WILLIAM & MARY
CHARTERED 1693

W&M ScholarWorks

Undergraduate Honors Theses

Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects

5-2017

The Northern Novel of Manners: Wuthering Heights & The Invention of a Genre

Cameron I. Menchel
College of William and Mary

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/honorstheses

Part of the Literature in English, British Isles Commons

The Northern Novel of Manners: *Wuthering Heights* & The Invention of a Genre

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in the English Department from
The College of William and Mary

By

Cameron Menchel

Accepted for _____

_____
Deborah Morse, Director

_____
Kathrin Levitan

_____
Suzanne Raitt

_____
Kim Wheatley

Williamsburg, VA
May 2, 2017

Introduction

A stereotypical conception of the "novel of manners" envisions it as a prim coagulation of stilted encounters and formal settings. This, of course, does no justice whatsoever to the genre's great practitioners, chief among them Jane Austen, George Eliot, Anthony Trollope, and Henry James, all of whom sidestep convention with harrowing psychological acuity. However, glibness tends to creep in when ascribing genre to a work of fiction, as label-making itself can tend toward oversimplification. *Wuthering Heights* (1847) does not pass the heuristic checklist one automatically associates with "novel of manners" and so is excluded from the category. Yet it was Emily Brontë's genius to reinvent the genre by bringing it to Yorkshire and making it *northern*. It was her innovation to examine how isolation and longstanding tensions could be the genesis of a vicious etiquette. Stevie Davies, one of the novel's most prolific and incisive critics, asserts that the lichen of normativity still clings, at least in a few patches, to Wuthering Heights, but Brontë manages a "revolutionary avoidance" (*Brontë* 69) of the "dictates of civility" (*Brontë* 69). This is true; Brontë examines the fallout when people adhere, instead, to the dictates of hatred, jealousy, and cruelty. Davies submits that "the author [implies] a norm of mores, etiquette, and a decorous behaviour" (*Brontë* 69), but decorousness is a rare commodity in the pages of *Wuthering Heights*. The *routines* of domestic life continue. Davies also reminds us that "laying fires, taking tea, [and] attending to livestock" (*Brontë* 69) demand attention from the servants; nevertheless, these requirements have little to do with the interactional temperature between Heathcliff, Edgar, and Catherine. What is more, these quotidian concerns and images anchor the novel in realism and suggest that the characters' antics are what pass for mores. The

uncommon violence is starker against a background that is still, in many respects, commonplace.

Barbra Brothers and Bege K. Bowers reveal in their book *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of The Novel of Manners* "that the term…did not come into existence concurrently with *Evelina*, *Pride and Prejudice*, or any of the other books we so often associate with the early novel of manners" (1). They mention the dearth of critical studies on the subject at the time of their writing (1990—fairly late in the game for defining such a crucial term). They do, however, reference the work of Joseph Wiesenfarth in his study *Gothic Manners and the Classic English Novel*. In that book, Wiesenfarth asserts that "[w]hereas the novel of manners presents individual thought and feeling indirectly through a code of usage established by social custom, the new Gothic novel [a category in which he places *Wuthering Heights*] presents thought and feeling at variance with social custom" (10). The former, he insists, "emphasizes social circumstance, the [latter], psychological states" (10). What makes this assessment problematic is that the canonical novels of manners, at the very least, *do* dwell on their characters' "psychological states." Austen's mastery of free indirect expression allows her to burrow into her characters' consciousness and, contra Wiesenfarth, to depict how often they are "at variance with social custom." The tension between Elizabeth and Lady Catherine de Bourgh in *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) neatly evidences this; the novel's heroine finds "that nothing [is] beneath this great Lady's attention, which…furnish[es] her with an occasion of dictating to others" (*Pride* 172). Austen introduces Elizabeth's subjective appraisal as though it were an objective discovery; the "great" strikes a note of trenchant irony, while "dictating" carries an obvious negative connotation. Moments

later, Elizabeth is spurred to impudence when she evades Lady Catherine's question about her (Elizabeth's) age. Although she is of a lower social station, Elizabeth is likely "the first creature who ha[s] ever dared to trifle with so much dignified impertinence" (*Pride* 174). Austen's pages are psychologically dense and subvert assumptions about etiquette—there is satisfaction to be found in Elizabeth's conversational transgressions, which provide an antidote to the pomposity of Lady Catherine. Claudia Johnson observes in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and The Novel* that "a consciousness of how the private is political" (xx) can provide insights into a novelist who sought "to rewrite the lexicon of conservative discourse…without seeming necessarily to imply a Jacobin wish to see society radically reconstituted" (xxv). Wiesenfarth's sweeping distinction fails to take Austen's oppositional qualities into account.

Wuthering Heights' thematic preoccupation with manners is inaugurated in part by the fact that Lockwood is incapable of admitting his romantic interest to a young woman during "a month of fine weather [he spends] at the sea-coast" (*Heights* 6). His confession that he recently "shrank icily into [him]self, like a snail" (*Heights* 6) rather than return the attractive lady's affectionate glances evokes the physical symptom of impotence. His reminiscence about an unconsummated flirtation is an oblique portrait of the interrogation to follow, an interrogation into social conduct and the way in which certain personalities, by virtue of their psychological impulses, reconstitute mores. The metaphysics of etiquette are called into question precisely because, at Wuthering Heights, they undergo a dramatic displacement from their position in what might be deemed "regular" society. Lockwood's inability to heed the rules of polite courtship—rules he skirts tentatively, before fleeing in terror—is effectively a comedic set-up for that which

is to follow. This non-interaction will be the closest in the book to normative social behavior; the relationships between Heathcliff, the Lintons, Nelly, and the Earnshaws are predicated on a set of manners so extreme that "heterodox" fails to do sufficient work in describing them. Even Lockwood's conversations with Nelly contravene the notion of the housekeeper as the guardian of her charges' privacy. The resident historian of Wuthering Heights chooses to divulge the house's most intimate details to Lockwood, a tenant whose transience makes that divulgence more understandable (since he is curious and Nelly can speak freely), yet simultaneously more egregious. Nelly confides in a man whom she has no reason to trust with sensitive information; this fact injects a certain amount of recklessness into the proceedings.

Chapter 1: Genre, Region and Framing

i.

"Genre" is a powerful pedagogical tool, helpful in inculcating students of literature with a basic interpretive framework. Labeling *Frankenstein* (1818), for instance, a "Gothic" work (burnished with Romantic features as well) has what might be called a "flashcard effect"—it is a practical mechanism which prompts one to recall the distinctive aesthetic features of Shelley's novel. The question of genre's ontology beyond the classroom is a fraught and theoretical one. This question entails a second inquiry, namely as to whether genre exists in any concrete sense, independent of the educational construct useful for guiding first-time readers. Genre *does* inhere in *Wuthering Heights*— not as a fixed designation but rather as a fulcrum upon which to tilt the narrative and examine it from different angles. A fulcrum is not unbounded; it is subject to time and space, and the lever placed upon it able to move only so far in either direction. Similarly

this conception of genre possesses definitive constraints without becoming so narrowly doctrinal as to elide the complexities that adorn Brontë's art. Genre, in this sense, allows us to recast *Wuthering Heights*' rich collation of patterns (though not *ad infinitum*) and, in so doing, to peer deeper into the architecture of meaning which they construct.

A claim of genre requires broad delineation in addition to the far narrower task of excavating an author's stylistic tendencies and feats. Emily Brontë's novel resists vastly more classifications than not; this is a simple point which requires iteration, lest categorization be misunderstood as lacking in principle, and treated as an enterprise to be pursued at the critic's inventive whim. *Wuthering Heights* cannot be called, for example, a *Bildungsroman*. We know Catherine from youth until death, yet her "coming-of-age" is never the central focus of the narrative[1] (nor is Heathcliff's which, besides, remains partly obscured because of his prolonged absence from Wuthering Heights). *Jane Eyre* (1847) can be poured into the mold of *Bildungsroman*, and regularly is—Amy Robinson, for instance, argues that Charlotte Brontë creates one using "a mixture of romance and realism" (65) and that "feminist readings focusing on the novel as a coming-of-age story have always been popular" (67). The same label cannot be applied, however, to a novel that traffics in generational wounds rather than an individual trajectory. Virginia Woolf notes in *The Common Reader* that "there is no 'I' in *Wuthering Heights*…Emily was inspired by some more general conception. The impulse which urged her to create was not her own suffering…She looked out upon a world cleft into gigantic disorder and felt within her the power to unite it in a book" (159). Emily Brontë's narrative scope extends

---

[1] Although Catherine does dwell on the painful arc from youth to adulthood—and her desire to be "'a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free'" (*Heights* 124) when her mind is clouded by "brain fever" (*Heights* 132).

far beyond that of that of the *Bildungsroman*. *Wuthering Heights* cannot be called a detective story either, to summon another example, except in the acrobatic distortion of that term whereby readers are made into detectives through the question-begging assertion that they should be so designated because of their determination to ascertain the narrative's facts. There are other proposed categories for *Wuthering Heights* that, as we will see, are insufficient to its particularities. Genre must account for the text's details— its diction, imagery, mood, metaphors, characters, atmosphere, plot, tone, and idiom— without reducing or repressing any of them. Otherwise, genre cannot possibly inhere in fiction in any sense, because it necessarily refuses to coexist with that work's elemental details.

Jacques Derrida in his article "The Law of Genre" seeks to do away with genre theory altogether; anyone who propounds genre (in one form or another) is impelled at least to address such a radical abrogation. It is, indeed, a meticulous dismantling beginning with his distinction between "a biological *genre*" (56) which is natural and "a typology designated as nonnatural [sic.] and depending on laws or orders…an artistic, poetic, or literary genre" (56). His thought process is unmistakably tinged with the politics of linguistic and cultural iconoclasm. Derrida speaks of genre in oppressive terms, noting that "as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm…one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity" (57). At the point when he makes this observation his disassembly is not yet properly underway, yet the terminology unmistakably implies a sort of paternal sententiousness with words such as "impurity." When Derrida experiments with his "(accountless) *Account*" (81) and mentions that "the principle of genre is unclassifiable" (61), he means to parade "the madness of genre"

(81), the way in which genre's teleology is as anarchic as it is codifying. The integrity of his experiment has little to do with establishing a suitable discourse for a specific literary work, however. That is to say, Derrida's reasoning has little bearing on a discourse that operates without regard to its own metaphysical justification, and instead prioritizes the need to understand a work of literature in relation to other works of literature. The critical dialectic must buy into the assumption that this is a worthwhile endeavor—otherwise, the landscape of criticism would be much more desolately barren than the Yorkshire moors. Moreover, the notion of genre in the original fulcrum metaphor is of an utterly different kind than that which Derrida entertains (he addresses it on its historical terms). The metaphor departs from the traditional idea of genre as that which inscribes a singular codification, in favor of the understanding that genre is a tool for the reader or critic to use judiciously.

Of course this departs from what many mean by genre, yet it will suffice because it cuts to genre's authentic use—construing a work of literature's meaning and the historical nature of its intertextual relations. In emphasizing "use," one is closer, on the interpretive spectrum, to Carolyn Miller who, in her article "Genre as Social Action," professes to be uninterested in "some kind of taxonomy" (151), preferring instead to understand genre in the context of the "action it is used to accomplish" (151). She aptly identifies the problem with Derrida's motive for most readers and critics when she mentions that theory is frequently plagued by "a level of abstraction that is too high to represent the practical rhetorical experience of those who use genre" (154). Miller's claim that genre "acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose" (163) certainly accords with an approach that treats *Wuthering*

Heights as a northern novel of manners, one that articulates the hazards of a unique social context with terrifying clarity. Brontë's "action" (151), to use Miller's term, is not didactic reportage nor is it social advocacy. Rather, her action is to present a portrait of wayward mores that run dramatically counter to those that prevail in conventional society. Although this is not my primary tack in accounting for genre's importance, Miller illuminates the larger need to consider the practical uses of genre, rather than dwelling on its metaphysical construction and avoiding literature itself.

Miller might approve of Arnold Shapiro's broad genre designation in his article "*Wuthering Heights* As A Victorian Novel," since he considers Emily Brontë's achievement as a form of social action, or as a correction. Shapiro writes that Brontë "describes that slow, gradual transformation of the individual which alone makes education possible and puts a better society within our reach" (295) and he posits that she "calls for a revolution—the reversal of the old ways of thinking and behaving" (285). Shapiro's concise appraisal of the novel is most insightful when it traces the contours of Brontë's mimetic realism. He asserts that the book "does not take place in some dream world" (285) and recognizes that reading *Wuthering Heights* as a novel which operates through the grammar of verisimilitude is not to reduce its moral complexity—Brontë does not "[see] things in blacks and whites" (285). Implicitly Shapiro conveys the anxiety that treating the novel as a realist work will rob it of enduring value, that—unless it is construed as a myth, borne aloft on the afflatus of the mystical—its edifice of irony, poetic diction, and characterological nuance will go neglected. Shapiro emphasizes the realistic nature of Heathcliff's revenge, in which "[h]e ends up playing society's game" (291) by transforming his enemies into slaves. Far from devising a new, Machiavellian

mode of retribution, baroque and therefore mythic in proportion, Heathcliff falls into the trap of "stasis" (Shapiro 291), just like "the Lintons and Earnshaws…[who] are grasping people who like the *status-quo* because it keeps them in power" (Shapiro 291). What is more, Shapiro places his finger on the pulse of the northern novel of manners when he says that for Charlotte and Emily Brontë "society and what passes for civilization are synonymous with selfishness" (285). The implementation of selfishness as a governing principle, which begins at Wuthering Heights when Hindley assumes power over the household, is merely an amplified form of the class-based selfishness that dominates in more "regular" settings. In the world of the Lintons, the Earnshaws, Nelly, and Heathcliff the rules are, of course, infused with personal resentments; the code is instantiated in the bitterest and most volatile interactions that the characters share.

