When examined through this perspective, the idea arises that "things" considered inanimate may be "vibrant matters". On the other hand, *Wuthering Heights* constitutes a comprehensive example to show the vibrant agency of nature. In this study, we analyze *Wuthering Heights* from a new materialist perspective and use the concepts of actor-network theory, intra-action, and vibrant matter as methods.

Keywords: *Wuthering Heights*, new materialism, actor-network theory, intra-action, vibrant matter

YENİ MATERYALİZM VE UĞULTULU TEPELER

ÖZET

Uğultulu Tepeler (1847), işlediği temalar nedeniyle bir Viktorya Dönemi romanı olarak kabul edilmektedir. Emily Brontë, sınıf farklılıklarını, kadının toplumdaki rolünü ve erkeğin üstünlüğü algısını romana taşıyarak geniş bir okur kitlesine hitap etmiştir. Bu eser yaklaşık 200 yıldır eleştirmenler ve akademisyenler tarafından sıklıkla tartışılmaktadır. Esere farklı açılardan yaklaşılsa da genellikle romantik, toplumsal ve gotik yönleri vurgulanmıştır. Ancak Brontë, olay örgüsünü oluştururken doğayı ve atmosferi ön planda tutmuş ve bolca coğrafi betimlemeye yer vermiştir. Mekânda doğayı bu kadar ön planda tutmasının nedeni, bir bütün olarak doğayı oluşturan her bir unsurun, yine doğanın bir unsuru olan insan üzerindeki etkin rolünü vurgulamaktır. İşte, doğada sabit ve edilgen olarak kabul ettiğimiz "şeylerin" aslında her bir fenomeni oluşturan ağın birer faili olduğunu savunan yaklaşım Yeni Materyalizm olarak adlandırılır. Yeni materyalizme göre insanın düşünce yapısını oluşturan, onu harekete geçiren aslında sürekli ilişki içerisinde olduğu etrafındaki nesnelere. Bu nesnelere işlevleri, hatta salt varlıkları bile insanı harekete geçirir. Bu perspektiften bakıldığında, cansız olduğu düşünülen "şeylerin" aslında canlı maddeler olabileceği fikri ortaya çıkar. *Uğultulu Tepeler* ise doğanın canlı failliğini göstermek açısından kapsamlı bir örnek teşkil etmektedir. Bu çalışmada *Uğultulu Tepeler*'i yeni materyalist açıdan inceleyecek olup yöntem olarak 'fail-ağ kuramı', 'içkin ilişkisel eylem' ve 'canlı madde' kavramlarını kullanacağız.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Uğultulu Tepeler*, yeni materyalizm, fail ağ kuramı, içkin ilişkisel eylem, canlı madde

* Assist. Prof. Dr., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Faculty of Letters and Science, Department of English Language and Literature, Rize/ Türkiye. E-Mail: yildirim.ozsevgec@erdogan.edu.tr / Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Rize/Türkiye. E-Posta: yildirim.ozsevgec@erdogan.edu.tr

** Corresponding Author, Res. Asst., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, Faculty of Letters and Science, Department of English Language and Literature, Rize/ Türkiye. E-Mail: enfal.erkana@erdogan.edu.tr / Sorumlu Yazar, Arş. Gör., Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi, Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Rize/Türkiye. E-Posta: enfal.erkana@erdogan.edu.tr

Introduction

The Earth, as a living organism, forms the basis of James Lovelock's Gaia Hypothesis. This theory, proposed in 1972, posits that the Earth is not a passive entity but actively interacts within itself and with its inorganic environment in the Milky Way. The Earth's biosphere, through its various phenomena, hints at the possibility of the Earth having a capacity for 'conscious' action (Lovelock, 1972, pp. 579-580). David E. Reichle, in his work *The Global Carbon Cycle and Climate Change*, further elucidates the biosphere's action:

[E]ven though the luminosity of the sun, the Earth's heat source, has increased about 30% since life began almost four billion years ago, the living system has reacted to maintain temperatures at a level suitable for life. Cloud formation over the open ocean is almost entirely a function of oceanic algae that emit sulfur molecules as waste metabolites, which become condensation nuclei for rain. Clouds, in turn, help regulate surface temperatures. (2019, p. 25)

