

A Strange Way of Loving:

The Brontëan Sadistic Heart of Jacques Rivette's *Hurlevent*

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Abstract:

This essay analyses Jacques Rivette's *Hurlevent*, the French film adaptation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, in terms of the adaptor's reworking of the novel's major themes and characters in predominantly visual images. The analysis seeks to determine whether the changes created by the film-maker affect the faithfulness and aesthetic worth of *Hurlevent* as an adaptation of Brontë's text. In the light of various notions of adaptation, such as Battestin's and Armour's theory of analogical autonomy, this analysis also seeks to demonstrate whether this film has succeeded in unveiling the roots of the novel's sadistic traits and the soil from which they stem; the agony of love denied.

KEYWORDS: *adaptation, change, faithfulness, analogy, thematic network, characterisation.*

A savage wilderness round him hang
As of dweller out of doors;
In his whole figure and his mien
A savage character was seen
Of mountains and of dreary moors.¹
— William Wordsworth

The Faithful Film Adaptation

Assessing the 'faithfulness' of a filmed literary work entails coming to terms with the changes created by the film-maker. A film adaptation of a literary text creates changes by its very nature for the simple reason that it is a different form of art. As Dudley Andrew observes, 'there is the sense that the organism, when transplanted to a different milieu, will alter itself in adaptation without losing its identity. [...] There is the generative aspect of an organism through which it reaches beyond itself in procreation.'² Most film adaptations omit or

1 'Peter Bell', in *The Works of William Wordsworth* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1994), pp. 236-249.

2 J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. 6.

change a substantial part of the text and differ dramatically in terms of the landscape and aspects of plot they choose to illuminate. But this transformation should give a sense of direction rather than loss because it establishes the role of an audience; that of dealing with changes and acknowledging them as part of the creative process.

When Joy Gould Boyum states that 'the question of fidelity [...] becomes an issue of making the adaptation a work that is masterful in itself,' she draws our attention to the concept of adaptation as a work that should never rely for its thematic development on the presumed audience's familiarity with the novel.³ Robert A. Armour argues that 'a film taken from a novel must strike a balance between showing respect for the source and forcing the viewer to depend on a knowledge of the novel to understand the cinematic narrative.'⁴ Linda Hutcheon hits the same theoretical key when she attributes the appeal of adaptations to what she calls 'repetition with variation' or 'the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise.'⁵ 'With adaptations,' she observes, 'we seem to desire the repetition as much as the change.'⁶ The film adaptor, therefore, has a dual responsibility since he has to establish his own aesthetic identity while remaining faithful to the original source. Martin C. Battestin recommends analogy as an artful means of maintaining this balance when he attributes the success of a film adaptation to 'the skill of its makers in striking analogous attitudes and in finding analogous rhetorical techniques.'⁷ Thus, the balance hinted at by Armour can somehow be attained if the film adaptor creates his own equivalents to the novel's major themes and characters, thereby rooting his aesthetic autonomy in a network of thematic analogies.

The following analysis seeks to demonstrate how the French film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*, Jacques Rivette's *Hurlevent* (*Howling Wind*), has attempted to recreate Emily Brontë's main themes and characters in terms of analogical autonomy. For, as Dudley Andrew puts it in his commentary on Eisenstein's work, 'it is theme which makes an organism tend to be the way it is; theme which seems to demand that certain choices rather than others be made in the creative process.'⁸ But themes do not stand in a vacuum; characters are also pivotal in the creative process of adaptation. As Murray Smith argues, 'characters are crucial to the rhetorical and aesthetic effects of both narrative and performance texts because they engage receivers' imaginations through [...] recognition, alignment, and allegiance.'⁹ Consider Rivette's Joseph, for instance, who is analogically autonomous of Brontë's: he is a French

3 *Double Exposure: Fiction into Film* (New York: Universe Books, 1985; repr. Mentor, 1989), p. 91.

4 'The "Whatness" of Joseph Strick's *Portrait*', in *The English Novel and the Movies*, pp. 279-290 (p. 282).

5 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, (Routledge, 2006), p. 4.

6 *Ibid.* p. 9.

7 'Osborne's *Tom Jones*: Adapting a Classic', in *Film and Literature: Contrasts in Media*, ed. by Fred A. Marcus (Scranton: Chandler, 1971), pp. 164-177 (p. 169).

8 *The Major Film Theories*, p. 64.