However, Shapiro's description of *Wuthering Heights* is problematic insofar as it is too broad and occasionally inattentive to the narrative's distinguishing features; it fails to accommodate the novel's wildness. He mentions that "critics have generally torn the novel from its Victorian surroundings" (284), presumably meaning those in which it was conceived, as the novel ends decades before Queen Victoria's reign. One is forced to presume because Shapiro does not address the novel as a work of historical fiction (which does not, of course, prohibit it *prima facie* from responding to the society and cultural phenomena of Brontë's own time). Shapiro, responding to those who place Brontë's novel in the Romantic tradition, maintains that "*Wuthering Heights* is in the same ethical and moral tradition as the other great Victorian novels" (285) and submits that "Heathcliff is much like the orphans in other Victorian novels…[including] Pip [in *Great Expectations* (1861)]" (286). In joining Brontë's novel with Dickens in this respect,

Shapiro risks a preposterous elision of substantial differences between the two characters. Heathcliff is a racial outsider[2], a "gipsy brat" (*Heights* 37) wounded by the upper-class Lintons through exclusion (although introduced by old Mr. Earnshaw into a world of yeoman farmers), while Pip is not disadvantaged by his skin color and he is *invited* into the aristocratic Miss Havisham's house (although this is the first step in her scheme to hurt him). That they are both orphans is virtually the single biographical fact they share. Brontë and Dickens do not occupy the same ethical continuum. Whereas Pip offers an object lesson in snobbery (without becoming, by any means, a didactic prop), Heathcliff's dramatically passionate disposition and experiences—which include physical abuse and mental torment beyond Pip's experience at the hands of his sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery—cannot be said to offer such a lesson. While Shapiro skillfully underlines Brontë's fidelity to reality, his attempt to group her in the Victorian tradition proves to be somewhat hasty. Her novel occupies a liminal space between, on the one hand, novels of manners such as *Pride and Prejudice* and, on the other, the romances of Walter Scott with their exuberant regionalism and larger-than-life figures.

Robert Kiely, in his seminal book *The Romantic Novel in England*, differentiates Brontë's work from Scott's *Waverley* (1814), yet declares that "*Wuthering Heights* is the masterpiece of English romantic fiction" (233). Kiely lists several of the ways in which Brontë draws on that tradition: "Heathcliff is Byronic…Catherine is Shelleyan…Emily Brontë read books…[including those of] the romantic poets" (234). However, he also acknowledges that Brontë relinquishes certain aspects of the Romantic tradition when

---

[2] Many critics have focused on Heathcliff's ambiguous racial identity and read *Wuthering Heights* through a postcolonial lens (Maja-Lisa von Sneidern's "*Wuthering Heights* and the Liverpool Slave Trade" is an example of this approach), however that is beyond the scope of this essay.

discussing Lockwood's comment about the eponymous place being "completely removed from the stir of society" (*Heights* 3). Kiely writes that Brontë "undercuts the familiar distinction between city and country [an important one to Wordsworth and other romantics]…no place and no society in [Lockwood's] past could have been more furiously agitated than nature and society in the region of Wuthering Heights" (240). Kiely does not dwell on manners, and so is content to place *Wuthering Heights* in a romantic "counter-tradition" (233). When one considers Brontë's obsession with domestic etiquette, it makes sense to treat *Wuthering Heights* as a northern take on the novel of manners, one that incorporates elements of the Romantic tradition without becoming completely beholden to it.

<div align="center">ii.</div>

Yorkshire has long inspired a strain of febrile poetry; the landscape's "desolation" (*Heights* 3) demands a descriptive language that can verge on the mythic in its mere attempt at mimesis. Ted Hughes, writing more than a century after Emily Brontë, produces a portrait of the country in "The Horses" that recalls her own aggrandizing language. Although he does not explicitly mention a location for the experience he relates, his brother Gerald has confirmed, in his autobiography *Ted and I*, that the poem is "set in the moors above Mytholmroyd, Yorkshire" (215). In the poem, Hughes recounts a pre-dawn walk through the woods' "[e]vil air…frost-making stillness" (2) in which his breath leaves "torturous statues in the iron light" (5) as he listens "in emptiness on the moor-ridge" (17). He moves "in the fever of a dream, down towards" (25) the eponymous creatures which stand "steaming and glistening under the flow of light" (29) This being a Hughes' poem, animalistic power is, of course, foregrounded in his distinctive manner;

no one would accuse him of Brontean imitation. Yet his attention to familiar detail discloses the phantasmagoric quality of even an ordinary early morning in Yorkshire— where the typical is, compared to so many other settings, sublime. The hushed nature of Hughes' ramble through a "world cast in frost" (4), "a grey silent world" (16) where "[t]he curlew's tear turn[s] its edge on the silence" (18) recalls Nelly's meditation on the snow and the profound quiet in the wake of Catherine's death. She remembers the "fine days" (*Heights* 169) coming to an end (a comment, of course, on the terrible momentousness of Catherine's demise) and how "the primroses and crocuses were hidden under wintry drifts: the larks were silent, the young leaves of the early trees smitten and blackened" (*Heights* 169). In both descriptions, the climate's raw, unmediated poetics are uncannily aligned with the observer's interior feelings. Hughes' vision, like Brontë's, is realistic yet nevertheless saturated with consciousness of the awe-inspiring elements of their shared region[3].

Critical consensus holds that Walter Scott is the great influence upon Emily Brontë, especially as far as her unabashed embrace of region is concerned. In the Gondal juvenilia, she "borrowed from the novels and ballads of Sir Walter Scott" (Barker 318) at least when it came to the mountains and castles that she inserted into those early fictions. The influence deepened in a less obvious, though more elemental fashion as Brontë matured. Scott's nationalist aesthetic opened up new possibilities for all the Brontë sisters; he gave each of them permission to turn to their own surroundings for subject

---

[3] In her article "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*," Margaret Homans points out the fact that "[t]here are…very few scenes in the novel that are actually set out-of-doors. With a few exceptions, the crucial events take place in one or the other of the two houses" (9). This is true, yet the moors are so atmospheric and so inextricably associated with Heathcliff and Catherine's love—for many readers the story's most memorable aspect—that their narrative significance cannot be downplayed.

matter. Indeed, much of *Ivanhoe* (1820), one of Walter Scott's English Romances, is set in "the beautiful hills and vallies [sic.] which lie between Sheffield and the pleasant town of Doncaster" (*Ivanhoe* 15), both of which are in Yorkshire. Moreover, Scott pays some attention in that novel to the matter of language, as *Wuthering Heights* does at its outset. He describes the tension between "French [which] was the language of honour, of chivalry, and even of justice, while the far more manly and expressive Anglo-Saxon was abandoned to the use of rustics…who knew no other" (*Ivanhoe* 17) and refers to "our present English language, in which the speech of the victors and the vanquished have been so happily blended together" (*Ivanhoe* 17). The self-reflexive commentary on language is echoed in *Wuthering Heights* not only when Lockwood defines "wuthering," but also in the way that dialect is allowed to surface sporadically, thus prompting the reader to ponder the essentially polyglot nature of Wuthering Heights' uncivilized (in the traditional sense) culture.

Ian Duncan, in his book *Scott's Shadow*, comments on the Scottish author's "nation-forming authority" (65) and his "ability to reanimate the landscape by reviving (or creating) its national associations" (65), both of which are evidenced by Scott's sweeping descriptions of national zeitgeist in a novel such as *Ivanhoe* where he is confidently capable of writing that "[t]he condition of the English nation was…sufficiently miserable" (65). Duncan observes that Scott's novel *The Antiquary* (1816) (which Duncan considers "the one most devoted to representation of common life" (139)) uses "the thick description of regional manners [to] represent a profound, organic inertia of common life that resists the totalizing force of historical change" (140). The same description could readily be applied to *Wuthering Heights*, which similarly

dwells upon "the modality of a present that already belongs to the past, and a past that flows into the present" (Duncan 140) through the chronological switching between history and the current moment in which Nelly and Lockwood are processing it. Emily Brontë is, of course, politically distinct from Scott in a number of respects. In choosing to make her subject marginal figures rather than famous ones from the past (such as Robin Hood), Brontë's art does not assume the task of attempting to control or order England's history. Scott's aesthetic enterprise (which often, as in *Ivanhoe*, includes an omniscient narrator) possesses a statesmanlike dimension that is absent from *Wuthering Heights*, which delves into the particular.

Duncan, interestingly, contrasts *The Antiquary* with Austen's *Emma* (1815), noting that whereas the latter "situates the reader inside its society" (140), Scott's novel "frames common life as an anthropological and antiquarian field of representation" (140). The comparison is useful here because it illuminates the peculiar interstice that *Wuthering Heights*, as a northern novel of manners, occupies between the nationalist romance of Scott and the refined realism of Austen, with its assiduous perch on social custom. For although Duncan's assessment of Scott's achievement in *The Antiquary* works as an accurate summa of Brontë's core agenda, Duncan's evaluation of Austen's narrative strategy *also* applies to *Wuthering Heights*, which "situates the reader" (140) in a world governed by a warped and violent code of etiquette.

It is fitting that a fictional work should occupy the terra firma between Scott and Austen; the imaginative nexus between the two authors has long been a subject of critical discussion. Both wrote, as Terry Eagleton remarks in *The English Novel*, in "an epoch of dramatic social and political upheaval" (95) during which "[c]ultural

nationalism…involved myth and fantasy, popular customs and sentiments, the exploration of identity as well as the struggle to tell your own story" (96). Scott famously admired Austen, whom he felt '"had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life…The Big Bow wow strain I can do myself…but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary common-place things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me"' (quoted in Lamont 661). Brontë bridges this stylistic gap, if unconsciously (as we will see, it is not certain whether she read Austen). Heathcliff might be called a "Bow wow" character—think of his dashing the applesauce "against [Edgar's] face and neck" (*Heights* 58) or his baptismal death. He lives up to the description in a different manner than a character such as Ivanhoe, yet he is certainly more dramatic than the figures typically encountered in a conventional life. However, Brontë also pays considerable attention to the "common-place things" of domestic life. Eagleton observes that Scott's "genius, from the viewpoint of modern British nationalism, is to recognize that local cultures must as far as possible be preserved within a greater whole. The nation is a harmony of differences, not an homogenous entity" (*English Novel* 101) in his work. Emily Brontë, as much as any British author following Scott, takes this lesson to heart in *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood begins the book by ruminating on the differences of the titular estate "so completely removed from the stir of society" (*Heights* 3). Eagleton writes of Scott's motivation that "[i]n setting out to write what he called historical romances, he hoped to weave together the realistic or historical with the colourful and exotic" (*English Novel* 103); this functions as an astute précis of Brontë's tonal balancing act as well.

Eagleton's attempt to link Austen and Scott as "conservative[s]…[who believe] in the need for reform and improvement within the status quo" (*English Novel* 121) would displace Emily Brontë from their ranks, for she was too iconoclastic to be considered conservative in any sense of the word. However, in addition to his ideological scheme, Eagleton fingers stylistic links that place *Wuthering Heights* between Scott and Austen. He notes that "Austen was the daughter of a clergyman of limited financial means…She hailed, then, from a subaltern section of the gentry, one which identified strongly with that class's values and traditions but found itself exposed and insecure" (*English Novel* 107). In her essay "Jane Austen and literary traditions," Isobel Grundy writes that in the Austen household, "most of the usual schoolbooks were accessible…[and] the whole family were avid book-borrowers and book-exchangers" (189). Brontë was, of course, also an outsider and the daughter of a clergyman who encouraged intellectual curiosity; one should not confuse biographical parallels with those of the aesthetic variety, yet their similar perspectives may help to account for aesthetic parallels. Eagleton acutely defines "morality in Austen…[as a] lonely uncompromising duty…[it] concerns small yet critical matters like remembering to light a fire for someone in their room, failing to wait for a companion who has gone off to fetch you a key" (*English Novel* 109) etc. It is highly arguable whether Austen is morally prescriptive in the spirit of Eagleton's assertions— i.e. urging her audience not to forget life's quotidian duties. It is more certain that she depicts the "small…matters" as morally fraught given that they are ineluctably overlaid with human emotion and relationships. In that sense, Brontë is her peer; Stevie Davies notes in *Emily Brontë* that readers of *Wuthering Heights* are permitted glimpses of the "mechanisms of domestic life—laying fires, taking tea, attending to livestock" (69). The

routines compound the intensity of the rhetorical violence in particular; the basic courtesies are a backdrop against which Catherine's wish, for example, that "'Heathcliff may flog [Edgar] sick, for daring to think an evil thought of [her]'" (*Heights* 114) is even bolder in its abrogation of traditional politesse.

Moreover, Brontë and Austen both demonstrate an acute understanding of England's legal mechanisms in their work. C.P. Sanger in *The Structure of Wuthering Heights* writes that "Emily Brontë clearly had a considerable knowledge of the law" (14) just as Austen possessed an "unerring grasp of the law of real property" (14). Sanger is able to deduce that Brontë was acquainted with the intricacies of entail law, at least to the extent that "she use[s]…earlier [inheritance] law" (14) dating back to the period in which the story is set, in spite of the fact that "[t]he Inheritance Act of 1834, the Wills Act of 1837, and…the Game Act of 1831 had changed the law" (14). This is not a superficial similarity between the two authors, so much as a symptom of their mutual and essential commitment to realism. Although readers and critics tend to metamorphose Heathcliff into a myth, he pointedly does not seize Wuthering Heights through force of personality alone. Rather, he becomes "the mortgagee in possession, and for practical purposes, owner of all the Earnshaw property that had gone to Catherine" (Sanger 15). He does not acquire Thrushcross Grange, Sanger demonstrates, through marriage, but rather by making Linton give it to Heathcliff through "a will of personality" (18), which, Sanger also notes, "a minor, could [do] (before the year 1838)" (18). Heathcliff's potency consists partially in his pragmatic attunement to the demands of the law. Arnold Kettle, in an essay on *Wuthering Heights*, writes that "[t]he weapons he uses against the Earnshaws and Lintons are their own weapons of money and arranged marriages" (210). Money and

marriage are, famously, the themes which Austen sounds in the first sentence of *Pride and Prejudice*. That novel begins, of course, by sharing the "truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife" (3). *Wuthering Heights*' precise account of the movement of wealth and property via marriage is yet another feature that links it to the novel of manners tradition.