The world exhibits various adaptations to maintain a system and preserve its existence. These phenomena have been interpreted through existing approaches and movements, often prefixed with 'eco,' such as eco-criticism or eco-feminism. While these movements often center on human experiences, perspectives and interests concerning the environment, their focus on human concerns may overshadow or downplay the intrinsic value of non-human entities and ecosystems. On the other hand, new materialism challenges this perception, arguing that matter has always been treated as passive. Traditional materialist approaches, for instance, uphold the static nature of matter. However, new materialism, rooted in the Gaia Hypothesis and the long-standing belief in animism (Müller, 2023, pp. 3,11) offers a fresh perspective on the agency of matter. The term 'new' in new materialism should not mislead. New materialism, akin to postmodernism, challenges previous epistemological and ontological theories and research. It emerges as a transformative theoretical perspective to recognize the active role of nonhuman materiality in actual reality. An American feminist theorist, Karen Barad, in an interview with Rick Dolphijn & Iris van der Tuin on new materialism, explains how matter "[...] is a dynamic expression/articulation of the world in its intra-active becoming" (Dolphijn & van der Tuin 2012, p. 69). She claims that "[all] bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the world's iterative intra-activity, its performativity. Boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted through the intra-activity of mattering" (ibid., p. 69). This approach critiques the human-centred perspectives at the core of humanities, which claim that humans are the sole actors and that everything that happens is based on human interactions and interpretations. However, according to new materialism, the intricate forces that shape interactions in the world cannot be confined to these parameters. In her book titled *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennet explains the new materialist approach towards anthropocentrism as follows: "[...] such a newfound attentiveness to matter and its powers will not solve the problem of human exploitation or oppression, but it can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations" (p. 13). This new approach necessitates an 'ontological turn' in social theory, re-examining accepted truths about the nature of being and existence. It attempts this re-examination by exploring how everything else, human and nonhuman, contributes to forming the social world.

Since new materialism posits that the social world is constructed by both matter and living beings, it must conceptualize the agency of matter. New materialism proposes a speculative ontology of matter, defining it as having an inherent potential for events and transformations. Matter is not passive but a persistent force, often unpredictable and resistant to external control. It is elusive, remarkable, and self-organizing, possessing its own internal drive toward becoming and existing independently (“becoming-for-itself” and “alive-for-itself”). This conceptualization emphasizes that matter has agency, playing an active role in shaping the world rather than merely being shaped by external forces (Schmidt, 2019, p. 137). Therefore, it must be assumed that there is some methodological symmetry between man and matter. Just like the actions mentioned when referring to human agency, there are also actions mentioned in the agency of matter. For example, a bridge performs the act of “linking” two places. Of course, as we mentioned before, new materialism makes great use of other theories to conceptualize this agency. The most important of these is the Actor-Network Theory.

Actor Network Theory, introduced by Bruno Latour in the context of Science and Technology Studies (STS), is fundamentally concerned with how phenomena and scientific discoveries emerge. Accordingly, everything that has happened and will happen results from a network of relationships. If there is no relationship, there is no existence (Latour, 2005, p. 169). For example, glasses cannot consist only of the glass and metal pieces that make them up. How this glass and metal come together, the person who wears it, and even the idea that it is produced for visual purposes are the building blocks of its existence. According to the theory of agential realism, put forward by Karen Barad, this network is a structure in which everything is entangled in the universe. Moreover, she coined a new term, “intra-action”, in this context. She explains this new term as follows:

... “Individuals” do not pre-exist as such but rather materialize in intra-action. Intra-action goes to the question of the making of differences, of “individuals,” rather than assuming their independent or prior existence. “Individuals” do not exist but are not individually determinate. (Kleinman & Barad, 2012)

According to agential realism, one of the most essential tenets of this theory, phenomena occur through the intra-action of humans and nonhumans. Barad claims that the notion of intra-action, unlike “interaction”, which assumes independent entities, marks a profound shift, as specific agential intra-actions determine the boundaries and properties of phenomena and give meaning to embodied concepts (2003, p. 815). Naturally, nothing has a fixed identity. On the contrary, the identity may alter as long as intra-action occurs; for example, people may not understand what someone who displays various figures in the middle of the street is doing. However, if music is added behind these figures, they gain meaning, and it is inferred that the person is dancing. Therefore, everything is an actor, whether a human being, an inanimate being, or even a concept. The fact that any inanimate object can influence the network somehow is enough to consider it as an actor. For this reason, nonhumans are as important as humans, and this complex relationship constantly changes. Jane Bennett emphasises the vitality of the nonhuman in this regard: “Everything is, in a sense, alive” (2010, p. 177). Naturally, nonhumans also include senses attributed to humans, but the vitality of non-human entities extends beyond human-centered experiences. It encompasses the dynamic, active roles that non-human actors—such as animals, plants, ecosystems, and objects or materials—play in shaping interactions, environments, and

social worlds. This vitality refers to the inherent ability of non-human entities to influence, affect, and participate in processes, not merely as passive elements but as agents with their own forms of responsiveness, agency, and influence that transcends human perception.