9 Quoted by Linda Hutcheon in *A Theory of Adaptation*, p. 11.

model of Protestant bigotry with those traits of sadism that are so essential to Joseph's characterisation. But if sadism is essential to Brontë's portrayal of Joseph, it is equally important in Heathcliff's characterisation. For as J. Hillis Miller poignantly observes:

Heathcliff's sadism is more than an attempt to take revenge indirectly on Cathy. It is also a strange and paradoxical attempt to regain his lost intimacy with her. [...] If his childhood relation to Cathy gave him possession of the whole world through her, perhaps now that Cathy is lost he can get her back by appropriating the world.¹⁰

This notion of sadism as a means of reattainment can be viewed from a truer perspective if we consider Brontë's portrayal of Catherine and Heathcliff before analysing their visual counterparts in Rivette's *Hurlement*.

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

The world of *Wuthering Heights* seems to be shaped by two diametrically opposed elements: the mysticism of Catherine's and Heathcliff's oneness and the bitterness of their tragic separation; it is a world which might be epitomised in Heathcliff's own words when he is near the end of his destructive journey:

I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags! In every cloud, in every tree – filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object, by day I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men, and women – my own features – mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her!¹¹

Now that Catherine is lost forever, Heathcliff is left with a world of tokens which only serve to intensify his anguish. His relation to Catherine has been a fusion with the whole world through her, and he feels that he can reverse the process and regain her by assimilating the world. One of the ways through which Heathcliff sets out to achieve this is by appropriating *Wuthering Heights* – the house where he had spent his childhood with Catherine. This is the reasoning which Catherine claims to have heard from Heathcliff as she relates it to the inquisitive Nelly:

He said he called to gather information concerning me, from you, supposing you lived there still – Heathcliff affirms his principal reason for resuming a connection with his ancient persecutor is a wish to install himself in quarters at walking distance

10 'Emily Brontë', in *The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp.157-211 (p. 195).

11 Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 320.

from the Grange, and an attachment to the house where we lived together [...].¹²

Meg Harris Williams is truly accurate, therefore, when she assimilates the returned Heathcliff's forced entry in *Wuthering Heights* with a kind of spiritual violence on Catherine who is 'always associated with the body of the house'.¹³ Furthermore, in Hindley and Isabella, Heathcliff can only decipher the image of a dead Catherine; their very presence seems to deprive him of her live spirit which he believed he would find at the heights.

So Heathcliff's defiance of everyone stems from his relation to Catherine, and it is only when he loses her forever that his destructive hatred reaches its apex. Catherine, whose life becomes a terrifying *blank* since the onset of puberty, can never be anything other than a child – and it is only the primitive child's world, characterised by an unthinkable cruelty, that can accommodate her true self.¹⁴ The world for which the dying Catherine yearns, in fact, is the world of *Wuthering Heights* – the same world where the young Heathcliff had shown 'the intensest anguish' at having saved baby Hareton's life when the latter was flung over the bannister by his father: 'Had it been dark', says Nelly, 'he would have tried to remedy the mistake by smashing Hareton's skull on the steps.'¹⁵ It is the same world where the young Hareton hurls a large flint at his former nanny and unleashes 'a string of curses' which 'distort his baby features into a shocking expression of malignity'.¹⁶ Catherine, on her part, is a protagonist in this child's sadistic world. Nelly describes her as a six-year old who 'liked [...] using her hands freely and commanding her companions'.¹⁷ 'She did so to me', says Nelly, 'but I would not bear slapping and ordering; and so I let her know'.¹⁸

Catherine describes Heathcliff as 'dumb or a baby' when he reproaches her for spending more evenings with the Lintons than she does with him.¹⁹ Yet, when Heathcliff disappears and Catherine becomes Linton's wife, she remains the same Catherine who had previously uttered 'I am Heathcliff'.²⁰ Thus, she is still 'a baby', egoistically forcing Heathcliff to incarnate her own childlike personality with all the cruelty it entails. In this sense, therefore, it is Catherine herself who moulds Heathcliff into what she later describes as 'a pitiless, wolfish man'.²¹ And because Catherine is equally oblivious to pity, she returns to haunt him in a most terrifying and malevolent way – she returns as a child-ghost. Joyce Carol Oates is truly accurate, therefore, when she states that 'this combative atmosphere is the natural and unspoiled Eden for which

12. Ibid. p. 98.

13. Meg Harris Williams, *A Strange Way of Killing: The Poetic Structure of Wuthering Heights* (Pertshire: Clunie Press, 1987), p. 58.

14. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 124.

15. Ibid. p. 74.

16. Ibid. p. 108.

17. Ibid. p. 23.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid. p. 69.

20. Ibid. p. 82.

21. Ibid. p. 102.

the dying Catherine yearns, however inhuman it is'.²²

With their child-self seemingly propelled into an unwanted maturity, Catherine and Heathcliff are both victimised victimisers living a *sui generis* existence. Hence the main purpose of this analysis; to establish whether the French film adaptation of *Wuthering Heights* has succeeded in unveiling the roots of Heathcliff's sadism by recreating Catherine's own 'strange way of killing' as the core of her *baby-work* while letting her double voice echo during her return to childhood.²³

Wuthering Heights and Hurlevent

Rivette adheres closely to Brontë in terms of characterisation and thematic analogy since he does visualise the supernatural dimension of Catherine's essence to some extent, while preserving the interplay between the lovers' adultlike qualities and their enduring childlikeness of spirit. Catherine's motherly intervention when Roc (Heathcliff) is beaten by her brother Guillaume (Hindley) is reaffirmed by her tone when she rebukes the latter during dinner: 'Now you think that you can do whatever you like but you're wrong. I swear, you're wrong.'²⁴ Outside, however, far from Guillaume's tyranny, there is the baby bird nesting upon the upland *garrigue*,²⁵ soon to be found by Roc and Catherine when they escape together from the farm. The helpless fluttering of the bird's wings at the mercy of Roc's hands and Catherine's wish to 'put it back to its nest', both provide a direct link with the piteous image of the lapwing left indelible in the memory of Brontë's Catherine – that childhood memory she speaks to Nelly while engaged in the 'baby-work' of undoing the stuffing of her pillow:

Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot – we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dare not come. I made him promise he'd never shoot a lapwing, after that, and he didn't.²⁶

In the light of this Brontëan moment, Rivette's bird sequence (Fig 1) makes the viewer experience what Irving H. Buchan says of Catherine and Heathcliff when he describes them as being 'not so much adults as arrested children'.²⁷ This notion is reinforced by Rivette in the subsequent scene of Roc and Cath-

22 'The Magnanimity of *Wuthering Heights*', *Critical Inquiry*, (Winter 1983) <<http://www.usfca.edu/~southern/wuthering.html>>. [accessed 2 May 2007] (p. 8)

23 *Wuthering Heights*, pp. 288, 122.

24 All quotations from *Hurlevent* come from the film's English subtitles.

25 Rivette transposes Brontë's Yorkshire moors to the sun-drenched *garrigue* of the Cévennes; an open shrubby vegetation of dry Mediterranean regions.

26 *Hurlevent* subtitles and *Wuthering Heights* pp. 122, 121.

27 'Emily Brontë and the Metaphysics of Childhood and Love', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 22 (1967), 63-70 (p. 67).



FIG 1: Rivette's Catherine and Roc face the fluttering of their childlike soul

erine crossing the river, where the latter's transparent dress hints at a sexuality of which both lovers seem to be oblivious. As Saviour Catania points out, 'Rivette's Catherine truly incarnates her Brontëan counterpart in terms of Balthus' depiction of the latter as the adolescent child of *Cathy and Heathcliff escape from Wuthering Heights*—a drawing where Catherine's open legs [...] convey what Sabine Rewald [...] calls "innocent exhibitionism."²⁸ The same concept is reaffirmed when Catherine quarrels with Roc while lying on a billiards table with her legs innocently exposed. Roc's own words, in fact, hint at the child that still lives in Catherine when he calls her 'a dirty little hypocrite in a doll's dress'.²⁹ Catania is incisively accurate, therefore, when stating that Rivette 'deliberately patterns Catherine's postures on those of Balthus' girls innocently sprawled on floors or chairs, lost in the day-dreaming of reading, and totally oblivious of their bodies' erotic magnetism'.³⁰

After Roc's disappearance, Catherine seems to be roused by what could possibly be a dream and relapses downward into a kind of visionary death which shows her a permanent reality rooted in childhood and which, consequently, thrives in the unconscious regions of her soul. This is what Rivette creates through this interpolation, which he aptly inserts in the middle of the film, just before he shows us Catherine in her role as Olivier's (Edgar's) wife. Like Brontë's Catherine, then, whose 'life close[s] in a gentle dream' in the middle of the novel, so does Rivette's heroine flow into the abyss of her unconscious inner world half way through the film.³¹ Hence Catherine's vision of Roc sitting next to her on the same bed, masking her eyes with her own hands and gently escorting her into an inner room. It is very significant, indeed, that Rivette makes Roc twist Catherine repeatedly whilst staining her white dress with his bleeding wrists. For even Nelly observes, in Brontë's larches scene, that Heathcliff's 'hand and forehead were both stained' with the blood he sheds during his violent lament for Catherine.³² Roc's bleeding

28 Saviour Catania, 'A Thematic-Semiotic Comparison of Five *Wuthering Heights* Film Adaptations' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Malta, 1996), p. 265.