Austen and Brontë are also bound by a common conception of nature as a sphere in which liberation is, if not guaranteed, at least possible. Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff are at their freest upon the moors of Yorkshire. Austen's country is considerably different—not as harsh and generally more crowded—yet also a place where physical and emotional release are possible. It is nature, in the first instance, which summons Elizabeth Bennet's attractive physical vitality for Darcy to see. When Jane falls ill and Elizabeth has to go to visit her at Netherfield, she makes "her walk alone, crossing field after field at a quick pace, jumping over stiles and springing over puddles…[until she has] weary ancles [sic.], dirty stockings, and a face glowing with the warmth of exercise" (*Pride* 33). Darcy feels "admiration [for] the brilliancy which exercise ha[s] given to her complexion" (*Pride* 33). Walking outside has momentarily rendered Elizabeth less physically inhibited; the result is a positive one, as this elicits Darcy's attention. Near the end of *Pride and Prejudice*, while Elizabeth and Darcy are "walk[ing] toward the Lucases" (378), Darcy makes it known that he is still "violently in love" (*Pride* 379) with Elizabeth and she gives him "to understand, that her sentiments [have] undergone [a] material…change" (*Pride* 379) since she last denied his proposal. They are outside when this revelation and moment of shared euphoria occurs; in a novel that lingers for lengthy stretches of time in drawing rooms and other interior spaces, such a

fact cannot be dismissed as mere coincidence. Austen writes that the pair walk "on, without knowing in what direction" (*Pride* 380). This phrase intimates that a haze of delight has descended upon the pair and made them oblivious to the comparatively prosaic concern of destination. It also, however, emphasizes the freedom that both feel now that they have articulated their love for one another. No longer constrained by the fear that their feelings will not be reciprocated, their emotional position echoes their physical one—they are able to strike out in a new "direction," although they may not have determined which one yet. A successful proposal occurs outside in *Persuasion* (1817) too, when Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth accompany one another "towards the comparatively quiet and retired gravel-walk" (*Persuasion* 248). Linda Bree's note in the Broadview edition of the novel describes this walk as "a quiet path…passing the gardens behind Gay Street and The Circus—one of the most private public spaces in Bath" (248). Austen thus evidences a penchant for associating genuine romantic love with private moments that take place outdoors—another commonality with Emily Brontë.

Whether Emily actually read Jane Austen is uncertain, although not at all necessary to contend that *Wuthering Heights*' status as a northern novel of manners places it between Scott and the author of *Pride and Prejudice*. Charlotte famously described that novel as "'[a]n accurate dageurrotyped portrait of a common-place face…but [there is] no glance of a bright vivid physiognomy—no open country—no fresh air—no blue hill—no bonny beck. I should hardly like to live with her ladies and gentlemen in their elegant but confined houses'" (quoted in Barker 646). Charlotte apparently read it in 1848; Barker writes that "until [George Henry] Lewes suggested it, Charlotte had never read any Jane Austen" (646). Given that the Brontë sisters had an

active and ongoing dialogue about literature—theirs and others'—it is difficult to fathom a scenario in which Charlotte did not at least discuss Austen's writing with Emily. Among the many indelible images with which the Barker biography presents readers is that of Anne, Charlotte, and Emily writing "their books in close collaboration, reading passages aloud to each other and discussing the handling of their plots and their characters as they walked around the dining-room table each evening" (590). Even if Emily never discussed *Pride and Prejudice* with Charlotte, *Wuthering Heights* still traverses the creative moor between Scott's vivid regional specificity and Austen's intensely psychological preoccupation with the etiquette of domesticity.

<div align="center">iii.</div>

Readers of *Wuthering Heights* are literary Anabaptists, tutored briefly in the peculiarities of the eponymous place before they are offered total immersion. Mr. Lockwood, the outer edge of the narrative's double frame, acquires a fleeting sense of Wuthering Heights' atmosphere before the servant and resident confidante Nelly steeps the reader in its past, or at least her remembrance of it. Lockwood reveals early that "wuthering" is "a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (*Heights* 4). This is an induction into Yorkshire life through its vernacular, and a signal of the essential uniqueness of Emily Brontë's text. Before the story can proceed there is a foreign word to be mastered, admittedly one that verges on onomatopoeia. Of course, readers first discover this word in the title itself—Brontë stamps the entire novel with a term that places it in her specific regional context. There is, too, Joseph's pungent locution; the second chapter contains the

hurdle of his challenging and rage-punctuated patois[4], for which many modern readers continue to require explanatory footnotes. *Jane Eyre* does not make such a demand upon those who wish to enter its world. Lockwood's status as an outsider is somewhat compensatory; he is starting from the same position of ignorance as we are. Nelly's eventual assurance that, "'[w]e don't in general take to foreigners, here, Mr. Lockwood, unless they take to us first'" (*Heights* 46) extends to the reader.

Lockwood observes that he could not "have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society" (*Heights* 3) anywhere else in England. Brontë thus immediately establishes not only the geographical isolation of Wuthering Heights, but also its removal from the rhythms of conventional society. The "tumult" to which Lockwood refers in his diligent etymological lesson is matched by a domestic correlative—"the hearth [of Wuthering Heights is] an absolute tempest of worrying and yelping" (*Heights* 7) when he enters. Dogs converge upon Lockwood but Heathcliff and Joseph do not move "one second faster than usual" (*Heights* 7), the implicit suggestion being that such an indoor "tempest" is as regular as its meteorological counterpart. Wuthering Heights' remoteness also quite clearly extends to the normalized surliness of its inhabitants. The niceties that typically attend introductions have no place there. When Lockwood first meets Cathy[5] he notes that she "never open[s] her mouth. I [stare]—she stare[s] also. At any rate, she [keeps] her eyes on me, in a cool, regardless manner, exceedingly embarrassing and disagreeable" (*Heights* 10). This is a sequel to

---

[4] Nelly largely eschews regionalisms in her account, though the servant upon whom she was modeled, Tabitha Ackroyd, "spoke a rich, satiric, harsh and warming Yorkshire dialect" (*Artist* 17).

[5] For purposes of clarity, I will refer to Catherine when speaking of the elder woman of that name, Cathy when referring to her daughter.

Lockwood's previous inability to meet the gaze of an admiring young lady; it is ironic because though Cathy is unpleasant, hostility is preferable to the sexually repressed outsider. Her refusal to make tea—Cathy flings "the tea back, spoon and all; and resume[s] her chair in a pet…ready to cry" (*Heights* 11)—is more early evidence that the setting's decorum is warped. She refuses to offer the gesture of hospitality typically extended by women of the household[6]. Lockwood's suggestion that Hareton is Cathy's husband causes the young man to grow "crimson, and [clench] his fist with every appearance of a meditated assault" (*Heights* 14). Violence is a part of the forecast for Lockwood's country sojourn.

He quickly apprehends the behavioral disparities between those in the north and the inhabitants of more metropolitan areas. Lockwood "'perceive[s] that people in these regions acquire over people in towns the value that a spider in a dungeon does over a spider in a cottage, to their various occupants'" (*Heights* 61). Couching this realization in such macabre terms demonstrates his penchant for thinking in grim, animalistic terms about entrapment, which he also does with respect to his romantic life (when he remembers how he "shrank icily into [him]self, like a snail" (*Heights* 6), rather than engage with an interested young woman at the shore). Nevertheless, Lockwood manifests excitement over these "'people,'" insisting that they "'*do* live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface change, and frivolous external things'" (*Heights* 61). One might be tempted to say that Brontë is writing about herself and her kin here; as Barker's

---

[6] In her book *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*, Julie Fromer writes that "Emily Brontë's novel repeatedly frustrates both a reader's and Lockwood's attempts to use the rituals of the tea table as a method of entering a household and becoming intimate with family members" (152). Fromer sees the scene with Cathy flinging the tea as an instance in which Brontë differs starkly from Elizabeth Gaskell's novel of manners.

biography shows, the poet lived very much within herself. Drawing a line from the author's disposition to the remark misses the point, however, that Lockwood's fetishization of the northerners' authenticity is partly prompted by his impressions of individuals whom he has never met. He has encountered Heathcliff, Joseph, Hareton, Cathy, and Nelly (and the first four relatively briefly), yet he is moved to talk about how the northerners eschew "frivolous" things only after he has been treated to a sample of Wuthering Heights' history. This comment comes, after all, in the midst of an objection to Nelly's attempt to abridge that history slightly by skipping over three years. Lockwood's insistence that he "'could fancy a love for life [t]here almost possible'" (*Heights* 61) comes not because of any particular action on the part of those he has met, but rather because he is so thoroughly "'interested in every character [Nelly has] mentioned, more or less'" (*Heights* 61).

The double frame in *Wuthering Heights* emphasizes the isolation of the eponymous house. Shapiro makes the valuable point that "the world of *Wuthering Heights* is hermetic. We get only one glimpse of the greater world outside Yorkshire in Emily Brontë's description of Lockwood, the first narrator" (288). Yet John T. Matthews notes in his seminal article, "Framing in *Wuthering Heights*" that even among the novel's relatively limited cast of characters, there is plenty of traffic into and out of Yorkshire— Heathcliff travels "from Liverpool…[and presumably to] the American war for independence" (39). Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange (and maybe Gimmerton) seem to be all that exist in the world because they form the novel's tight geographical boundary after Lockwood arrives, yet Brontë intimates the existence of the wider world through periodic characterological absence (Isabella and Hindley are other

examples of this—Frances also comes from outside the novel's boundaries). Thus, Brontë is able, in effect, to have it both ways—she realistically places Wuthering Heights and its environs in the context of the larger world while simultaneously magnifying it to the extent that it becomes a world unto itself[7].

 Wuthering Heights' frame also consecrates its realism—central to its function as a novel of manners. John Matthews' fidelity to the text in his article on the subject of framing provides a welcome rebuke to those overly ingenious psychological readings that come unmoored from actual narrative circumstance. He writes, for instance, that although "[i]t has become one of the truisms of the novel's critical edifice that Catherine and Heathcliff suffer exile from a world of preconscious, natural intimacy…*Wuthering Heights* steadfastly refuses picturing either such original moments themselves or even sharp memories of them" (32). Their relationship is framed by their bond as familial misfits. Going further, Matthews elucidates what could be called Brontë's meta-compositional verisimilitude. He deftly observes that "the transparency of narratorial disinterest" (28) cannot simply be taken for granted. An awareness of the obscuring tendencies of historicization has (understandably) made readers and critics dubious about the veracity of the many claims that a frame narrator makes. Matthews suggests that the frame renders the novel, in part, a meditation on the demands of telling a story. Lockwood's promise to condense Nelly's tale is significant, Matthews emphasizes, because "condensation is a form of composition" (28)[8]. In adumbrating how "[t]he

---

[7] Emily's insularity is evidenced by the fact that "thirteen years since the creation of [her and Anne's] imaginary world, Emily, at almost twenty-seven, had lost none of her enthusiasm for Gondal" (Barker 532), although Anne was no longer as interested.
[8] We might wonder how extreme this narrative compression is; Lockwood says, after Nelly has told him about Heathcliff disappearing for three years, that he "can recollect

structure of the core story is a synecdoche for the novel's structure" (29), Matthews verges on likening it to a postmodern work, ripe with meta-fictional self reference.

What is more, Matthews demonstrates that custom is one of the novel's crucial framing devices. He remarks that "when Heathcliff behaves at his most despicable, he invariably turns out to be reflecting the violence inherent to the structure of the social order" (34). That the novel's characters act in accordance with certain rules of their own devising is a reality that Matthews also implicitly recognizes when he writes that "[w]hat keeps [Heathcliff and Catherine] apart…[is] the plain unavailability of a form for their bond…[it is] the lovers' own unquestioned devotion to *maintaining* the very barriers that keep them apart" (31). Such a reading evidences that what occurs at Wuthering Heights is a reconfiguration of norms rather than devolution into an anarchic state; there are still powerful constraints that not only exist within the narrative, but drive it. The frame and its metonymic iterations illustrate both the practical and strategic excisions required by any narrator, and the concrete instantiation of a frame within the narrative in the form of a brutal "social order."

Of course, Brontë's frame also crucially involves a translation from the oral to the written. Matthews is correct to note that "*Wuthering Heights* broods both at its center and in its margins on the problem of articulation" (26)—and, we might well add, on the "problem" of its various modes. Nelly relates the story aloud to Lockwood who transcribes and, for purposes of economy, edits it. Their disparate methods of discourse correspond to their respective social stations and backgrounds. Lockwood is a gentleman

---

[the story's] chief incidents" (*Heights* 90). This does not preclude the possibility that he scribbled Nelly's history down and, in the midst of his "illness" (*Heights* 90) lost touch with its specifics, though it certainly casts doubt on his memory for detail.

who tellingly covers up a potentially humiliating moment—his command to "the miscreants" (*Heights* 17), Heathcliff and Hareton, to "let [him] out" (*Heights* 17)—by saying that his "threats of retaliation…in their indefinite depth of virulency, smacked of King Lear" (*Heights* 17). He thus reveals that he is educated and possesses a certain degree of cultural literacy. Nelly, however, does not possess commensurate social stature or education (as a woman and a servant) and her bardic function is more in keeping with a household that is, by atmosphere and architectural inscription, steeped in the past. The difference between writing and speaking crystallizes the contrast between Lockwood's refinement and Nelly's rootedness in the comparatively crude and retrograde culture of Yorkshire.

Chapter 2: Thresholds and Violence

i.

Stevie Davies memorably writes of Emily Brontë that "she never made a single friend of her own outside her family, as though to move past blood-kin might be lethal" (*Artist* 15) and that she processed the world "in a peculiarly inward way" (*Artist* 12). For Brontë, fictional creation involved both a mimetic accounting of her surroundings and, of course, an enactment of her innermost fantasies and obsessions. The existence of this boundary is distilled most starkly within the narrative when Catherine contemplates marriage to both Edgar and Heathcliff and famously declares that she *is* the latter. A reckoning must be made with practicalities—that is to say, with the world; her deeper passions, "'the eternal rocks beneath'" (*Heights* 82) must be overlooked in favor of "'the foliage in the woods'" (*Heights* 82) (her metaphorical description of this very

phenomenon). She does not have the freedom of her creator who, in weaving together Catherine's story, is able to marry the two.

Liminal spaces pervade *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood, when he initially arrives, says that "[b]efore passing the threshold [of the house], [he] pause[s] to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front" (*Heights* 4). Brontë directs the reader's attention to the threshold because it concretizes Wuthering Heights' estrangement from normative society. Lockwood is entering into a microcosmic, "grotesque" civilization, or so he perceives it. He is, himself, an interstitial figure, able to travel between worlds in spite of the forbidding connotation that his name carries. Marginalized by his sexual repression and unable to tarry long in any place because he is "'a fixed unbeliever in any love [of place] of a year's standing'" (*Heights* 61), he is also a sociable figure who finds Yorkshire's "desolation" a "misanthropist's Heaven" (*Heights* 3) and is content to remain there a while. Excepting Heathcliff, Isabella, the elder Mr. Earnshaw, and Hindley and Frances, Lockwood is the only person in the book to travel between Yorkshire and the rest of England, which confers upon him crucial perspectival value. Moreover, as the outermost frame of the narrative, he commutes between an extended conversation with Nelly and a testament offered to the reader.