The agency exists even in the absence of action. Being around or catching our eye is enough to evoke indescribable emotions of the sublime. While examining Edmund Burke's work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, published in 1757, Fred Botting explains why we experience different emotions when looking at other things as follows: "[...] Exquisite goods were defined by their modest size, uniformity, elegance, and progressive change. They aroused affection and warmth compared to the sublime, which elicited anxiety and dread. Things that elicited sublime feelings were large, majestic, and obscure." (1996, p. 26). These objects we encounter may be things we see for the first time. The greater the surprise of experiencing something for the first time, the greater our reaction will be. However, it should not be forgotten that although the nature of the emotion changes, its nature does not change. We can reach the same feeling through different experiences. However, these first-time experiences often suggest another experience we had in the past. Marcel Proust explains how a new experience evokes a past one as follows:

And shortly, mechanically, disheartened by a dismal day and the prospect of a depressing tomorrow, I brought to my lips a tablespoon of tea in which I had soaked a bit of cake. As soon as the warm liquid mingled with the crumbs met my mouth, a chill rushed through me, and I halted. [...] The recollection instantly manifested itself. The taste was like the small piece of madeleine that my aunt Léonie used to offer me on Sunday mornings at Combray (since I did not go out before mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, after first dipping it in her own cup of tea or tisane. (1981, p. 57–59)

As the protagonist of *In Search of Lost Time*, Charles Swann determines his existence with the objects around him, both in the past and the present. Accordingly, any existence is based upon the relation of human and nonhuman actors. The experience in the past is the moment that first or most intensely makes one experience the emotion one feels. Likewise, humans are in touch with nature from the moment they are born, and weather phenomena are also an integral part. Natural events are among the actors to whom we attribute these emotions linguistically. Sometimes, we interpret the sounds coming from the sky when lightning strikes as reflecting an angry mood. Alternatively, we complain about how cruel nature can be when a natural disaster occurs. So, nature has an active role in our emotions and actions. When the weather is sunny, people's moods are more optimistic. Most people do not want to go out in the dark because night is also an element of fear. This may be due to the sky suddenly booming while one sleeps during infancy. Even though we know what thunder is in adulthood, we are still filled with uneasiness because of that violent experience of thunder in infancy. Writers and poets aware of nature's agency over humans often use natural phenomena in their works. Chief among these are Shakespeare (particularly *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*) and the Romantic writers who wrote about nature and weather adeptly. Also fear can be a way of embracing nature, particularly in the Romantic sense of the sublime, which evokes awe and terror. Romantics believed nature's impact on humans wasn't simply positive or negative but a blend of both. Like thunderstorms, nature's elements can inspire fear and admiration for its power. For them, peace with nature required accepting its nurturing and destructive sides, just as Shakespeare used storms and darkness in *King Lear* to reflect human

turmoil. Thus, embracing nature means confronting its beauty and fear, as both are essential to understanding it fully. According to them, nature is an indispensable part of humans, and they argue that only a person who embraces nature can have a peaceful life (Wordsworth, 1798).

On the other hand, gothic, a subgenre of Romantic literature, uses the darkness of the night, lightning, storms and especially abandoned rural geography because they trigger a feeling of horror and terror in the person (Emandi, 2016, pp. 68-69). It dwells on the harsh temperament, dark selves, and vulnerability of people in touch with such things. Among the eminent writers of the English Romantic - mainly gothic – genre is Emily Brontë, who lived a short life between 1818 and 1848.

The life she spent in the rural areas of Yorkshire was also reflected in her most analysed work, *Wuthering Heights*. Elements such as the solitude of these heights and harsh weather conditions are a projection onto the character of Heathcliff, the proto/antagonist of the work. This study will discuss the dynamics between the Earnshaw and Linton families in *Wuthering Heights* with a new materialist approach, focusing on Heathcliff’s character development. How the environmental and weather elements in their environment impose agency on their characters and the actions that this agency causes will be examined on the theoretical basis of intra-action proposed by Karen Barad, which refers to the idea that entities do not exist as independent, pre-existing objects but instead come into being through their interactions with each other (Barad, 2003. p. 815). Also, the Actor-Network Theory coined by Bruno Latour, claiming that social, technological, and natural phenomena are produced through networks of relationships between human and non-human actors (2005, p. 112) will be analyzed within the framework of the novel. Besides, Jane Bennet’s theory of vibrant matter, which claims that “each human is a heterogeneous compound of wonderfully vibrant, dangerously vibrant, matter. If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated” will be examined (2010, pp. 12-13).