29 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

30 'A Thematic-Semiotic Comparison of Five *Wuthering Heights* Film Adaptations', p. 265.

31 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 167.

32 *Ibid.*

wrists do not only evoke Heathcliff's agony – they also reinforce Catherine's childlike essence in Rivette's interpolation. For Heathcliff's blood seems to have its source in that devastating question he puts to Nelly: 'How did she die?' – a question that Nelly can only answer by resorting to her memory of Catherine as the child she used to nurse at *Wuthering Heights*: 'She drew a sigh and stretched herself like a child reviving and sinking again to sleep, and five minutes after I felt one little pulse at her heart and nothing more'.³³ It is apt, therefore, that Rivette shows Catherine peacefully waking up within her bed sheets before she enters the world of her soul's desires – a scene which evokes Stevie Davies's lyrical description of Catherine's death in *Wuthering Heights*:

If you have seen a little girl in a deep sleep, coming gently to the surface, perhaps roused by some dream and then relapsing downward into the inner world without breaking the surface of consciousness, then you have seen Catherine's death as Emily Brontë meant you to imagine it.³⁴

In her married state, Rivette's Catherine remains convinced that she still inhabits the earlier world of her childhood. Her childlike egoism is reaffirmed on Roc's return: 'Don't make that face, Olivier,' she tells her husband, 'three years went by; you can become friends now.'³⁵ This recurs when she is lying on the bed with Olivier: 'I did not know you were such a wimp. I'm as happy as can be, and you have a headache. If you really loved me, you would be as happy as I am.'³⁶ Rivette's Catherine, therefore, still sees Olivier and Isabel as the soft and petted companions of her childhood whom she expects to dominate, just like her literary equivalent: 'I yield like a foolish mother,' the latter claims to Nelly, 'they are spoiled children, and fancy the world was made for their accommodation'.³⁷ Likewise, Catherine complains that Edgar whines for trifles and melts into tears. When Heathcliff returns after his three-year absence, she refuses to acknowledge that the world around her has not remained unchanged like herself and persists in believing that her relationship with Heathcliff, 'half savage, and hardy, and free', can continue uninterrupted.³⁸ It is significant, therefore, that on the night of Roc's return, Rivette makes Catherine declare to Héléne (Nelly): 'What happened tonight is the story of my life. You don't know what I had to endure.'³⁹ In Héléne's eyes, in fact, Catherine's illness is merely a childish display, through which her mistress is seeking to win her way: 'Wait a little bit for that...don't go along with her game,' Héléne tells Olivier when Catherine locks herself in a room and starts refusing food.⁴⁰ There is actually little distinction between Héléne's words and what Brontë's Nelly whispers to Edgar: 'There is nothing in the

33 Ibid. p. 166.

34 Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë: The Artist as a Free Woman* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983) p. 106.

35 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

36 Ibid.

37 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 97.

38 Ibid. p. 124.

39 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

40 Ibid.

world the matter." [...] I did not want him to yield, [...] I told him how she had resolved, previous to his coming, on exhibiting a fit of frenzy'.⁴¹