Heathcliff, when he assumes ownership of Wuthering Heights, becomes rather possessive of the property's boundary. Hareton says that he is told that "'the curate should have his – teeth dashed down his – throat, if he ever step[s] over the threshold—Heathcliff ha[s] promised that'" (*Heights* 109). This command is so specific partly for the sake of sheer emphasis; Heathcliff finds the notion of religiosity even an inch inside the grounds to be utterly unacceptable. For Heathcliff, thresholds take on immense

psychological significance beginning at least when the Lintons exclude him from Thrushcross Grange. The elder Mrs. Linton proclaims the "'wicked boy…quite unfit for a decent house'" (*Heights* 50). Heathcliff is, as a child, only ever able to admire Thrushcross Grange (without the distraction of a barrage of insults) from the outside, just as he could admire only the exteriors of houses on the streets of Liverpool. His insistence that he would "'not exchange, for a thousand lives, [his] condition [at Wuthering Heights], for Edgar Linton's…[even if he, Heathcliff] might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley's blood'" (*Heights* 48) is stamped with the insincerity of unprompted defensiveness. At Wuthering Heights, Hindley surpasses cruelty in his treatment of the "gipsy" (*Heights* 37) boy[9]; it is only the moors, a vast sort of interstice, where he can roam free. Heathcliff's exclusion from Thrushcross Grange—a painful symbol of his relative powerlessness—is one of the reasons for his jealous propriety with respect to the fence of irreligion that he eventually erects around Wuthering Heights.

Yet there are other boundaries which Heathcliff transgresses with glee. He desecrates—or improves (who is to judge?)—Catherine's grave so that, in decay, he can merge with her. Their mutual rot will represent and seal their spiritual kinship. He admits to Nelly that he has "'struck one side of [her] coffin loose—and covered it up—not Linton's side, damn him!'" (*Heights* 285) and has paid the sexton to break a side of his [Heathcliff's] coffin loose as well. For the Teutonically prone critic, this act is the

---

[9] Hence, Heathcliff's desire to decorate Wuthering Heights with Hindley's blood. Interestingly however, Heathcliff is spared a flogging for entering Thrushcross Grange; Hindley tells him instead that "the first word he [speaks] to Miss Catherine [will] ensure a dismissal" (*Heights* 51), one of the few times in the text when a warning is substituted for a beating.

culminating incident in the couple's *Liebestod*, though one cannot help but wonder if the consummate joy for Heathcliff consists to a considerable degree in breaking the taboo. He pays for a literal (partial) excavation and, with indignant zeal, exhumes Catherine conversationally as well. Whether the result is as fulfilling as Heathcliff hopes is, of course, unknown. One threshold Brontë does not cross is that between life and death. Even if one believes the ghost of Catherine to be real, she is merely a brief visitor who does not, in word or deed, divulge or hint at the metaphysics of her situation.

ii.

Many are apt to see the novel's violence as transgressive too. This violence is both physical and rhetorical; it colors the lives of the Earnshaws, Nelly, the Lintons, and Heathcliff throughout the novel and adumbrates their behavioral code. Heathcliff seems, upon his arrival, already to have been the victim of considerable abuse. He is "hardened, perhaps, to ill treatment; he…stand[s] Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear" (*Heights* 38). A threatening ambience prevails within Wuthering Heights; indeed, Catherine and Heathcliff become so used to being flogged that it hardly weighs upon them at all—it is "one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment [is] a mere thing to laugh at" (*Heights* 46). Hindley, an alcoholic, is violent toward Hareton as well; the boy is "squalling and kicking in his father's arms with all his might" (*Heights* 74) when he is hoisted over the bannister; he is dropped and spared injury only when Heathcliff "arrive[s] underneath just at the critical moment…[and] arrest[s] his descent" (*Heights* 74) with uncharacteristic solicitude. Brontë does not poeticize these moments; the unadulterated pathos of the scene is allowed to stand. As an author, she mostly resists facile allegorical gestures—the

obvious one would be to link Hindley's gratuitous and failed sacrifice with Abraham's on Moriah (one would think as an ironic, heretical reimagining). She instead focuses on the banality of pain when it becomes a fact of the schedule. The violence is never a set piece; it has none of the grandeur of Shakespearean fighting and mutilation. The only explicit reference to Shakespeare within the text[10] comes when Lockwood mentions his "threats of retaliation…[which] smacked of King Lear" (*Heights* 17). It is telling that he likens his words to Lear but never does the same for the brutality in Nelly's story; her tale's episodes of abuse are so different than those in Shakespeare that it simply does not occur to Lockwood to compare them. *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello* and other tragedies all march inexorably toward episodes of violence. Looming catastrophes, as well as sudden, unexpected ones (i.e. Hamlet's murder of Polonius) lend those plays their suspense and narrative drive. *Wuthering Heights* is filled with verbal and physical ferocity at virtually every turn.

Charles Darwin observes in his *On The Origin of The Species* (1859) that "climate…brings on the most severe struggle between...individuals" (83). His finding, of course, is not anthropological yet it can be readily applied to Emily Brontë's characters. The author, in her implicit linkage of Yorkshire's natural environment with her characters' emotional storminess and coarse behavior, anticipates this realization. Darwin's notion of the "survival of the fittest" (147) is a useful lens through which to view the violence at Wuthering Heights. There is danger in extrapolating from the discoveries of another field when interpreting literature—the temptation to impose

---

[10] There is an allusion to *Hamlet* during Catherine's delirium, when she starts tearing feathers out of her pillow; this scene implicitly recalls the moment in Shakespeare's play when Ophelia sorts flowers in the midst of her madness.

wholly extraneous meanings and rewrite the text to conform to a separate theory is great—but Darwin's phraseology and fundamental concept are helpful here. Isabella and Linton Heathcliff are among those who are not fit to survive; Lockwood, despite his hermetic proclivities, may also be too fragile, although he is put to the test only vicariously. Heathcliff, addressing Nelly while his wife Isabella is present, dismissively speaks of her as though she is not present and inquires, "'was it not the depth of absurdity—of genuine idiocy, for that pitiful, slavish, mean-minded brach to dream that I could love her? Tell your master, Nelly, that I never, in all my life, met with such an abject thing as she is'" (*Heights* 149). This is as excruciating as the administration of any of the book's other lasting wounds. Heathcliff's degrading animalization of Isabella ("brach" refers to a bitch) takes on an additional note of menace given that he has just finished relaying that the "'first thing [Isabella] saw him do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog'" (*Heights* 149). Heathcliff's capacity to endure abuse and to inflict it with commensurate viciousness makes him the most dominant and evolved creature in an ecosystem of violence[11].

Chapter 3: Class and Gender

i.

A paradigmatic feature of the novel of manners is a concern with how class dynamics shape conduct. Yet a nineteenth-century English novel *without* any references to class is difficult to imagine. Examining social strata and their corresponding behavioral

---

[11] In *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, Stevie Davies observes that "[i]t was not necessary for [Emily] to undertake a voyage in the Beagle to the Galapagos Islands to formulate a rough and ready theory of the survival of the fittest" (103).

obligations provides a useful critical lever for opening up the works of Dickens and Hardy, not just Austen and Eliot. Pip's central dilemma in *Great Expectations* hinges on the issue of class, while the rape of the eponymous character in *Tess of The D'Urbervilles* (1892) takes place, in part, because her lowly status renders her an easy victim for Alec D'Urberville. The difference is that the novel of manners maintains its focus on a particular segment of society, and the gradations of social class therein. This is as true of *Wuthering Heights* as it is of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Lockwood invokes the issue of class upon his first entry into Wuthering Heights. He notes that Hareton "show[s] none of a domestic's assiduity in attending on the lady of the house" (*Heights* 12). Brontë here stakes out a position directly opposite Austen's perch; what is on display in this particular moment is the crumbling of class distinctions, rather than the repressive rigidities of an enforced social hierarchy. When Nelly begins to tell Catherine and Heathcliff's story, she does discuss that sort of rigidity however. She notes that at Thrushcross Grange, Catherine hears "Heathcliff termed a 'vulgar young ruffian,' and 'worse than a brute,' [and] she [takes] care not to act like him; but at home she [has] small inclination to practice politeness that would only be laughed at" (*Heights* 66). Thrushcross Grange is, in the world of *Wuthering Heights*, the last outpost of normativity, a place where Catherine's stay of "five weeks…[sees] her manners much improved" (*Heights* 52). Yet it is also a callous place, where a child is swiftly evicted because of the color of his skin (and the magistrate who presides over the household declares that it would be "'a kindness to the country to hang him at once'" (*Heights* 50)).

Mr. Earnshaw upsets any hope of a traditional class order at Wuthering Heights; upon bringing Heathcliff back from Liverpool, the patriarch takes "to Heathcliff

strangely, believing all he [says]…and petting him up far above Cathy" (*Heights* 38).

Indeed, the old man is "furious when he discover[s] his son persecuting the poor,

fatherless child" (*Heights* 38). He elevates Heathcliff above his own children, naming

him after a deceased son and prompting such rage within Hindley that he gives Heathcliff

"'thrashings…[on his] arm, which is black to the shoulder'" (*Heights* 39)—beatings that

are the genesis of the story's primitive displays of violence. Hindley's "degradation"

(*Heights* 46) of Heathcliff is motivated less by an ideology of mastery or economic

opportunism than old grievances. Frances' disdain is "enough to rouse in [Hindley] all his

old hatred of the boy" (*Heights* 46) who thereafter plummets to the servant class,

"deprived…of the instructions of the curate" (*Heights* 46) and made to "labour out of

doors…as hard as any other lad on the farm" (*Heights* 46).

Thrushcross Grange remains a place at which Heathcliff is made acutely

conscious of his inferior status for much of the novel. When he returns from abroad, for

instance, Edgar does not think the parlor is a suitable place for him to visit, although

Catherine instructs Nelly to set two tables, one for the "'gentry; the other for Heathcliff

and [her]self, being of the lower orders'" (*Heights* 95). An agitated Edgar says to

Catherine that the "'whole household need not witness the sight of [her] welcoming a

runaway servant as a brother'" (*Heights* 95). Of course Edgar cannot be unaware that

Heathcliff is his great erotic rival. Edgar's use of the word "brother" is as telling as his

scornful employment of "servant"; he dismisses Heathcliff and then unsubtly attempts to

desexualize him through a purely rhetorical distortion of his relationship to Catherine.

Nelly's comment that Catherine and Heathcliff strive, in their youth, to "grow up

as rude as savages" (*Heights* 46), offers an adult variation on that notion, one that is

scarcely more acceptable. Edgar, raised to be a gentleman, is not irked simply by Catherine's evident affection for Heathcliff. He also balks at Catherine's willingness to defect to a lower class. In speaking of the "whole household," he implies that Catherine will convey the wrong message to the servants. They may be unduly emboldened by such a gesture or, more likely, moved to gossip in Gimmerton. The prospect of wider social humiliation hovers, for Edgar, over the sexual threat. Catherine, however, cannot be read as some sort of proto-Marxist heroine on the basis of this utterance; though her impulses are at times radical, she acts upon them inconsistently. She elects, after all, *not* to marry Heathcliff because it "'would degrade [her] to marry'" (*Heights* 80) him. These are the words that cause him to "steal out, noiselessly" (*Heights* 80) and leave Wuthering Heights for years. She, too, is capable of bowing to conventionality.

Edgar continues to anchor the narrative's class concerns for much of the novel, initially because of his deep dismay at Isabella's attraction to Heathcliff. Her brother is "appalled at this fantastic preference. Leaving aside the degradation of an alliance with a nameless man…[Edgar has] sense to comprehend Heathcliff's disposition—to know that, though his exterior [is] altered, his mind [is] unchangeable, and unchanged" (*Heights* 100). "Degradation" (*Heights* 46) is a word that resurfaces with some regularity in the book's first half. Hindley degrades Heathcliff, Catherine risks self-degradation by marrying Heathcliff, and so does Isabella. Critics have discussed the way in which the same characters run into one another again and again, eliciting an atmosphere of claustrophobia. The repetition of certain words—"degradation" being a prime example— echoes this effect. Brontë records with painstaking clarity the way in which those who live in close proximity with one another feed off each other's vocabularies. This, too,

eventually erodes class distinctions. Hareton, instead of inheriting the relatively urbane diction of Edgar from his own father, will instead come into possession of Heathcliff's disreputable and blasphemous idiolect.

Emily wrote in the context of her semi-private world and so it is easy to forget that the Brontës were not immune from the forces of class and socioeconomics. Juliet Barker writes that Elizabeth Gaskell's conception of the village—one that many readily adopted—envisioned it as a place of "physical and social isolation, excluded from all the normal preoccupations of ordinary life" (105), yet Haworth "was a busy, industrial township" (105) which "from 1820 to 1861, saw some of the fastest growth and biggest changes that were to take place" (105) there. There is little evidence of industrial progress in *Wuthering Heights*, which makes sense, of course, given that the novel takes place largely in the eighteenth century before the period of the Industrial Revolution's autocatalytic technological development. Emily Brontë found inspiration in the "bleak and dramatic scenery…of the sweep of moorlands round Haworth" (Barker 107), rather than the forward-lurches in manufacturing that took place nearby. Perhaps she found a measure of influence in the penury and suffering her father's parishioners endured; there were "the terrible years early in the [1840's]" (Barker 596) and as Emily was working on her novel a "decline in wages [that] was a source of misery and privation in the township" (Barker 596). Brontë did not seek to transpose local (and anachronistic) strife into the pages of her novel; however, it is reasonable to think that the "misery" she witnessed, or at least heard about, proximate to home provided her with a palpable model for intense, unmitigated anguish. "Model" is precisely the term; if she took any interest in the debasement of those "unable to pay their rates…[who] could only plead absolute

poverty" (Barker 596-7), it may have been because the "uncompromisingly self-centered" (Barker 460) artist could use such detail to fuel her art. Then again, Emily's political instincts may have been something which, like religion, she felt ought to be private; her father possessed a number of strong and relatively liberal convictions. Patrick Brontë was suspicious of Catholics but "differed from his friends…in believing that Catholics, like Dissenters, should have civil rights" (Barker 183) and "he organized petitions for the abolition of slavery to both Houses of Parliament" (Barker 195).

In *Myths of Power*, Terry Eagleton takes a Marxist approach to *Wuthering Heights*, which discusses, among other subjects, the novel's "ambivalences" in comparison to Charlotte's more apparent political stances. He shrewdly observes that in Charlotte's work, "characters and events are flushed with the novelist's ideological intentions, [and] bear the imprint of her longings and anxieties" (99), whereas Emily is relatively elusive. Eagleton does not include it here, but an appropriate illustration would be Jane Eyre's claim that "[n]obody knows how many rebellions besides political rebellions ferment in the masses of life which people earth" (*Jane Eyre* 129). Clearly this is reflective of her author's ideological spirit, an author who famously prefaces the book by assuring its readers that "[c]onventionality is not morality" (*Jane Eyre* 5). Eagleton's reading also highlights the realism of Emily Brontë's vision; Catherine's decision to marry Edgar rather than Heathcliff, a decision that originates in class-consciousness and the concomitant desire for ascent, is to Eagleton "the pivotal event of the novel[12], the decisive catalyst of the tragedy; and if this is so, then the crux of *Wuthering Heights* must be conceded by even the most remorselessly mythological and mystical of critics to be a

---

[12] At the very least it is the catalyst after Heathcliff's introduction into the family.

social one" (*Myths* 101). Eagleton's analysis perspicaciously identifies the choice as a "catalyst" rather than a cause—a much more metaphysically fraught phenomenon and therefore harder to prove. That it is the catalyst is almost certain; Catherine's rejection (one that is, crucially, voiced to Nelly and heavily qualified) prompts Heathcliff to flee and to plan revenge against Hindley and Edgar. As Eagleton points out, none of these events possesses the gauzy overlay of mysticism, but rather the clarity of realism.