A New Materialist Approach to *Wuthering Heights*

Emily Brontë’s most eminent work, *Wuthering Heights*, has been examined with various approaches and has been a popular work in social studies of the Victorian period¹. However, it should not be forgotten that Queen Victoria’s rule had just begun when this work was published, and only a 10-year period had passed. Therefore, another factor that makes the work meaningful is that it was written in the Romantic period and serves as a kind of bridge, simultaneously containing Victorian values with a Gothic style².

To analyze *Wuthering Heights* as a gothic novel, the setting has an important position, but it still seems that everything is left to the will and interpretation of the characters. However, the eco-critical approach, which has become popular in more recent works, emphasizes the symbolism of nature, which contributes significantly to the setting of the work: “*Wuthering Heights* plays a unique position in the pantheon of English literature. It is typically regarded as a masterwork of a superior creative order to that of most works more solid, in touch with and deeper into the fundamental forces of nature and society in symbolic significance” (Basirizadeh et al., 2020, p.

¹ See for example, Shapiro, A. (1969), and Casali, L. K. (2021).

² Class conflicts, the general subject of the novels written in this period, were also the subject of *Wuthering Heights*. On the other hand, studies on the work in the twenty-first century have adopted a more feminist perspective and focused on Catherine’s character development while examining her relationship with Heathcliff.

1624). The perspective employed by the new materialism movement is like a blend of all these approaches. This movement is not new materialism but new materialisms. The agency of the elements, weather or landforms that Brontë frequently mentions in the work on Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw has also been adopted in new materialisms. Above all, Brontë's naming, such as the title and the protagonist's name, denotes the importance of the relationship between humans and inorganic matter.

ANT, the theory that new materialisms benefit most from, argues that matter and the natural world are important in establishing social relations as much as humans (Latour, 2005). Accordingly, nothing can be an agent on its own. Latour explains how anything is attached to the relations as follows:

It's clear that each object – each issue – generates a different pattern of emotions and disruptions, of disagreements and agreements. There might be no continuity, no coherence in our opinions, but there is a hidden continuity and a hidden coherence in what we are attached to. Each object gathers around itself a different assembly of relevant parties. Each object triggers new occasions to passionately differ and dispute. Each object may also offer new ways of achieving closure without having to agree on much else. (2005, p. 5)

The world is a creation not of predetermined social relations and natural entities but of a constantly changing network of relations. ANT examines how actors in this network of relationships communicate with each other, influence each other, or even how one creates another. One of the most productive areas where this theory can be adopted is gothic novels, which depend on the setting. For example, who came up with the gloomy castles before they were built, for what purpose they came, and how those castles affected the ideas of who lived in them are significant for the network that creates social relations. These structures are usually built in high places that are difficult to reach. The house where Heathcliff lives is located on such a hill that gave its name to the novel:

Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr Heathcliff's dwelling. "Wuthering" is a significant provincial adjective, which is descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun. (Brontë, 1847, p. 4)

The vigorous effect of materials on social relations- in this example, nature itself- shapes life dynamics. In the process that people think they are struggling against nature, they are, in fact, inevitably shaped by nature because they are part of its physical formation. In this example, Wuthering Heights, where Heathcliff's house is located, is integrated with him and his family and offers a visible concrete environment that affects and shapes all their lives. In the same way, Catherine also says that "...heaven 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" (Brontë, 1847, p. 102). These characters' earthly connections and spiritual dislocations are redolent to their physical world. Brontë also conveys Catherine's stuckness between the two characters through the features

of their spatial environments. Thus, it can be suggested that the person acquires the characteristics of the environment in which s/he lives due to its influence:

That was his most perfect idea of heaven's happiness: mine was rocking in a rustling green tree, with a west wind blowing, and bright white clouds flitting rapidly above; and not only larks, but throstles, and blackbirds, and linnets, and cuckoos pouring out music on every side, and the moors seen at a distance, broken into cool dusky dells; but close by great swells of long grass undulating in waves to the breeze; and woods and sounding water, and the whole world awake and wild with joy. (Brontë, 1847, pp. 313-314)

Catherine's words emphasize the harmony of all living and non-living things together, all in action. The two different places in the novel can be considered to be the proof of the significant impact of non-living agents on people. While Thrushcross Grange is a welcoming, warm place, like the people living there, Wuthering Heights is harsh and scary, like Heathcliff. Even the weather in these two regions is opposite to each other. This contrast is also reflected in the temperaments of the characters. The actions taken by the people speaking of natural events such as cloudy weather or heavy rain show how active an actor the weather is. A cloudy weather condition can cause pessimistic feelings in us. Alternatively, a sunny sky can enhance our moods. Edgar Linton talks about the weather to make his wife Catherine feel better in her sick bed: "The snow is quite gone down here, darling," replied her husband, "and I only see two white spots on the whole range of moors: the sky is blue, and the larks are singing, and the becks and brooks are all brim full" (Brontë, 1847, p. 172).