What makes Rivette's Catherine satisfying in terms of Brontëan adaptation is not merely the way in which he recreates her childlike essence; it is also the manner in which he suggests her supernatural dimension. It is apt, for instance, that Rivette juxtaposes the onset of Catherine's illness and her fainting to what happens at Roc's farm after Isabel's elopement. I am referring, here, to the nocturnal sequence where Isabel is ushered by Joseph to the room where Catherine used to sleep. 'You can stay here,' whispers Joseph, 'but be quiet so they don't hear you.'⁴² One wonders if Joseph's *they* is simply referring to Roc and Guillaume – who currently reside at the same farm – or to some unearthly presences that might be haunting the dark room. Rivette sustains this ambivalence by letting Joseph's figure loom silhouetted against the dim candle light while he warns Isabel, thereby hindering the viewer from drawing any conclusion in the absence of Joseph's facial expressions. It is indeed significant that what alerts Roc to someone's presence in the room is the noise of the broken glass which Isabel hits when she changes her position in bed. The broken glass does not only prefigure the shattered lattice in the film's ambivalent ending – it also evokes Heathcliff's rage in Brontë's novel when he is compelled to return from Thrushcross Grange without the injured Catherine. 'If Catherine had wished to return,' he tells Nelly, 'I intended shattering their great glass panes to a million fragments, unless they let her out.'⁴³ Furthermore, Roc's murderous threat when he discovers Isabella in Catherine's former room echoes Heathcliff's reaction when he finds Lockwood terrified by the child-ghost or the tree branch that shatters his lattice: 'I wish you were at the –,' cries Heathcliff, 'And who showed you up to this room? [...] Who was it? I've a good mind to turn them out of the house this moment!'⁴⁴

Rivette, however, does not sustain the same depth of ambivalence when he makes the failing Catherine muse over what seems to be her childhood portrait at Olivier's house. For her fixed gaze at the portrait only serves to reaffirm what Nelly says of Catherine in Brontë's novel: 'She lay still, now: her face bathed in tears – Exhaustion of body had entirely subdued her spirit; our fiery Catherine was no better than a wailing child!'⁴⁵ When Rivette's Catherine claims that she saw the girl's eyes moving, she does evoke Brontë's mirror scene in which the delirious Catherine claims to see a face. However, Rivette masks this supernatural possibility by making Héléne attribute the movement to the change of the lights. What endures in this sequence, therefore, is the concept of a return to childhood, reinforced by what Rivette makes Catherine say of the girl in the framed portrait: 'She wants to bring me back there. I almost died because of this. So be it. But everything's changed.'⁴⁶ These words, in fact, echo Catherine's pining for her childhood as written and juxtaposed by Brontë to the mirror scene: 'I wish I were a girl again, half savage and

41 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 117.

42 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

43 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 51.

44 *Ibid.* p. 26.

45 *Ibid.* p. 123.

46 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

hardy, and free...and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed?'⁴⁷ Rivette's interpolation, however, does not function autonomously as an analogue of Brontë's moment. For the scene does not contain any visual equivalents to Brontë's supernatural suggestions when she makes the dying Catherine exclaim:

Look! [...] that's my room, with the candle in it, and the trees swaying before it [...]. It's a rough journey and a sad heart to travel it; and we must pass by Gimmerton Kirk, to go that journey! We've braved its ghosts often together, and dared each other to stand among the graves and ask them to come...But Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself; they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me; but I won't rest till you are with me...I never will!⁴⁸

Catherine's vow to return from the dead suggests an interaction with the life-transcending moment when she herself seems to travel to Wuthering Heights as a child-ghost and fuse with the *fir-bough* that shatters Lockwood's lattice.⁴⁹ The candle which Brontë's Catherine claims to see in her delirium seems to account for Zillah's advice to Lockwood when she ushers him to Catherine's room and tells him to 'hide the candle and not make a noise'.⁵⁰ Rivette's Catherine, on the other hand, is only able to see darkness and no candles shine in her delirium. As she herself tells Hélène: 'There's nothing left. Only darkness.'⁵¹

Rivette, however, still creates his own network of thematic analogies in which he roots the ambivalent ending of *Hurlevent*. The shattered lattice in Roc's dream-apparition does not merely interact with the breaking of the glass which Isabel hits in an earlier sequence: the swaying tree branch which seems to change into Catherine's ghostly arm is also evocative of the promise she had made while resting her palm against a tree trunk during one of her *garrigue* rambles with Roc: 'I'll always stay with you.'⁵² Rivette, therefore, seeks to integrate Catherine's supernatural dimension with the agony of love denied and the sadistic qualities that distinguish his Heathcliff. This film adaptation, in fact, does not only root Roc's sadism in his relation to Catherine, but also transforms it into the strange melancholy that overwhelms him after Catherine's death. It is significant, therefore, that *Hurlevent* starts off with Catherine's assurance: 'I'll always be yours.'⁵³ This statement forms the basis and cause of the following tragedy: what has been promised never seems to be delivered, and the knowledge of this fact only serves to intensify the anguish of the deprived heart. Rivette seems particularly keen on rooting Roc's revenge in a lost sense of refuge. Consider, for instance, the sequence where Catherine rushes to the stable where

47 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 124.