Arnold Shapiro also comments on the destructive exclusivity of the landed gentry, writing that the Lintons "are repelled by Heathcliff because he looks like a gypsy and therefore cannot be a member of their social class" (287). Shapiro goes too far in asserting that "one has only to think of *Great Expectations* or *Vanity Fair* to see that Emily Brontë is on the main road of Victorian social criticism, attacking those who judge others solely by surface appearances or money or birth" (287). Shapiro wants to argue that Emily Brontë belongs in the company of such paradigmatic Victorian authors as Dickens and Thackeray, and consequently he imputes a motive to her that is difficult to find within the work itself. As Eagleton points out, Emily Brontë is considerably less interested in making an explicit social critique than Charlotte is. There are no traces of polemic intention, nor of didacticism in Emily's febrile cartography of household power, which like most maps refuses to take a position on that which it portrays.

While the class structure appears rooted in place firmly at the novel's beginning, Heathcliff, of course, subverts it with his return to Wuthering Heights. It is the most dangerous sort of subversion, because Heathcliff's primary instrument is the legal code of a society that seeks to oppress him. John Matthews writes that "Heathcliff leaves no doubt about the lawfulness of his design—from confining himself to the regulations of

gaming in order to acquire Hindley's fortune to mastering the ins and outs of inheritance law" (33). His vengeance is terrifying in part because it is inured against any accusation of impropriety or illegitimacy. It is, nevertheless, worth noting that the disruption is a temporary one. Hareton, the Earnshaws' descendant, will become the master of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights; indeed, his name is carved over the latter's doorway. In the history of the Earnshaw lineage (the house dates back to 1500), Heathcliff's upheaval is a relatively minor upset.

<div align="center">ii.</div>

Any consideration of gender in *Wuthering Heights* must take into account the tenacity with which its author resisted societal expectations in writing the book. Her father, Patrick, was supportive of her literary endeavors[13]. More than that, Robert Polhemus notes in *Lot's Daughters* that Patrick was a formative influence who "would preach dread [to the children], but give them libertine Byron to read; spout Tory doctrine, but…expose them to radical writings; condemn the world, but instill in them his passion for politics, books, and the glories of nature" (146). However, the notion of woman-as-serious-writer plainly flew in the face of prevailing Victorian values, which relegated women to the domestic sphere—and not so as to write about it. Many "women were joining the ranks of the published" (Flint, 172), yet this generated "a backlash against the presumed shallowness of women's minds, their thoughtless verbiage…and their perceived unseemly desire for fame" (Flint 172). Emily's aesthetic, furthermore, ran the

---

[13] There were "books available to the young Brontës at home" (Barker 171) and Patrick was, eventually, one of the few who knew that "the brothers Bell were actually three sisters" (Barker 664). The decision to tell Patrick this came about "[p]erhaps with the view of cheering him up" (Barker 644) as his "spirits were low at the beginning of 1848" (Barker 644).

risk of being "unwomanly" (Flint 174) because of its "vivid metaphors of violence and repression" (Flint 174). Her stylistic ingenuity and resistance to sentimentality were not what an audience might have anticipated from a woman who set pen to paper. One would be hard pressed to find a sentence that strikes a note of *bien pensant* idealism or seeks to impart pleasure through rhetorical floridity. Certainly this accounts for the poor reception the novel received in some quarters; Juliet Barker notes that "reviewers were hardly enthusiastic about *Wuthering Heights*" (630), and that one described it as having "'such a general roughness and savageness…as should never be found in art'" (104). An unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights* in the *Examiner* in January of 1848 described "the people who make up the drama…[as] savages ruder than those who lived before the days of Homer" (*Critical Heritage* 220)[14]. Barker posits, somewhat controversially, that this did not discourage Emily from continuing her work on a second novel that Charlotte likely destroyed. Also problematic for some readers at the time, Emily's is not a didactic fiction, nor does it present "engagement or marriage [as] being the most desirable of conclusions" (Flint 176), a quality which sets her apart, for instance, from Jane Austen (who ironizes the institution even as she exalts it). Cathy has no qualms about casting aspersions upon marriage in the presence of the sickly and ineffectual Linton Heathcliff. He "denie[s] that people ever [hate] their wives; but Cathy affirm[s] they [do] and in her wisdom, instances his own father's aversion to her aunt" (*Heights* 235). Not only does

---

[14] Not all reviews were poor; an unsigned review in *Britannia* called *Wuthering Heights* "strangely original" (*Critical Heritage* 223) and claimed that the novel "bears a resemblance to some of those irregular German tales in which the writers…represent personages as swayed and impelled to evil by supernatural influences" (*Critical Heritage* 223)—a compliment which one can imagine Emily enjoying, given her interest in "German [literature's]…dramatic qualities and stern tone" (Barker 485).

she correct a man, but she bluntly offers an example of how matrimony is susceptible to failure.

While she published under the male name of "Ellis Bell," Emily Brontë nevertheless had to contend with the predominant ideas of her time, tinged as they were with patriarchal calculations. She refused to engage with those cultural expectations that might otherwise have hampered her and, instead, deferred to her own creative instincts, which mitigated these forces through potent irony. Gubar and Gilbert, in their seminal feminist text *The Madwoman in The Attic*, offer an incisive take on precisely this in their essay on Brontë's "Bible of Hell"; they write that Catherine's relatively pallid "love" for Edgar "is a bitter parody of a genteel romantic declaration which shows how effective her education has been in indoctrinating her with the literary romanticism deemed suitable for young ladies" (277). The result is much more raw than the novels of manners which came out of the south of England. Brontë spurns a veneer of placid respectability in favor of graphic portraits of passion, anger, and resentment. What this means is that the politics of gender are inscribed in the text, and not merely incidental to it. Brontë, through her unorthodox male and female characters, comments on the malleability of gender roles, most famously when Catherine declares "'Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff'" (*Heights* 82). To suggest that the subversive behavior of certain female characters (Catherine, Nelly, Cathy, Isabella) functions solely as a reflection of Emily's unflinching self-possession, however, does not do justice to her aesthetic motivations. Her pursuit of characterological depth compelled Emily to produce portraits that burrow away from the bland ethics of acceptable social comportment. The characters in *Wuthering Heights* possess distinct reasons for flouting the rules that, in the epochal mainstream, attached to female conduct;

an attempt on the part of the critic to transmute these women into alter-egos, or political ideograms, mistakenly overlooks Emily's ambition to create literature rather than a polemic work. In *Fiction and Repetition*, J. Hillis Miller writes about the danger of a totalizing political reading of Brontë's novel; he observes that it is fallacious to submit "that there *is* a single secret truth about *Wuthering Heights*" (51). He insightfully posits that "[o]nly an interpretation which accounts for each item and puts it in relation to the whole will be at once specific enough and total enough. The reader must be like a cat who licks her kitten all over, not missing a single spot of fur" (53). The critic who treats *Wuthering Heights* solely or primarily as an ideological text is missing more than a few spots on the kitten.

The willingness of Catherine and her daughter to be vituperative in word and deed is especially striking and presents a stark contrast with the behavioral mode of Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice* or Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch* (1871-2), two paradigmatic novel of manners heroines from opposite ends of the nineteenth century. However, those two heroines also evince a potentially disruptive level of agency by the end of their respective narratives. Elizabeth, as we have seen, is willing to challenge Lady Catherine and, in so doing, to show an unacceptable degree of insolence on the part of a lady of a lower station. Indeed, Elizabeth is consequently judged to be an "'[o]bstinate, headstrong girl!'" (*Pride* 368). Dorothea, in her eventual romance with the foreign bohemian Will Ladislaw, becomes a sort of proto-feminist figure who is willing to eschew social perceptions and live her life according to her erotic and romantic

preferences[15]. Catherine Earnshaw's penchant for violence sets her apart from these women; she, for instance, shakes little Hareton "till the poor child waxe[s] livid" (*Heights* 70)—hardly a manifestation of maternal instinct. A moment later, she strikes Edgar "in a way that could not be mistaken for a jest" (*Heights* 70), which he admits makes him feel "'afraid, and ashamed'" (*Heights* 71). This scene is a deflation of the myth of inherent masculine dominance. Just when Catherine begins to cry about Edgar's decision to leave, teetering on the edge of cliché, it occurs to Nelly that this is nothing so much as another exertion of authority on the young lady's part. When Catherine looks "askance through the window" (*Heights* 71), Nelly realizes that Edgar has "the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half killed, or a bird half eaten" (*Heights* 71). This metaphor-pair deceptively seems to confer control upon Edgar, insofar as he is likened to a predator and Catherine to prey. However, the remark contains another level of metaphysical import which Nelly herself may scarcely grasp. The comparison animalizes Edgar in a manner that evokes his helplessness when it comes to resisting the deterministic forces of appetite; he is propelled not according to his will, but rather those urges over which he has no say. He "flies to his fate" (*Heights* 71), a fate which Catherine has constructed through canny theatrics. Of course, class dynamics are at work here as much as their gender counterparts; to some degree, Catherine is a slave to the idea that she needs to ascend beyond her station. This is an inextricable component of her attraction to Edgar. Yet for the moment she takes the upper hand; later, in dying first and stranding Edgar in a hinterland of grief, she never relinquishes it.

---

[15] Though this is only after considerable hand-wringing on her part, and she reaches her apotheosis, in that novel's epilogue, as a wife and mother.

After Hindley dies, Nelly reports that "the house, inside, ha[s] regained its ancient aspect of comfort under female management; and the scenes of riot common in Hindley's time [are] not now enacted within its walls" (*Heights* 195), invoking a gender dichotomy while making a somewhat misleading point. Hindley's behavior is in no sense the appropriate metric by which to judge a violent decorum, as he is its most extreme proponent, an adventurer in the realm of anarchic destruction paralleled only by Heathcliff. Though there are fewer drunken "scenes of riot," verbal assaults do not disappear from the house's diurnal talk; Hareton, for instance, does not respond kindly to Cathy's order that he get her horse and yells back at her, "'I'll see thee damned, before I be thy servant!'" (*Heights* 193). Heathcliff has, of course, tutored the boy in weaponizing language. The tensions are such that more "diabolical violence" (*Heights* 268) is to come; Cathy bites Heathcliff and he responds by administering "a shower of terrific slaps on both sides of [her] head" (*Heights* 268). The characters' hermeticism, and its concomitant reinforcement of lingering resentments, has reconstituted behavioral and gender norms. Cathy is punished, yet by this point in the narrative, the reader has been conditioned to expect a show of force from a female character. A late scene in a novel of Austen's or Eliot's in which a woman bites a man is inconceivable—it would tear a hole in the page. In fashioning a northern novel of manners, Brontë reshapes traditional gender roles with ferocious verve.

Nelly's reference to Wuthering Heights' "ancient aspect of comfort under female management" (*Heights* 195) is a fraught one given Emily Brontë's motherless youth. One hesitates to lean on biography unduly—the intricacies of almost any author's life can all too easily supply one with a totalizing interpretive apparatus for the work at hand. In this

case, however, Catherine's lack of a mother so closely echoes her creator's history that the connection is undoubtedly legitimate, concretized through textual instantiation. Davies helpfully writes that "Emily remembered nothing definite about her mother. But it would not be accurate to say that she retained no impression of…the experience of losing her" (*Artist* 7). The notion that a governing maternal presence could, in a household, be a stay against pandemonium was not a theoretical proposition for Emily, but a thought that congealed around her most intimate wound. Reading a purely political motivation into Nelly's subdued praise of a house run (in some sense) by a woman is far too reductive. Emily recasts the dynamics between men and women and simultaneously illuminates the elasticity of etiquette, yet she does so for aesthetic effect—not to edify her readers as Charlotte Brontë, working in a more epigrammatic vein, does when she has Jane Eyre pause to say that "[w]omen are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel…they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer" (*Jane Eyre* 129-130). Emily confounds the laws of gender because the upheaval is, as a spectacle, sublime enough to warrant the thorny poetry she conjured at the tip of her pen.

When Catherine remarks, "'Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind…as my own being'" (*Heights* 82) she collapses the barrier of gender. Some may read in this a desire to be "male" though such a construal ignores that Catherine may not view this dividing line as being fixed, or especially significant. The peculiar set of mores indigenous to Wuthering Heights has long grouped Heathcliff and Catherine together because of how often they have stood—or rambled—athwart them. Heathcliff reciprocates Catherine's sentiments when, upon her death, he bellows, "'I *cannot* live

without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!"' (*Heights* 167) implying that he is equally joined in a metaphysical cohabitation with Catherine. The intensity of their union need not be explained through the diction of myth or ideology; they are at home only when together because theirs is a relationship girdled by severe violence (when they are younger) and staunch disapproval (this persists even when Heathcliff returns). Such a bond is difficult to fathom for many readers—and so is thought to trespass into fantastical territory—yet Heathcliff and Catherine's extremity of feeling is commensurate with the extremity of their circumstances. They fall in love and—what is more—into mutual identification in the midst of a capacious landscape of "desolation" (*Heights* 3) that exists in stark contrast to the cramped desolation both endure within the walls of their putative home. In choosing freedom they are wedded. Their spiritual yearning to wander the moors together eternally is their greatest commonality[16]. The lapwing episode neatly distills the liberation that Heathcliff and Catherine find upon the moors. Its recounting comes when Catherine's feverishness makes her voluble about the past. She recalls a lapwing "'wheeling over [her and Heathcliff's] heads in the middle of the moor"' (*Heights* 121) and how she exacted a "'promise [from Heathcliff that] he'd never shoot a lapwing, after that, and he didn't"' (*Heights* 121). This moment demonstrates that the landscape is a place where the house's decorum of ruthlessness can be escaped. Heathcliff does not have to worry, during a ramble outside, that his merciful acquiescence of Catherine's request will telegraph weakness. He impresses her not as a man might traditionally impress a woman—through a show of force—but rather through

---

[16] Their freewheeling nature also recalls their creator; Charlotte memorably wrote of Emily that "'[l]iberty was the breath of [her] nostrils; without it she perished"' (Gaskell 104).

restraint (although Catherine, in her confusion, nevertheless asks Nelly whether Heathcliff shot the lapwings and wants to know if "'they [are] red, any of them?'" (*Heights* 121)).