The weather is seen as a living thing whose effects are seen on humans, like healing them. The colour of the sky and the singing of the birds cannot be controlled and shaped by people, but there is an interwoven relationship between what happens in nature and humans. Barad explains this interwoven relationship through entanglements. She claims that:

[T]o be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence. Existence is not an individual affair. Individuals do not preexist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating. (2007, p. 9)

Likewise, the weather is an important element in the entanglements. In Wuthering Heights, the weather does not generally trigger positive feelings, as in the excerpt above. On the contrary, it is often stormy and cold. In Shakespeare's works, for example, in *King Lear* (1605), stormy weather in Wuthering Heights indicates someone's sadness, broken order, or an awful event. For example, the first lightning strike we encounter in the work occurs after Heathcliff, in his childhood, disappears. In fact, the tragedies that wound Heathcliff are always given in an atmosphere where lightning strikes allow us to conclude that his soul is made of electricity: "In her description of Catherine and Heathcliff's souls as electric, Brontë, like Mary Shelley before her, embraces scientific theory on the existence of the soul, which rests on an active notion of matter. Brontë portrays Catherine and Heathcliff as possessing lightning-like strength" (Kraus, 2019, p. 43). Elements, just like electricity, have determining roles in human nature. It is universally accepted that someone whose soul is likened to fire is considered appropriate for this analogy because he gets angry quickly or harms his surroundings because he sees the red mist when he gets angry. Or, it is said that some people are as calm as a millpond because of their calm

temperament. Some people are as cool as cucumbers because they keep their distance from others and have impenetrable walls.

Brontë adapted these features to her novel characters. While comparing her lovers, Catherine identifies Heathcliff's fierceness with lightning. On the other hand, Linton is just a moonbeam for Catherine: "... he [Heathcliff] shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning or frost from fire" (Brontë, 1847, p. 102). The souls of Heathcliff and Catherine are not inert but dynamic; their souls resemble lightning/electricity, which has a dynamic and continuous role in the form of everything. In other words, the souls of Heathcliff and Catherine, much like lightning, exhibit a force that is not static but actively shapes the world around them, constantly influencing their environment and relationships. In terms of new materialisms, this comparison highlights how their emotional and spiritual energies possess agency, much like the natural force of lightning, which affects and transforms its surroundings. Lightning, with its capacity to illuminate, destroy, and renew, embodies a continual process of becoming—never fixed, always in flux. Similarly, Heathcliff and Catherine's souls, charged with passion and unrest, disrupt social norms, alter the lives of others, and leave lasting imprints on the landscape of their story.

Lightning causes electrification. Matter exposed to excessive amounts of electricity burns. However, a certain amount of electricity can trigger vitality³. Today, it is known that electricity is used as a treatment method for partially paralyzed individuals. It is even used in the treatment of some psychological disorders. Because electrical signals transmit communication between nerve cells in the brain, this communication forms neural networks. Through this activity called brain waves, all cerebral actions, such as thinking, eating, and running, occur. In fact, electricity is an inorganic substance not associated with the brain. Similarly, there is no direct correlation between electricity generation and eating. However, thanks to intra-action, these actors come together and create an agential reality.

Karen Barad supports the Actor-Network theory with the concept of intra-action. According to her, what constructs reality is the intertwining of seemingly different objects: "Phenomena are constitutive of reality. Reality is not composed of things-in-themselves or things-behind-phenomena but "things"-in-phenomena" (2003, p. 17). Anne-Jorunn Berg also explains Barad's concept as follows in her article titled "The Cyborg, Its Friends and Feminist Theories of Materiality":

When the boundary between the human and the nonhuman is removed, she refers to the entanglement as intra-action, as opposed to inter-action, where "inter" means "between" and "intra" means "within." In other words, intra-action is processes that take place within a phenomena—a phenomenon consists merely of such intra-action—rather than a process between separate entities. (2019, p. 79)

³ For example, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, Dr Frankenstein gives life to the monster he assembles from human corpses by electrocuting it. The use of electricity is not random. The period in which Shelley lived coincides with the Enlightenment. During this period, there were no limits to scientists' experiments. One of these scientists was Luigi Galvani, who believed that he could bring the dead back to life. In his work *De Viribus Electricitatis In Motu Musculari*, he explains how he used electricity in an experiment he conducted on a frog and concluded that there was movement in the frog's muscles (2010). After announcing this experiment, he paved the way for many scientists, who became the pioneers of Galvanism, to use electricity on tissues.