48 *Ibid.* p. 125.

49 *Ibid.* p. 25.

50 *Ibid.* p. 19.

51 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*



FIG 2: 'Windows of hell': Rivette kindles Roc's fire of revenge

Roc is locked in isolation and together they dash off into the vastness of the *garrigue* – a moment which is certainly rooted in Nelly's portrayal of the children in *Wuthering Heights*:

He bore his degradation pretty well at first, because Cathy taught him what she learnt, and worked or played with him in the fields. They both promised fair to grow up as rude as savages. [...] It was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at [...] Joseph might trash Heathcliff till his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again, at least the minute they had contrived some naughty plan of revenge.⁵⁴

In one of Rivette's interpolations, Roc is plagued with the added burden of being expelled from Catherine's room when she is trying her clothes: 'What are you doing here? It's not a good time. Get out!' she howls at him.⁵⁵ Rivette's interpolation initiates the lovers into their sundering tragedy. For, as Miller points out, 'Clothes are ordinarily used to cover a single person's nakedness and to serve as a sign of his separateness. Like language, clothes are a symptom of the mediated nature of civilised relations.'⁵⁶ Rivette's Catherine uses clothes in this *ordinary* sense of separateness, whereas Catherine and Heathcliff are 'so closely identified', says Miller, 'that clothes are for them a means of affirming their unity in opposition to society and all the world.'⁵⁷ Miller draws our attention to this clothes motif by citing what Brontë's Catherine writes in her diary:

We made ourselves as snug as our means allowed in the arch of the dresser. I had just fastened our pinafores together, and hung them up for a curtain [...]. My companion is impatient and proposes that we should appropriate the dairy woman's cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter.⁵⁸

As Miller remarks, the moors come to be symbolic 'of the wildness of

⁵⁴ *Wuthering Heights*, p. 46.

⁵⁵ *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

⁵⁶ 'Emily Brontë', in *The Disappearance of God*, p. 177.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Wuthering Heights*, p. 21.

nature as opposed to the restraint of indoor society. Childhood, like animal life or the windy moors, is outside civilisation. Cathy and Heathcliff slept together in the same bed until old Mr Earnshaw's death.⁵⁹ Now, Roc is expelled from Catherine's room and she promptly uses clothes to deny him access to her body which is, to him, a mere reflection of his own. 'I'll always stay with you,' Catherine had repeatedly promised Roc in the previous scenes.⁶⁰ That was the reassuring statement which had provided him with a sense of security – and the knowledge that, no matter what happened, he could always find shelter in Catherine's arms. It is a statement which Roc cannot have forgotten, now that Catherine slams the door of her room in his face. Hence the significance of Roc's claim to Joseph when he returns after his disappearance: 'I haven't felt protected for a good while now.'⁶¹

In the nocturnal fireworks sequence, the petards which are seemingly meant to celebrate Bastille Day,⁶² are skilfully transposed by Rivette into Roc's fire of revenge. 'I'm wondering how to get revenge on Guillaume,' Roc tells Catherine, accompanied by the cracks and colours of the fireworks in the background.⁶³ 'I'll wait as long as it takes, I don't care. I hope he doesn't die before,' he adds.⁶⁴ It is by the aid of the light provided by the same fireworks that Catherine searches for a meaning in Roc's eyes when he tells her: 'The revenge wouldn't give you the same satisfaction as me.'⁶⁵ Like Heathcliff, Roc has been treated *infernally* in a house that 'has become a hell hole', as Rivette's Catherine puts it in an earlier sequence.⁶⁶ Always associated with fire, the hell where Roc lives is the same hell that provides him with inspiration for the planning of his revenge. Rivette is analogically Brontëan, therefore, when he makes Roc plan his revenge against the background of a window glaring with fireworks. For even Heathcliff's eyes flash like 'windows of hell' as Isabella perceives them in *Wuthering Heights*.⁶⁷ In fact, what endures in the transformed Heathcliff after his three-year absence are the 'eyes full of black fire' which remind Nelly of his infernal personality.⁶⁸ In Nelly's words, Heathcliff's eyes become two *windows* under which a 'couple of black fiends lurk glinting'.⁶⁹ Hence the significance of Catherine's remark in *Hurlevent* when Roc enters during her quarrel with Isabel: 'There you are Roc. Speak of the devil. We were just having an argument about you.'⁷⁰

Rivette's portrayal of Roc's return (Fig 2) is analogically accurate to Brontë's, since it retains Heathcliff's menacing characteristics combined with the peaceful atmosphere in which Catherine and Edgar are embedded in the

59 'Emily Brontë', in *The Disappearance of God*, p. 177.