Gender, consequently, is an obstacle easily overleaped—before the heretical ambition to readjust heaven's parameters, it is nothing. In *Myths of Power*, Terry Eagleton perspicaciously observes that "both become the 'outside' of the domestic structure" (103) and, moreover, that their "loving equality…stands…as a paradigm of human possibilities which reach beyond, and might ideally unlock, the tightly dominative system of the Heights" (103). Of course, Wuthering Heights is, apart from the quarters given to Joseph and "'a lad to keep him company'" (*Heights* 334), shut up "'[f]or the use of such ghosts as choose to inhabit it'" (*Heights* 334). The intense association between Heathcliff and Catherine has less to do with a radical erasure of concrete gender differences than the no-less magical ability to undo the codified cruelty under which they live.

Chapter 4: Allegory and Myth

Many critics read *Wuthering Heights* as a romance that enacts a moral drama on an allegorical plane. Stevie Davies, for instance, writes that the novel is "a myth of resurrection, renewal, a fresh start; and her art is therefore essentially recreative and tragi-comic" (*Artist* 16). In this interpretive vein, the narrative gestures toward the death of Emily's mother and her sisters Maria and Elizabeth, maternal figures whose "losses [seemed to] mirror one another" (*Artist* 14). This mirroring is, appropriately enough, reflected back in the novel's pages: "the repetition and recapitulation of places, persons,

events, names" (*Artist* 104) responds to this dismal replication with aesthetic zeal that halts the wheel, ultimately, at generation rather than loss. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, operating in a disparate critical mode, construe the tale's inventive architecture as a response—and, indeed, a rebuke—to "Milton's patriarchal poetry" (252), one that consequently "seems at times to be about forces or beings rather than people" (252) in suggesting that "the state of being patriarchal Christianity calls 'hell' is eternally, energetically delightful, whereas the state called 'heaven' is rigidly hierarchical…a poison tree" (255).

For those who propound Brontë's biographical motivations or literary agenda (with its "rebellious" (Gilbert 252) and hence political underpinnings), *Wuthering Heights* possesses the elusive tissue of allegory. Unlike metaphor, which operates within the text to enhance the impressions it conveys and develop an interior system of meaning, allegory invokes the penumbra of personal history, or cultural dispute, or "forces" that transcend the bounds of either. The danger in this sort of reading is that it is prone to turgid reductionism. It may well be true that "[c]haracter and relationships, for Emily Brontë, are immutable, stable, and eternal" (*Artist* 9), yet that statement, for instance, undercuts the complexity of Heathcliff, who is unhappily transmogrified by oppressive authority figures. Such an assessment also loses sight of a relationship like Catherine and Hareton's, which originates in mutual loathing and ends in love. It is precisely this fidelity to the protean nature of human connections that roots Brontë in the realist tradition. Her art is a stern and compassionate act of mimesis; if it reads, at times, like "myth" in its evocation of the "eternal" that is a testament to mortality's inevitable role in any work that honestly appraises life's calamities.

Of course, the tendency to inscribe myth into *Wuthering Heights* is understandable given that the novel flirts with the supernatural and its vocabulary. The characters routinely conjure heaven and hell in the course of conversation, to the extent that Gilbert and Gubar are comfortable in maintaining that "all the narrative voices…insist upon casting both action and description in religious terms" (253). What is more, ghosts enter into the equation reinforcing the novel's "metaphysical nature" (Gilbert 254) (a designation too easily abused, given that realist fiction can also interrogate reality, and so be metaphysical). Lockwood's sexually fraught vision of Catherine's specter comes on his first night at Wuthering Heights. He reaches out to stop a branch from scraping against the window and feels his hand close "on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand!...[Lockwood tries] to draw back [his] arm, but, the hand [clings] to it, and a most melancholy voice sob[s], 'Let me in—let me in!'" (*Heights* 25). The ghost identifies herself as Catherine Linton and "shiveringly" (*Heights* 25) informs Lockwood that she "'lost [her] way on the moor!'" (*Heights* 25). Hers is "a child's face" (*Heights* 25) but the repressed Lockwood pulls "its wrist on to the broken pane, and rub[s] it to and fro till the blood [runs] down and soak[s] the bed-clothes" (*Heights* 25). One suspects that the "[t]error…[that makes him] cruel" (*Heights* 25) is not only terror at the ghost, but in addition his terror of intimacy, which the blood, simultaneously evoking the loss of virginity and menstruation, surely exacerbates[17].

The novel ends with chilling rumors of ghosts roaming the earth; a reader who has just departed its pages is, in all likelihood, cognitively inclined to grasp this most recent

---

[17] Lockwood's horror might also have to do with the fact that such emblems of sexual maturity are jarringly out of place in a dream involving, as Stevie Davies puts it in *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, "not a woman's voice but a child's, speaking in spasms of irrational fear and superstition" (208).

detail in the claws of his or her visual imagination. Nelly testifies that even after Heathcliff's death, "the country folks…would swear on their Bible that he *walks*…that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on 'em, looking out of his chamber window, on every rainy night, since his death" (*Heights* 333). She speculates that those who glimpse Heathcliff and Catherine "probably [raise] the phantoms from thinking" (*Heights* 333) though she has developed a fear of "being out in the dark" (*Heights* 333). These happenings, crucially, are contained within dreams and hearsay; the presiding grammar continues to be that of realism. The physical boldness of these characters has a mental corollary; all are individuals who, at some level, enjoy being transported—and ferrying one another—into "nightmare" (*Heights* 25). Heathcliff is a man of extreme behavior, but what elevates (or lowers) him to the status of Byronic hero is the mythologizing tendency of *those around him*. Catherine tells Heathcliff that repeating an offer to him is "'as bad as offering Satan a lost soul—Your bliss lies, like his, in inflicting misery'" (*Heights* 111), and in doing so she imposes the language of theology to enhance her reality; she does not inhabit a romance (in the literary sense of the term), except by her own preference. To compare Heathcliff to Satan is to swell their bond to an object of cosmic, or sub-cosmic value—she does it because is an exciting dramatization of their relationship, a rhetorical extension of their childhood play upon the moors.

Heathcliff is not the novel's singular practitioner of blasphemy, although his achievements in that area are unparalleled. Apostasy is an inseparable component of the novel's moral texture. Catherine scribbles in her books, including her Bible, and admits to Nelly that if she "'were in heaven…[she would] be extremely miserable'" (*Heights* 80) as the ethereal region does "'not seem to be [her] home'" (*Heights* 80). Indeed, she has a

dream in which "'the angels [are] so angry that they [fling her] out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where [she wakes] sobbing for joy'" (*Heights* 80). Emily Brontë's language, though lapidary[18], here takes on an ironically Biblical resonance that compounds the sentence's heretical thrill. The music of the mounting prepositional energy—"out"; "into"; "on"; "of"—gives way to an image evocative of ecclesiastical joy. In keeping with this, Catherine later informs Heathcliff as she is dying that she "'shall not be at peace'…[she is] recalled to a sense of physical weakness by the violent, unequal throbbing of her heart, which beat[s] visibly and audibly under this excess of agitation'" (*Heights* 159). The dream's spirit, if not the dream itself, sticks with her until she dies. Catherine cannot find any sort of reassurance in Christian theology. Her heart, the instrument that binds her to Heathcliff, is also the anchor of her consciousness even as it thrums with pain. Catherine's penchant for impiety is the direct result of a youth spent associating religiosity with punishment at the hands of Joseph, whom Nelly describes as "the wearisomest, self-righteous pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself, and fling the curses on his neighbours" (*Heights* 42). Catherine and Heathcliff skip out on church until "Joseph and the curate [reprimand Hindley's] carelessness" (*Heights* 46). God is, for her, an abstraction that exists to be forgotten; Heathcliff and their rambles upon the moors are everything.

Lockwood, as the lone agent of normality[19] at Wuthering Heights, observes Hareton "performing his orisons, *sotto voce*, in a series of curses directed against every object he touche[s]" (*Heights* 29). He rather archly deploys "orison" (indicating, perhaps,

---

[18] Emily Brontë's linguistic precision is undoubtedly the concomitant of her work as a poet, which is, unfortunately, beyond the purview of this essay.
[19] This is relative; his dreams are undeniably bizarre.

his own sardonic attitude toward religion) in noting that even the practice of morning prayer has undergone a perverse conversion at Wuthering Heights. Curses are more in keeping with the house's prevailing ethos—one of bitterest resentment. Lockwood, however, is not given to the same pagan fantasies as Catherine. He cannot "imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (*Heights* 334) when he gazes upon the graves of Edgar, Catherine, and Heathcliff at the novel's end. Whether this self-imposed speculative prohibition is the concomitant of lingering piety is not certain, however. It may simply be a reflection upon the profound silence of the small graveyard, or Lockwood's failure of imagination.

Nelly's relationship to religion is another of the narrative's more interesting questions. She memorably describes Wuthering Heights as "an infernal house" (*Heights* 65)—a phrase which intimates divine abandonment—and hearkens back to a period when the curate has "dropped calling, and nobody decent [comes] near [them]" (*Heights* 65). The curate's unwillingness to come to the house means that there is no alternative role model for Heathcliff or Catherine; the former becomes "diabolical [and]…notable for savage sullenness and ferocity" (*Heights* 65), while Catherine becomes "a haughty, headstrong creature" (*Heights* 65). Nelly is moralistic, and also ritualistic as well; after noticing that Heathcliff has removed "a curl of light hair" (*Heights* 168) from Catherine's locket and thrown it upon the floor, "replacing [it with] a black lock of his own. [She] twist[s] the two, and enclose[s] them together" (*Heights* 168). This is simultaneously a gesture of respect to Heathcliff and Edgar and a demonstration of her belief in symbolism for its own sake, which in this case gestures in a spiritual direction. Nelly plainly feels that Catherine's soul belongs to both of the men who loved her. Taking action implies

that she sees herself as an enforcer upon whom it is incumbent to ensure a small measure of spiritual equilibrium.

Earlier, while Catherine is dying, Nelly admits that her "mind was never in a holier frame, than while [she] gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest" (*Heights* 164). This observation is somewhat strange in context, given that Catherine is suffering and not at all "untroubled"; she herself has already testified to her sincere belief that she will "'not be at peace'" (*Heights* 159). Yet Nelly ignores this even as she records it and also confesses that she is "seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the chamber of death" (*Heights* 165). Brontë offers an implicit criticism of religion, not only through Joseph's brutal and unyielding devotion to scripture but also Nelly's fetishistic obsession with death. It is an obsession that proceeds from a belief in an eternal reward, yet it blinds her to the suffering which accompanies Catherine's demise. The reader, sympathetic at this point in the novel to Heathcliff's grief, cannot be "happy" as Nelly is; thus, her religious ecstasy comes to seem as grotesque as any of the novel's other tableaux of abuse (as does her feeling that Catherine led a "wayward and impatient existence" (*Heights* 165) and therefore does not deserve a place in heaven). What is more, such physical and emotional agony demands some form of theodicy which Nelly is unable to provide. The evil of thwarted love lends Catherine's deathbed scenes an additional dimension of poignancy; Nelly's unthinking faith does nothing to abrogate this evil or reduce it through explanation.

Heathcliff embraces the language of damnation. Even his words of welcome are marked by venomous irreverence, a quality which Lockwood notices immediately. Heathcliff invites the tenant into Wuthering Heights "with closed teeth" (*Heights* 3) and a

voice that "expresse[s] the sentiment, 'Go to the Deuce!'" (*Heights* 3). It is Hindley, of course, who transforms Heathcliff into a young man who takes "grim pleasure…in exciting the aversion rather than the esteem of his few acquaintance[s]" (*Heights* 67). He eschews all pious diction, except when he is being mordantly ironic. He informs Cathy that her father "'has a prejudice against [him]; [they] quarrelled [sic] at one time of [their] lives, with unchristian ferocity'" (*Heights* 215). The sarcasm in Heathcliff's tone is palpable to the reader, if not to Cathy whom he is attempting to deceive in a pointedly unchristian manner. "Unchristian ferocity" is, for Heathcliff, an authentic and totally habitable mode of being; after learning of Catherine's death, for instance, he "dashe[s] his head against the knotted trunk [of a tree]; and…howl[s], not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death…[there are] several splashes of blood about the bark of the tree" (*Heights* 167). For Heathcliff this extraordinarily violent display—which surpasses the self-destructive capabilities of most people ensconced in grief's constrictive finery—is his catharsis and reckoning; it is this, and not attendance at church, that will pass for observance of Catherine's passing. He takes care that Hareton is "never led a single step towards virtue" (*Heights* 194), so that the boy also becomes a truant from services. Yet another of the narrative's ironies is that Hareton turns out a much more decent character than Linton Heathcliff, who is comparatively selfish and ill at ease in the world. This perpetuates Brontë's trenchant critique of traditional religion; a young man can avoid instruction from the curate and still manage to develop a sense of moral wherewithal, assuming he is afforded some attentive nurturing (which Nelly gives him for his first five years). Emily herself did not seem to believe that public displays of religious faith were necessary; Edward Chitham's biography reveals that she "was loath

to support" (155) her father when it came to matters of faith and when Mary Taylor "said that religious opinions were between the individual and God" (155), Emily replied by "venturing the words, 'That's right' (spoken tersely)" (155). Stevie Davies also points out that the "individualism…[of Patrick Brontë's] Protestantism…found its most radical form in Emily's insistence on spiritual freedom from any external creed or dogma" (*Artist* 4).

The intent behind Heathcliff's desecration of Catherine's grave is as blasphemous as the act itself. He seeks to orchestrate a union in death by bribing the sexton, a maneuver that is wholly antithetical to Christian theology, which reserves that sacrament for life alone. Heathcliff's is not a quietly defiant atheism, but an attempted rearrangement of the spiritual order with the meager tools of earthly existence.

Coda: Alice Munro and The Northern Story of Manners

The northern novel of manners did not die with *Wuthering Heights*. Its rebirth has occurred, somewhat belatedly, in the work of Alice Munro. She is, like Emily Brontë, a lapidary prose stylist who has explored "manners" in the context of her rough and partly rural northern country. Although Munro is primarily a short story writer, the author Joyce Carol Oates has observed that she "writes stories that have the density—moral, emotional, sometimes historical—of other writers' novels" (*New York Times*). This is a fairly typical assessment of her narrative achievements.