Barad reaches this idea by starting from quantum entanglement in quantum physics. Accordingly, the change in each subatomic particle also occurs in other subatomic particles, even at the other end of the world (2007, p. 354). Each change simultaneously enables seemingly opposed realities. However, to interpret whether a phenomenon is natural, it is necessary to measure it. According to Barad, for reality to become concrete, an interpretive actor, an interpreted actor and an interpretation tool (method, measuring device, etc.) are required (2003, p. 815). The combination of these three elements leads to an agential reality. When Barad's concept of intra-action resonates in the literary world, it turns all known classifications upside down. For example, one of the most common themes, the battle between good and evil, is no longer a simple binary opposition because these categories are not viewed as fixed, independent entities. Instead, they are understood to emerge through relationships and intra-actions with each other and their surrounding context. This means that "good" and "evil" do not pre-exist as static forces but are continuously redefined and co-constructed through specific circumstances, characters, and events⁴. When considering Heathcliff, many traditional approaches interpret him as a vindictive anti-hero, even an antagonist. However, if the events are seen from his point of view, he is a lover who is punishing his oppressor for the injustice done to him and trying by all means to reach the woman he loves, and since his motive is love, he is a protagonist. Both interpretations are accurate/real; only the interpreter and the interpreting tool have changed. However, in both interpretations, Heathcliff's environment was formed due to the events emerging from the intertwining of the people he lived with and his inner chaos combined with the environment itself. Even his love for Catherine is shaped in this way. Just like all other actors, what they feel is part of an inseparable whole. Accordingly, Catherine says: "I am unable to articulate it, but certainly you and everyone else have a sense or belief that there is, or should be, an existence of yours that extends beyond your current state. What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here?" (Brontë, 1847, p. 104). Heathcliff and Catherine's love is based on true childhood friendship. It has deep roots and is different from a usual love relationship. She often resembles her love with the place they live in: "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" (1847, p. 104). For that reason, leaving Heathcliff seems challenging and complicated. From a new materialist perspective, Catherine's relationship with Heathcliff reflects the entanglement of human emotions with their physical environment, emphasizing how both shape and define their existence. This connection suggests that separation from Heathcliff would not only disrupt her emotional state but also alter her relationship with the material world around her, rendering it alien and unrecognizable.

In terms of nature's effect on man, it offers a certain vitality that can be experienced. It can be said that everything in nature is included in an assemblage while the agency is being formed. In her work titled *Vibrant Matter A Political Ecology of Things*, Jane Bennet adapts the concept of assemblage from the works of Deleuze and Guattari to vibrant matter. Accordingly, no entity is isolated. On the contrary, it occurs when many entities come together in different ways and influence each other. This effect may be temporary or permanent. Assemblages are ad hoc groups

⁴ For further information, see Introna, L.D. (2013). Epilogue: Performativity and the Becoming of Sociomaterial Assemblages. In: de Vaujany, FX., Mitev, N. (eds) *Materiality and Space. Technology, Work and Globalization. Palgrave Macmillan*, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137304094_17

that come together for a specific purpose. The dynamic interaction of elements within the group allows the formation of various realities (2010, pp. 23-24). In her work, Bennet focuses on the impact of inanimate beings - especially nature. Therefore, nature is not an entity dominated by humans; on the contrary, humans are a part of nature's dynamic assemblage (2010, p. x). *Wuthering Heights* is an important work that emphasizes the impact of nature. One of the most apparent natural examples of the vitality of matter is soil. Soil is an assemblage where both construction and destruction occur. It decomposes the organic and inorganic substances it contains and reintroduces them to nature. Every grain of sand, rotting leaves, worms, and even the air in it are actors that bring together the functions of the soil. It feeds plants with the organic substances it breaks down. The nourished plants take root and prevent landslides. Typically, after passing away, a dead body is expected to decay in the soil; it is the normal cycle of nature: we are born, mature, then die and return to the soil. However, in the novel, Brontë challenges the binary opposition that humans are active, and nature is passive and finds a way to connect the soul and the matter. Catherine's soul may be physically located or attached to *Wuthering Heights*:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees—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. (Brontë, 1847, p. 104)