60 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

61 *Ibid.*

62 The French National Day celebrated annually on the 14 July to commemorate the storming of the Bastille fortress-prison during the French Revolution.

63 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

64 *Ibid.*

65 *Ibid.*

66 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 111 and *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

67 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 180.

68 *Ibid.* p. 95.

69 *Ibid.* p. 56.

70 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.



FIG 3: Isabel Landon faces a 'sucking leveret [']s' destiny

novel. The calmness of dusk, the lurking of Roc behind the tree and Hélène's (Nelly's) walk home with her basket of apples, are all essential to Rivette's preservation of the spirit that characterises Brontë's episode, particularly when viewed in the light of Williams' eminent association: 'The fruitfulness suggested by the basket of apples recalls Heathcliff's original arrival at harvest time inside the coat of old Earnshaw, usurping not only the toys intended for Cathy and Hindley, but the 'pocketful of apples and pears' promised to the child Nelly.⁷¹

In Rivette's adaptation, this return to childhood occurs in its totality, since there is an emphasis on the notion of Catherine as the one who controls events: 'I heard about the marriage, Catherine,' Roc tells her when he enters her living room. 'I had a plan too. Simply to see your face. To surprise you. To see you smile politely. And then take my stupid revenge. Get it over with. However, the way you greeted me, made me change my mind.'⁷² The fact that the mere sight of Catherine deviates Roc's plan, even if only temporarily, implies that her relation to him is the prime motivation which accounts for his revenge. Roc's revenge, however, does not focus on making Catherine envious by winning Isabella's heart. This is attested to in the sequence following the quarrel between Catherine and Isabel where Catherine tells Roc: 'She's gorgeous, isn't she?'⁷³ And he replies: 'Not as gorgeous as you are.'⁷⁴ Like Heathcliff, therefore, Roc intends to take revenge on what Williams terms 'the Linton aspect of Catherine' rather than directly on his Catherine.⁷⁵ In fact, Roc tells Catherine in a later episode: 'You offered me Isabel on a silver platter. Thank you very much for that. I'll try to get the most out of it, I assure you. But don't pretend that you're jealous.'⁷⁶

When Catherine reproaches Roc for having flirted with Isabel, he an-

71 *A Strange Way of Killing*, p. 49.

72 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

73 *Ibid.*

74 *Ibid.*

75 *A Strange Way of Killing*, p. 53.

76 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

swers: 'You can't tell me what to do. You treated me in a terrible way. Did you think I forgot? Maybe you thought I was hanging out somewhere in the park, my arms crossed, not thinking of vengeance. Well, that's not how it was...'⁷⁷ This echoes Heathcliff's own words when he tells Catherine: 'I want you to be aware that I know you have treated me infernally – infernally! – and if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary, in a very little while!'⁷⁸ Roc's revenge, however, does not stem from the mere fact that Catherine has treated him 'in a terrible way'. In a later sequence, we see Roc threatening Isabel that he will 'skin [her] like a rabbit' if she does not leave his house.⁷⁹ Isabel Landon is ultimately from the family of the 'sucking leveret', as Catherine calls Edgar Linton in Brontë's novel.⁸⁰ Rivette, in his film adaptation, makes the leveret grow into a rabbit ready for skinning, in order to satisfy Roc's revenge. The image evokes an earlier sequence in the film where Héléne is actually seen skinning a rabbit, while the furious Guillaume looks for Roc. The skinning of the rabbit seems to be one of Héléne's household duties which Roc must have witnessed time and again during his childhood and thus grown accustomed to. Roc's revenge, therefore, is rooted in older times, when he was still one with Catherine and derives its destructive quality from images of the past. The image of the skinned rabbit is actually transposed to an assault on Isabel when Roc is seen ripping her clothes and raping her. When she manages to escape to her brother's house, Héléne finds her sitting exhausted on the stairs with a bleeding cheek. Roc seems to have delivered on his promise of revenge, (Fig 3) just like Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* when he reveals his intentions towards Isabella: 'You'd hear of odd things if I lived alone with that mawkish, waxen face; the most ordinary would be painting on its white the colours of the rainbow, and turning the blue eyes black, every day or two; they detestably resemble Linton's'.⁸¹