Many writers have imbibed what they took as Emily Brontë's mysticism[20]. None of commensurate ability followed in her footsteps as a chronicler of idiosyncratic codes of etiquette until Alice Munro started publishing[21]. There are several links, biographical and geographical, that may help to explain why this is the case. Alice Munro was born in 1931 and grew up on a farm in Canada (Staines 7); hers was an environment of rigid gender roles and social isolation. David Staines, in his essay "From Wingham to Clinton: Alice Munro in her Canadian context," writes that "[t]he farm was a dangerous locale [in which the family, in Munro's words] 'lived outside the whole social structure because [they] didn't live in the town and [they] didn't live in the country…It was a community of outcasts'" (9). What is more, her "family was Protestant" (Staines 13) and Munro lost her mother, "who had shown signs of Parkinson's disease from the early 1940s" (Staines 13) when she was relatively young, a new mother herself. Elizabeth Hay remarks in an essay on Munro that "[t]he problem of 'the mother'…hovers in the background of everything she writes, for in order to become a writer Munro had to abandon her ill and needy mother" (178). Although Emily Brontë never knew her mother, *Wuthering Heights* reflects the loss of a maternal presence; the same is frequently true of Munro's stories. Both authors were outsiders from Protestant families who set pen to paper initially in

---

[20] Jane Urquhart's *Changing Heaven* (1990), for instance, imagines the ghost of Emily haunting Yorkshire and, in so doing, attempts to illuminate the personality of one of English literature's most mysterious authors since Shakespeare. One of the novel's other central characters is an academic writing on weather in *Wuthering Heights*. Urquhart, incidentally, also hails from Ontario.

[21] In *The Tumble of Reason: Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence*, Ajay Heble writes about Munro's interest in "patterns of complicity" (175)—a phrase that intimates her preoccupation with manners, which are, after all, founded on a mentality of complicity.

rural settings[22] and witnessed tremendous economic hardship in their communities from an early age (Munro's earliest years, of course, saw Canada still plagued by the Great Depression). The house in which Munro grew up was "a bulwark against [Ontario's] west wind with its heavy burden of winter snow and searing summer heat" (Simonds 29); like Emily, she grew up and wrote about a northern country stampeded by gales year-round. Neither author is overtly political[23], although both create subversive portraits of claustrophobic settings. Of course, seizing upon an aggregate of similarities between two writers is not difficult and can easily make for an inane comparison. The general experiences that Munro and Brontë have in common, however, are those that animate them as writers, and drive their intense engagement with domestic life (including the threats of violence, physical and rhetorical, that lurk therein).

It is, of course, wholly impossible to say why a Canadian rather than someone from the north of England should carry forward the genre that Brontë invented. The Industrial Revolution may have made Yorkshire somewhat less wild and therefore deprived it of a small, yet crucial part of its frontier spirit, thus rendering the genre's relocation inevitable. "May" is the operative word. Any attempt to account for intercontinental influence through a broad, historical scheme is bound to be speculative, and not helpfully so. While the artist is not immune to historical change, her aesthetic decisions are rooted more in the personal than in national or global incident; they necessarily spring from impulses that resist pat explanation. Harold Bloom's anatomies

---

[22] In her book on the author, Coral Ann Howells remarks that "Munro is fascinated by local history and geography and her stories offer social maps of small-town life…[although] they also retail socially unspeakable events" (1).

[23] Jane Smiley, in her introduction to *Family Furnishings* (2014) notes that Munro commented, in her Nobel interview, "'I never knew about the word "feminism," but of course I was a feminist'" (xii).

of influence are not likely to be useful here, either. Misprision is, in the case of Munro, out of the question. Her fiction demonstrates that she has read Emily Brontë both acutely *and* to her own creative benefit.

Here I will look at the early story "Royal Beatings," a stylized recounting of domestic and provincial violence, "Friend of My Youth," a mid-career masterpiece about dreams and vicarious reminiscences, and "Runaway," a psychologically fraught tale from Munro's triumphant late career of tension between two households.

i.

In the preface to the short story collection *A Wilderness Station* (originally published as *Selected Stories* (1996)), Alice Munro discusses some of the texts that made an indelible impression upon her as a young girl, already enamored with storytelling. She tells us that at the age of "eleven or twelve I had worked out—mostly in my walks to and from school—an adventure-narrative inspired mostly by *The Last of The Mohicans*" (xv). This early influence was, shortly thereafter, "pushed aside, obliterated…when a couple of years later I came across *Wuthering Heights*. Its long shadow fell over all the remaining years of my adolescence" (*Wilderness* xv). Munro reveals that she was not simply delighted by the experience of reading it; "obliterated" signals the novel's colossal resonance. She was moved to create a narrative of her own that mimicked its cadences of doom and resentment. Munro informs us, "I carried in my head a whole demonic tragedy in which people were riven by love, blasted by curses, and died young, all in a landscape of windy moors inserted into Huron County" (*Wilderness* xv). That Munro spent a number of her formative years—as a writer and a young woman—attempting to relocate Brontë's book to Ontario in a novel of her own cannot be overlooked. This was not,

moreover, a passing infatuation but a novel that she did not relinquish "until [she] went to college" (*Wilderness* xv). It would be several years before she developed what we think of now as the definitive Munro story: economic and unsentimental diction, immersion in the life of a Canadian woman—often a life clouded with longing. Yet this period was self-evidently important; Munro feels the need to acknowledge it in a brief introduction to the largest collection of her fiction up to that point. Her eventual innovation was to recognize that the landscape around her would provide fruitful material; she did not need to bring Yorkshire to Huron County to tell a story of individuals "riven by love." Munro left behind what sounds like a period of exuberant pastiche, although she did not abandon the ideas and narrative patterns that make *Wuthering Heights* a novel of manners.

"Royal Beatings" is, true to its title, an interrogation into how parental domestic violence functions as a dismaying part of a family's routine. Munro also considers how it operates as an imaginative stimulus. It is clear that she is directly influenced by Emily Brontë. Rose, the short story's anchoring consciousness, is a young woman in Ontario during the Great Depression who is sporadically subjected to beatings when she misbehaves. Just as frequent thrashings do not dissuade Heathcliff and Catherine from their antics, Rose has "a need to picture things, to pursue absurdities, that [is] stronger than the need to stay out of trouble" (*Wilderness* 117). She is a unique character, though analogous to both Brontean lovers in this respect. Her circumstantial and dispositional similarities create an aperture through which Munro can explore the distinctive cruelty of small town and familial mores. Rose obsesses over how a beating could possibly meet a regal metric and comes "up with a tree-lined avenue, a crowd of formal spectators, some white horses and black slaves. Someone [kneels], and the blood [comes] leaping out like

banners" (*Wilderness* 117). In *Wuthering Heights*, Hindley's abusive violence prompts Heathcliff to become an auteur of vengeance; in Munro's story, beatings and threats elicit a self-contained poetics of brutality on Rose's part. Her fixation upon the phrase "royal beating" demonstrates not only linguistic curiosity, but the importance of familial idiom. Emily Brontë's northern novel of manners begins by tutoring the reader, incompletely, in the local vernacular; we learn that "wuthering" is "a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (*Heights* 4). The lesson is incomplete, of course, because the emotional and moral dimensions of the word "wuthering" will only become apparent later. Munro's story similarly provides a purposefully ill-fitting exegesis of "royal beatings"—the phrase at the core of the family's tensions.

Rose grows up in a town where violence is commonplace and frequently treated as a necessary corrective to bad behavior. Flo, Rose's stepmother, tells of a local man who has "beaten all his children and beaten his wife as well" (*Wilderness* 123), a man guilty of incest with his daughter and infanticide, when a pregnancy resulted. This builds to a tableau of punishment in Flo's recounting; she tells of how "in the interests of public morality" (*Wilderness* 124), a local crowd of men beat the abuser "while his nightgown and the snow he was lying in turned red" (*Wilderness* 124). What is vital here is Flo's association of brutality with morality; the public code not only can accommodate such viciousness, but Flo would have her stepdaughter believe, it *must*.

The beatings that Rose receives from her father are part of the household's self-contained value system. They are, nevertheless, considerably more demeaning than the violence in town. When Flo "brings a jar of cold cream" (*Wilderness* 135) to Rose after

"damage has been done" (*Wilderness* 135), she registers its "intimate, babyish, humiliating smell" (*Wilderness* 135). The degradation of a beating at home is compounded by the feeling that it can only lead to the further embarrassment of being infantilized. Flo is complicit both in the aftermath of painful belittlement and in the ordeal's initiation. She rarely puts a hand on Rose herself, and when she does it is in the form of "quick cuffs and slaps…while her attention remain[s] elsewhere" (*Wilderness* 117). Instead Flo convinces her husband, Rose's father, to do the beating. After informing him of Rose's "back talk and impudence and her terrible tongue" (*Wilderness* 131), Flo says that they "'don't need the public in on this, that's for sure'… and she goes to lock the door" (*Wilderness* 132). Locking a door is often a momentous event in a narrative because it reveals a character's desire for privacy and foreshadows an encounter of great import. Flo's act, and her accompanying words, convey that Rose's beating belongs exclusively within the province of their shared domestic space. Like Brontë, Munro is interested in treating the home as a cosmos unto itself. Arnold Shapiro's description of *Wuthering Heights* as "hermetic" (288) applies to Rose's household as well. Rose wonders how her father's abuse can "go on in front of such daily witnesses—the linoleum, the calendar…the old accommodating pots and pans" (*Wilderness* 133). In elevating domestic features to "witnesses," Rose affirms the metaphysical weight of her setting. These objects are not incidental; they are the immutable markers of her quotidian existence. She cannot believe that her world can fail to change when "[h]er father is after her, cracking the belt at her when he can, then abandoning it and using his hands" (*Wilderness* 133). This disbelief does not belie the regularity of the beatings. Rose knows that soon enough "they will all sit around the table eating again, listening to the radio

news" (*Wilderness* 136). The violence is sufficiently routine that Rose can be certain of the awkward détente that will transpire next.

Rose's lack of a mother is reminiscent of *Wuthering Heights*, because that maternal figure is supplanted by a woman who cannot fulfill that role, one, moreover, who "like[s] the details of death" (*Wilderness* 118) just as Nelly Dean does. Rose was in her infancy when her mother died and so has "heard it from Flo, who must have heard it from her father" (*Wilderness* 118). Flo is a storyteller, who provides a history not only of the town's more disturbing episodes, but also of Rose's family. Oral history is also, of course, the primary mechanism in Brontë's novel by which painful memories are resuscitated. The pain is evident when Rose imagines the period in which her mother was still alive as a "far gentler and more ceremonious time, with little touches of affluence" (*Wilderness* 118). This is almost uncomfortably close to Nelly's supposition that Wuthering Heights had an "ancient aspect of comfort under female management" (*Heights* 195). Flo is Nelly's stand-in in "Royal Beatings," although here it is Rose, the Catherine/Heathcliff amalgam, who dreams of the past in hazily pleasant terms. Munro, like Brontë, considers how the lack of a mother figure is easily blamed for a harsher household. Both are content to be ambiguous, however, about whether such a claim makes any sense—we cannot know what Rose's mother was like any more than we can Catherine Earnshaw's. Munro introduces her own ironic flourish; Rose longs for something "ceremonious," yet her father pointedly *does* supply ceremonies, albeit of the barbarous variety. The beatings are, after all, "royal". Her vocabulary of fantasy has become contaminated by the very experience which fantasy is supposed to help her escape.

Manners, and not just the violent sort, receive direct attention in "Royal Beatings." The household's mores are peculiar when set against those of mainstream society because the characters live in close quarters and color the decorum with their own quirks. The bathroom is placed in the kitchen and "the walls [are] only beaverboard" (*Wilderness* 120). As a result, everyone is "familiar with each other's nether voices, not only in the more explosive moments but in their intimate sighs and growls…And they [are] all most prudish people" (*Wilderness* 120). Prudishness cannot exist where there is a vacuum as far as custom is concerned. Rose's household is a place where what passes for acceptable behavior is strange and unintuitive to those who hail from a different and less secluded context. Flo will joke about a man exposing himself, yet still "despise[s] dirty talk" (*Wilderness* 128). Munro is interested, like Brontë, in how closely manners can come to resembling the personal preferences of those who preside over a household.

<div align="center">ii.</div>

"Friend of My Youth" is a frame story (by the end, a double-frame) of memory, loss, and romantic tensions in a domestic household. Its formal parallel with *Wuthering Heights* might appear to be incidental were the thematic overlap not so pronounced. Munro incorporated Brontë's aesthetic and adapted it to Ontario. The narrator recounts her mother's stories about being a teacher in a small town who boarded "with the Grieveses…in that black board house with its paralytic Sundays and coal-oil lamps and primitive notions" (*Wilderness* 456). When the narrator begins reporting on the content of the letters that Flora sent to her mother, the frame acquires another layer. Just as Emily Brontë uses a boarder to emphasize how remote Wuthering Heights is from mainstream society, so Munro does the same for the heterodox family at the center of her story.

Dreams are also a crucial part of the narrative's edifice, as they are in Brontë's novel. Indeed, Munro's narrator begins with a recurring one in which, she tells us, "I would be the age I really was, living the life I was really living, and I would discover that my mother was still alive" (*Wilderness* 454). She professes, toward the end, that she understands her fantasy about Flora "as a dream" (*Wilderness* 474)—a comment on how private fictions are comparably urgent and functionally similar to the fragments that pass through a sleeping mind. Munro's subtle metafictional commentary also recalls Brontë, whose realism extends to a mimetic portrait of the compositional process in the form of Lockwood. He, of course, promises to condense Nelly's tale and admits that he "can recollect [the story's] chief incidents" (*Heights* 90), thus revealing the considerable difference between that which makes it onto the page and that which actually occurred.

Munro pays close attention to region in "Friend of My Youth" and aggrandizes it through the narrator's mother, who describes "the Ottawa Valley, which was her home…in a dogmatic, mystified way, emphasizing things about it that [distinguish] it from any other place on earth" (*Wilderness* 455). In *Wuthering Heights*, Brontë presents Yorkshire as a country overrun with passion and kissed by heretical possibility. The Ottawa Valley acquires an equivalent degree of mythical exaltation through language in Munro's story; it is a place where "[h]ouses turn black, maple syrup has a taste no maple syrup produced elsewhere can equal, [and] bears amble within sight of farmhouses" (*Wilderness* 455). Romantic ardor is more subdued in Munro's context although, as we will see, Flora simply transfers it to the religious realm. The narrator herself describes this part of Ontario as "a scrambled, disarranged sort of country with no easy harmony about it" (*Wilderness* 455); here Munro crafts a different portrait than Brontë does at the

end of her novel, when Edgar Linton's grave is "harmonized by the turf" (*Heights* 334). The Ottawa Valley's landscape is more discordant than Yorkshire's, although both are, crucially, rural environments in which etiquette can undergo a profound and dark transformation.