As seen in this excerpt, such natural objects as stones, cold weather, etc., go hand in hand with the dynamics of love and affection. It shows that not only human beings are the agents of the changes in nature, but all living and non-living things have an effect. Heathcliff, as the rock in the novel, a material being, is regarded as Catherine's mind and soul. Brontë's comparison of Heathcliff to a rock is not haphazard. In Nelly's words, rock is the raw material of the soil on which all this life is shaped. Heathcliff is the mortar in Catherine's character formation: "And what are those golden rocks like when you stand under them?" she [Catherine] once asked. The abrupt descent of Penistone Crag particularly attracted her notice, especially when the setting sun shone on it, and the topmost heights and the whole extent of landscape besides lay in shadow. I explained that they were bare masses of stone, with hardly enough earth in their clefts to nourish a stunted tree" (Brontë, 1847, p. 241). Like all the others, rocks have some agencies, including providing earth and ground for trees. In the quotation, Nelly's explanation states that rocks are expected to turn into soil to grow trees and other plants, but it happens in the long term, and the rock she mentions may be a young one, and its cliffs are too pointed to let plants grow. Then, it may contribute to the formation of the landscape.

Even after her death, Catherine still has some features that reveal the physical existence of the soul. Nature shows its impact on humans best in *Wuthering Heights* when Heathcliff tries to open Catherine's grave, aiming to embrace her dead body and want to unite again. Nature as an agent plays a vital role in showing the coexistence of humans and nature, and the interaction between agencies is continuous: "I said to myself 'I'll have her in my arms again!'" indicates Heathcliff, "If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills ME" (Brontë, 1847, p. 365). Nature does not refuse his request and makes him think that Catherine is breathing: "There was another sigh, close at my ear" (Brontë, 1847, p. 366). He is now sure that the material body of Catherine is alive but not seen like the wind: "So certainly I felt that Cathy was there: not under

me, but on the earth (Brontë, 1847, p. 366). The continuous interaction between humans and nature demonstrates that both are interconnected and mutually influential. Nature is not merely acted upon; it plays a vital role in shaping experiences, environments, and relationships. This continuous exchange emphasizes that nature has an active, dynamic presence that contributes to the coexistence and ongoing development of both human and non-human systems.

However, it should not be concluded that only nature has agency over humans. Nature generally does not produce effects. On the contrary, it reacts to the effect. As social dynamics transform nature and cities, nature transforms them simultaneously. It is not just a transformation but also absorption. After all, the organic and inorganic substances will be broken by the nature. We witness the intra-action performed by Catherine and nature in the network: “The place of Catherine’s interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope in a corner of the kirk-yard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry-plants have climbed over it from the moor; and peat-mould almost buries it” (Brontë, 1847, pp. 214-215). The dead body of Catherine will turn into soil and take a different shape in nature. She will become nature itself. There is a coexistence of humans and nature. Every substance, including human beings, is perpetually interconnected to each other⁵.

By mentioning decomposition in the way Brontë does, new materialists refer to *animism*. Regarding animism, death is a transformation performed through decomposition, which unites the animate and inanimate. In his book *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, Graham Harvey explains how an animate being becomes an integral part of nature. According to him, after death, bodies transform. Animal or plant bodies may be turned into food, shelter, or artefacts. Human and older plant or animal bodies decompose through various forms of decay, which can be celebrated by supporting nutrient redistribution, such as feeding vultures, earthworms, or composting. While decay marks the divide between life and death, transformation is a natural expectation for all beings (2006, p. 117). The substance never fades away but shifts its shape. Perhaps they seem on the verge, but Brontë supports this claim through Heathcliff’s words:

I got the sexton, who was digging Linton’s grave, to remove the earth Earth off her coffin lid, and I opened it. I thought, once, I would have stayed there: when I saw her face again it is hers yet! he had hard work to stir me; but he said it would change if the air blew on it, and so I struck one side of the coffin loose, and covered it up: not Linton’s side, damn him! I wish he’d been soldered in lead. (Brontë, 1847, p. 364)

Heathcliff believes that he and Catherine can only be together on earth, and they will decompose in the grave and mix and become a single substance. His grave digging, and here, the grave is an assemblage- is a kind of imposition in his discourse on materiality. However, he forgets the dynamic relationship of actors. He would never know what was going to happen through decay.