In his reworking of Catherine's death, Rivette seems particularly keen on emphasising the strange melancholy which overwhelms Heathcliff towards the end of the novel. Consider, for instance, the seemingly cold manner in which Roc walks away when Catherine dies, brushing against her lifeless hand and mockingly telling Olivier to 'take good care of her'.⁸² It is clearly the action of a man who has nothing more to lose in his life. He is then seen entering his farm with a melancholy that seems to gnaw at his heart so rapidly that by the time he reaches his room, he is hardly able to make a few steps. Rivette aptly makes Roc stare at his own reflection in the mirror, as if to make sure that he still exists. Roc is very much like Heathcliff, therefore, who seems to be afflicted by a maddening melancholy: 'I have to remind myself to breathe - almost to remind my heart to beat!' cries Heathcliff. 'And it is like bending

77 Ibid.

78 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 111.

79 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

80 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 114.

81 Ibid, p. 105.

82 *Hurlevent*, subtitles.

back a stiff spring... it is by compulsion, that I do the slightest act, not prompted by one thought, and by compulsion, that I notice anything alive, or dead, which is not associated with one universal idea'.⁸³ So it is precisely this *universal idea* - the Catherine of the past haunting the present - that transforms Heathcliff from the 'dumb [...] baby' of the beginning into the 'pitiless, wolfish man' and back again just like 'a stiff spring'.⁸⁴ This is Brontë's poignant cycle which Rivette manages to retain so skilfully in his final images of the battered Roc staring at his own reflection in the mirror.

The anguish on Roc's face when he finds himself unable to grasp the ghostly swaying hand suggests that his effort to regain Catherine through revenge fails, just like Heathcliff's attempt to regain her through sadistic destruction. As Miller points out, Heathcliff realises that 'his career of sadistic revenge is a way of suffering the loss of Catherine more painfully rather than a way of reaching her again'.⁸⁵ Very significantly, therefore, Rivette makes Roc retire and move away from the window, which finally appears devoid of any human or ghostly image. It seems that Roc's tormenting of others leads him to be even more tormented by a Catherine whose sadistic traits are paradoxically evident in her invisibility. Rivette, in fact, seems to plague Roc with the same kind of *intolerable torture* endured by Heathcliff after Catherine's death: 'I could *almost* see her and yet I *could* not!' he cries to Nelly.⁸⁶ 'I ought to have sweat blood then, from the anguish of my yearning, from the fervour of my supplications to have but one glimpse! I had not one'.⁸⁷ This final sequence is crucial to Rivette's adaptation, since it enables him to develop the tragic melancholy that distinguishes Brontë's sadist while he faces the absent presence of his own soul. In Rivette's hands, therefore, Heathcliff remains the man who will 'love and hate equally', as Lockwood concludes upon his first encounter with him.⁸⁸ Since love and hate become one, the soul is somehow forced to kill the thing it loves. This is what Heathcliff describes as a 'strange way of killing' which could be equally conceived as a strange way of loving.⁸⁹ Miller is deady accurate, in fact, when he describes the relation between Emily Brontë and her poetic imagination as 'an ambiguous mixture of love and hate, of submission and rebellious defiance, as [...] the relation between Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*'.⁹⁰ Rivette's *Hurlevent* does not only capture the paradox of this relation but also rebuilds it into an analogical wholeness that functions autonomously of the literary text.

The film adaptor is much the same like Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*; a stranger plunged into Brontë's turbulent lands, gradually coming to grips

83 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 321.

84 *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 102, 321.

85 *Emily Brontë: The Disappearance of God*, p. 197.

86 *Wuthering Heights* p. 287.

87 *Ibid.*

88 *Ibid.* p. 5.

89 *Ibid.* p. 288.

90 *Emily Brontë: The Disappearance of God*, p. 158.

with her 'dreary' space and interpreting it in his/her own way.⁹¹ Admittedly, Lockwood's interpretation, when he mistakes 'a heap of dead rabbits' for living cats, is truly 'strange' and 'scorn(ed)' by the younger Cathy.⁹² However, it is depicted by Brontë in chiaroscuro style, featuring 'the large, warm, cheerful apartment [...] glow[ing] delightfully in the radiance of an immense fire' where it starts shedding light on one of her main concerns; a blurred distinction between love and hate, an eternal embrace between life and death.⁹³

91 *Wuthering Heights*, p. 152.

92 *Ibid.* p. 11.

93 *Ibid.* p. 10.