The narrator considers both the mores on display in a fringe-religious household of Cameronians and the more general way in which custom is subject to generational shifts. There is never a question, once Robert has impregnated Ellie (Flora's little sister), that he will marry her even though he was Flora's fiancé. Their religion, which governs much of the house's behavioral protocol, dictates that this must occur. Flora "behave[s] like a saint" (*Wilderness* 459) and has "the house divided" (*Wilderness* 461); like Brontë, Munro finds aesthetic inspiration in a domestic setting rent by competing passions. There are strict rules in place at the Grieves' home, yet they accommodate interactions that would be deemed bizarre or unruly elsewhere. Ellie places "thistles in Robert's bed" (*Wilderness* 460) under the guise of play; the sexual impulse that is truly at play here bristles beneath the surface, yet is tolerated. Robert himself sounds like a Byronic figure in the narrator's imagination. She does not have many details about him and so conjures an image of a man who is "black-haired, heavy-shouldered, with the strength of a plow horse, and the same kind of sombre, shackled beauty" (*Wilderness* 462). In this conception, he is sullen, powerfully libidinal and impervious, by virtue of his manhood, to the constraints that Flora accepts. The narrator's mother supposes that Robert will inherit the farm in spite of his role as an outsider who has sowed division within the Grieves family. Flora's own tradition of extraordinary acquiescence makes this unavoidable.

Just as *Wuthering Heights* contemplates how codes of conduct are inexorably altered with the passage of generations, the narrator ruminates on why her own response to the Grieves' story is bound to differ from her mother's. The narrator realizes that her "mother had grown up in a time and in a place where sex was a dark undertaking for women…So she honored the decency, the prudery…that might protect you" (*Wilderness* 471). Time has scattered the coordinates of even "progressive" (*Wilderness* 471) values; the narrator admits that she "grew up in horror of that protection…and [of] all other sorts of tinkling inanities" (*Wilderness* 471). What might have seemed estimable to the narrator's mother is baffling to the narrator herself, although the tale preoccupies mother and daughter alike. This is an unconscious signal of kinship between Munro and the author she admires and echoes; the generational gulf between the two is enormous, yet they both share the same fundamental interests. Virginia Woolf's dictum that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" (*Room* 57) is germane here. Brontë is, for Munro, an inescapable and aesthetically nourishing maternal figure.

"Friend of My Youth," like *Wuthering Heights*, contains characters who possess firm and unusual metaphysical ideas that affect their daily actions. Flora is secure enough in her beliefs that she has "no fear of the heathens—she ha[s] always lived in the midst of them" (*Wilderness* 458). Thus, she can tolerate the narrator's mother in addition to accepting an arrangement that would be too emotionally difficult for most. The story's central mystery is why Flora does not even hint at the violent feelings of betrayal and disgust that must surely reside within her. Munro gives the reader a seemingly unrelated final passage about the history of Cameronians, the sect to which Flora belongs, that provides an oblique explanation. The passage conveys the extreme sentiments of the

"uncompromising" (*Wilderness* 475) of that denomination. One of whom was, the narrator tells us, a minister who "in a mood of firm rejoicing at his own hanging, excommunicated all the other preachers in the world" (*Wilderness* 475). This implicitly answers how Flora could remain self-contained and altruistic in the face of humiliation. Her metaphysical ideas were, the narrator understands, the zone to which she displaced her fury. Flora could not get rid of Ellie and Robert but she could, by the contrasting virtue of her own example, excommunicate them from both her own church and the church of public approval. Like Heathcliff, Flora's anger is so profound that she must channel some of it in a theological direction.

<div align="center">iii.</div>

"Runaway" is a story of the tension between two rural, and somewhat isolated houses; this is the most basic of its structural parallels with *Wuthering Heights*. Even by her late career, Munro still evidenced a great degree of Brontean influence. As with "Royal Beatings" and "Friend of My Youth," the concern with manners is still present. "Runaway" is set in the present (or close to it—Clark uses a computer), which makes the story's gender dynamics all the more peculiar. Clark orders Carla to start supper and he talks to her while she's in the shower, but he will not watch her get out of it. He expresses affection through violence, telling Carla, "'[i]f you ever try to run away on me again I'll tan your hide'" (*Family* 342). When he says this, Carla notices that Clark is "high-spirited…irresistible as when she had first known him" (*Family* 342). The notion that threats can foster an intimate and enduring bond is comparably essential to Brontë's narrative, in which Heathcliff and Catherine find poetry in the scathing wishes that they

impart (consider the moment when Catherine tells Edgar, "'I wish Heathcliff may flog you sick, for daring to think an evil thought of me'" (*Heights* 114)).

Munro's prose style resembles Brontë's psychologically incisive syntax, which resists mawkishness and rhetorical gratuity. When Carla gives Sylvia a daughterly kiss, for helping her to leave her troubled marriage, the older woman views "it as a bright blossom, its petals spreading inside her with tumultuous heat, like a menopausal flash" (*Family* 321). Munro, like her aesthetic forebear, often favors metaphors that evoke the natural world (here, the word "tumultuous" provides an explicit link to Brontë's signature meteorological phenomenon). She resists the urge to sentimentalize Sylvia. The phrase "bright blossom," with its alliterative sunniness, might seem to create an improbably delightful comparison. However, the romantic euphoria is dashed with a surprising reference to a discomforting sensation associated with the end of fertility. Religious language frequently creeps into the story (as it does in *Wuthering Heights*), although Munro is not allegorical. Sylvia, when seeing Carla off, thinks that the younger woman's "thanks had been sincere but already almost casual…she [is] used to her salvation" (*Family* 330-331). "Salvation" communicates the gravity of the situation; its use is also an example of precise free indirect discourse on Munro's part. She does not insert her own word into Sylvia's self-dialectic, but rather chooses a term that a woman who has recently spent long hours in her husband's "death chamber" (*Family* 320) might easily produce, given that such a setting tends to produce serious metaphysical thought. Munro's psychological acuity recalls her predecessor, as does her fascination with the effect that time spent in a "death chamber" has on how one thinks. Brontë, of course,

dwells on the subject when Nelly admits that she is "seldom otherwise than happy while watching in the chamber of death" (*Heights* 165).

A wind motif pervades "Runaway," which never leaves behind its secluded country milieu. Like Catherine Earnshaw, who cannot conceive of existing anywhere but upon the moors, Carla realizes that "[t]he strange and terrible thing" (*Family* 334) about travelling to another place is "that she [will] not exist there" (*Family* 334). She does not get very far from home before she calls Clark and returns. The story too is stranded in Munro's windswept territory. In the beginning, there is tempestuous weather in the form of "a sudden stirring and then a blast through the treetops and a nearly horizontal blinding rain" (*Family* 311). As in *Wuthering Heights*, the wind is connected to the characters' emotional gusts. The gales in Munro's story hint at Carla's turbulent feelings and presage the stormy confrontation between Sylvia and Clark. Right before Carla leaves, there is "enough of a wind blowing to lift the roadside grass" (*Family* 332); it is only once she has returned that the weather is milder and there is a "light warm wind [that blows] and everyone [feels] like doing things again" (*Family* 341). The compressive nature of the short story form demands that every detail Munro include be absolutely vital to the narrative. The zephyrs that propel the reader through "Runaway" are not tossed-off atmospheric details, but important markers of the characters' mental states, like the storm of "violent wind[s]" (*Heights* 84) that accompanies Catherine's heartbreak at Heathcliff's disappearance.

At the end of *Wuthering Heights*, "the country folks…[raise] the phantoms from thinking" (*Heights* 333); although the ghosts may not be real, the sensation of being haunted is legitimate. Nelly is, on an intellectual level, dubious about the claims of

spectral sightings, yet she is apprehensive about "being out in the dark" (*Heights* 333). Similarly, Clark and Sylvia are momentarily convinced that they have seen a ghost at the end of "Runaway"; although this turns out to be false, the story ends with Carla's own haunted avoidance of a particular location. Sylvia and Clark are arguing when they notice that outside "[t]he fog ha[s] thickened…transformed itself into an unearthly sort of animal, pure white, hell-bent…rushing at them" (*Family* 338). It turns out to be the truant goat, Flora. Clark tells her that he and Sylvia "'thought [she was] a ghost'" (*Family* 339) and he compares her to an "'apparition'" (*Family* 339). Munro is playing a linguistic game here; "goat" and "ghost" are close enough, phonetically speaking, that the mistake is entirely understandable. She is also ruminating on the nature of ghosts, as Brontë does in her novel. After this encounter, Clark murders Flora and abandons the carcass at "the edge of the woods…where the buzzards [have a] party" (*Family* 345). Flora—now a pile of "little dirty bones in the grass" (*Family* 345)—looks even less like a phantom than she did when she interrupted Sylvia and Clark, yet Carla is haunted by her. Carla refuses to "go near [the] place" (*Family* 345) where she would find Flora's "skull with perhaps some shreds of bloodied skin clinging to it" (*Family* 345). Like Nelly, she resists "the temptation" (*Family* 345). The true ghosts, to Brontë and Munro, are the lingering fears that keep certain areas, and memories, off-limits.

Works Cited

Allot, Miriam ed. *The Brontës: The Critical Heritage*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,
    1974. Print.

Austen, Jane. *Pride and Prejudice*. New York: Penguin, 2012. Print.
---. *Persuasion*. Ed. Linda Bree. Toronto: Broadview, 1998. Print.

Barker, Juliet. *The Brontës: Wild Genius on the Moors: The Story of a Literary Family*.
    New York: Pegasus, 2012. Print.

Bowers, Bege K., and Barbra Brothers. *Reading and Writing Women's Lives: A Study of
    the Novel of Manners*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990. Print.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Jane Eyre*. Ed. Stevie Davies. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Ed. Pauline Nestor. New York: Penguin, 2000. Print.

Chitham, Edward. *A Life of Emily Brontë*. New York: Blackwell, 1987. Print.

Darwin, Charles. *The Origin of Species*. Ed. Charles W. Eliot. New York: P.F. Collier &
    Son, 1909. Print.

Davies, Stevie. *Emily Brontë*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. Print.
---. *Emily Brontë: The Artist as a Free Woman*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1983. Print.
---. *Emily Brontë: Heretic*. London: The Women's Press, 1999. Print.

Derrida, Jacques, and Avital Ronell. "The Law of Genre." *Critical Inquiry* 7.1 (1980):
    55-81. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 April 2017.

Duncan, Ian. *Scott's Shadow*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. Print.

Eagleton, Terry. *The English Novel: An Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell
    Publishing, 2005. Print.
---. *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan,
    2005. Print.

Flint, Kate. "Women writers, women's issues." *The Cambridge Companion to The
    Brontës*. Ed. Heather Glen. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Print.

Fromer, Julie. *A Necessary Luxury: Tea in Victorian England*. Athens, OH: Ohio
    University Press, 2008. Print.

Gaskell, Elizabeth. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Ed. Elisabeth Jay. New York: Penguin,
    1997. Print.

Gilbert, Sandra M, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. New Haven: Yale
  University Press, 2000. Print.

Grundy, Isobel. "Jane Austen and literary traditions." *The Cambridge Companion to Jane
  Austen*. Ed. Edward Copeland and Juliet McMaster. Cambridge: Cambridge
  University Press, 2003. Print.

Hay, Elizabeth. "The mother as material." *The Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro*.
  Ed. David Staines. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Print.

Heble, Ajay. *The Tumble of Reason: Alice Munro's Discourse of Absence*. Toronto:
  University of Toronto Press, 1994. Print.

Homans, Margaret. "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in Wuthering Heights."
  PMLA 93.1 (1978): 9-19. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 April 2017.

Howells, Coral Ann. *Alice Munro*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. Print.

Hughes, Gerald. *Ted and I*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2012. Print.

Hughes, Ted. "The Horses." *Selected Poems: 1957-1994*. New York: Farrar, Straus, and
  Giroux, 2002. Print.

Johnson, Claudia. *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and The Novel*. Chicago: The
  University of Chicago Press, 1988. Print.

Kettle, Arnold. "Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights* (1847)." *The Victorian Novel: Modern
  Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Ian Watt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972.
  Print.

Kiely, Robert. *The Romantic Novel in England*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press,
  1972. Print.

Lamont, Claire. "Jane Austen and the Old." *The Review of English Studies* 54. 217
  (2003): 661-674. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 April 2017.

Matthews, John T. "Framing in *Wuthering Heights*." *Texas Studies in Literature and
  Language* 27.1 (1985): 25-61. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 April 2017.

Miller, Deborah. "Genre as Social Action." *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151-
  167. *Google Scholar*. *Web*. 4 April 2017.

Miller, J. Hillis. *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard
  University Press, 1982. Print.

Munro, Alice. *A Wilderness Station: Selected Stories 1968-1994*. New York: Vintage, 1997. Print.

---. *Family Furnishings: Selected Stories 1995-2014*. New York: Vintage, 2014. Print.

Oates, Joyce Carol. "Characters Dangerously Like Us." *New York Times*. New York Times, 14 Sept. 1986. Web. 8 April 2017.

Polhemus, Robert. *Lot's Daughters*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005. Print.

Robinson, Amy. "Journeying Home: Jane Eyre and Catherine Earnshaw's Coming-of-Age Stories." *A Companion to the Brontës*. Ed. Diane Long Hoeveler and Deborah Denenholz Morse. Malden, MA: Wiley, 2016. Print.

Sanger, C.P. *The Structure of Wuthering Heights*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1926. Print.

Scott, Walter. *Ivanhoe*. Ed. Graham Tulloch. New York: Penguin, 2000. Print.

Shapiro, Arnold. "*Wuthering Heights* As A Victorian Novel." *Studies in the Novel* 1.3 (1969): 284-296. *JSTOR*. Web. 8 April 2017.

Simonds, Merilyn. "Where do you think you are?: Place in the short stories of Alice Munro." *The Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro*. Ed. David Staines. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Print.

Staines, David. "From Wingham to Clinton: Alice Munro in her Canadian context." *The Cambridge Companion to Alice Munro*. Ed. David Staines. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Print.

Urquhart, Jane. *Changing Heaven*. Boston: Godine, 1993. Print.

Von Sneidern, Maja-Lisa. "Wuthering Heights and the Liverpool Slave Trade." *ELH* 62.1 (1995): 171-196. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 April 2017.

Wiesenfarth, Joseph. *Gothic Manners and the Classic English Novel*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *The Common Reader: First Series*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984. Print.

---. *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Print.