⁵ Accordingly, Donna Haraway explains the coexistence of humans and nature through the relationship between dogs and humans in her book titled *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*:

Bringing Thomas Jefferson into the kennel, Hearne believes that the origin of rights is in committed relationships, not in separate and pre-existing category identities. Therefore, in training, dogs obtain "rights" in specific humans. In relation-ship, dogs and humans construct "rights" in each other, such as the right to demand respect, attention, and response. Hearne described the sport of dog obedience as a place to increase the dog's power to claim rights against the human. (2003, p. 53)

Here, the real subject is neither the grave nor Heathcliff. It is Heathcliff's inner struggles' entanglement with the object, the act of digging. No natural element can be considered independent here.

Heathcliff's cannibalization also reflects the continuous relationship between different species in nature. Heathcliff's words and frightening appearance when he sees Hindley emphasize a possible cut in the world. His anger is not just an emotion; he has this wild appearance and cannibal teeth due to the harsh weather assemblage caused by the intra-action of cold, threatening air and snow. The words he speaks are the product of his anger's intra-action with the outside world. When Brontë uses the expression cannibal teeth, she blurs the distinction between humans and animals and emphasizes Heathcliff's entanglement with his environment. Heathcliff says of Edgar Linton that "I would have torn his heart out, and drank his blood" (Brontë, 1847, p. 189). In confronting Hindley through the window of Wuthering Heights, "[h]is hair and clothes were whitened with snow, and his sharp cannibal teeth, revealed by cold and wrath, gleamed through the dark" (Brontë, 1847, p. 225). Here, it is possible to see that agential cuts emphasize the entanglement of the world. Agential cuts, in this context, highlight the entanglement of the world by showing how boundaries between entities, such as humans, animals, and the natural environment, are fluid and interconnected. Heathcliff's cannibalistic imagery blurs the distinction between species, demonstrating the ongoing relationships and exchanges within nature.

Conclusion

Emily Brontë's, *Wuthering Heights*, links the material cosmos and human behaviours with new materialisms (even though there was no such approach when the novel was first published). On the surface, where interaction is constant, *Wuthering Heights* fundamentally challenges standard subject-object connections, forcing readers to reconsider the distinctions between humans and nonhumans. The work concentrates not just on the characters' interactions with one another but also implies that the untamed Yorkshire countryside actively alters people. When examined from a New Materialist perspective, it becomes clear why and how this change occurs. Because, from its very name, the work is a comprehensive example of the intra-action of material things with animate beings - especially in the setting where the action occurs. While Heathcliff's tough temperament is a projection of the harsh geography of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine's illnesses and rebellious nature reflect the climatic characteristics of the region. Even when Catherine, hypergamous by nature, chooses Edgar Linton as her husband, she is influenced by the class distinction with Heathcliff and the geographical features between Thrushcross Grange and *Wuthering Heights*. As can be understood from the adjective "wuthering" at the beginning of *Wuthering Heights*, it evokes a sense of violence and terror. Moreover, the house where the Earnshaw family resides is quite old and dreary. Thrushcross Grange, on the other hand, has a sunny atmosphere in a quiet valley. It symbolises wealth and prosperity. When examined with all the elements within the mentioned regions, they are assemblages. The so-called assemblages come together to form something superior to themselves. For example, the soil is a much larger living space with air, bacteria, water and human organisms. Therefore, Catherine's tomb is not just a piece of land where her dead body in a coffin rests but also a network of material associations. The actors, the soil, the coffin, Catherine and even Heathcliff, create this network together. Heathcliff cannot understand this bond. That is why he believes that he can destroy the assemblage by

opening the grave, but nature cannot be bent under the influence of humans. It has its flow. Heathcliff is entangled with nature, but this is what wounds him. Catherine is no longer the Catherine he knew. Nature has changed what she was. Even this change is subject to change at any time. North wind-breathing nature is always alive. The change generally shows decaying. Namely, the decay of houses equates to the aging of people.

Finally, the ending of *Wuthering Heights* encourages readers to consider the long-lasting repercussions of these relationships within the structure of the material world. If Heathcliff had grown up on a beach rather than in such a harsh climate or arduous geography, perhaps he would not have been such an aforementioned cannibal character. Accordingly, the wuthering voices behind Catherine's haunted feelings caused her illness and eventually her death. When viewed from all these aspects, nature can never be seen as a passive structure, and every element -animate or inanimate- constructs her as an actor. Thus, the novel's setting consists of living and non-living entities, actor networks, and relationships between humans and non-humans.

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