The Significance of *Wuthering Heights*

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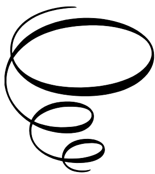
An Elemental Love-Story

By

John Hardy

Cambridge Scholars Publishing



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“It is easy to talk of elemental passion: but here, for once in the art of the novel, we really do get the elemental passion of love”

—Lascelles Abercrombie

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FOREWORD

This book is not divided into chapters, but traces the elemental love-story of Heathcliff and Catherine Linton (nee Earnshaw) through its various stages. These are numbered by roman numerals. Their love-story is elemental in having as bedrock a relationship as binding and basic as "the eternal rocks beneath". Yet it possesses a seismic dimension when the two lovers become separated. Their happiness derives from being together in a world that remains their sole compass; and this means that how this love-story is related needs to be approached with some caution. It is in large measure narrated by his housekeeper Ellen Dean to the citified Mr Lockwood, Heathcliff's tenant at Thrushcross Grange. Its reader should therefore be aware that its events are for the most part told as they have come to be registered in the mind of Nelly Dean, who had been housekeeper to the families who inhabited Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

Both Nelly Dean and Mr Lockwood are far more conventionally-minded than either Heathcliff or Catherine, both of whom have affinities with the outdoors and its heath-clad moors. As narrators, Nelly and Lockwood have attitudes marked by a sense of convention foreign to that of the two lovers, so that in appraising the novel it is important to remember, as Wallace Robson pointed out, that to appease "a conventional morality" nothing "vitally important to literature as literature" should be "handed over to an external judgment".[1]

By Emily Bronte's time, the appearance of both the Gothic novel and the Byronic hero suggested that some regarded society as too conventional in its attitudes, welcoming a greater imaginative freedom in the portrayal of passion or emotional content. Though the prevailing attitude at the time doubtless accounted for the fact that the novel was for the most part not well received, its greatness today is acknowledged. Robert Barnard has claimed: "Emily produced before she was thirty the one English novel that in scope, grasp and dramatic force begs comparison with the greatest plays of

Shakespeare"; moreover, in describing *Wuthering Heights* as "that most Beethovian of novels", Barnard pointed out that it is "not only titanic in themes and treatment, but incredibly complex and devious in its narrative methods".[2] In being perhaps the greatest love-story ever imagined, it could in some sense be regarded as literature's Taj Mahal.

The ending of the novel, after Heathcliff's death, possibly conveys, even so, something of a difference between Lockwood and Nelly. Because of various reports that the lovers were still to be seen at times on the moors, Lockwood indulges the flippant suggestion that the old structure of Wuthering Heights, when Cathy Linton and Hareton Earnshaw leave to go to Thrushcross Grange, could be inhabited by old Joseph and "such ghosts as choose to inhabit it". Nelly, conventionally religious, "shaking her head", replies: "No, Mr. Lockwood, I believe the dead are at peace: but it is not right to speak of them with levity." Does it appear as if Lockwood might finally tend to realize something of the harmony they enjoyed when together, which should not have been subject to "levity"? In the novel's final paragraph he lingers around their graves, listening "to the soft wind breathing through the grass", and wonders "how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth".

Quotations from the novel follow the text of the "Library of Classics" edition of *Wuthering Heights*, published in London and Glasgow by Collins Clear-Type Press, except that short passages involving direct speech, represented there by short paragraphs of a line or two, have often been modified as parts of longer paragraphs.

Notes

1. *Critical Essays*, London, 1966, p. 7.

2. *Emily Bronte* (The British Library Writers' Lives series), Oxford, 2000, pp. 61, 96.

An Elemental Love-Story

I

The reader of *Wuthering Heights* may initially wonder why an incident involving Mr Lockwood, when he enjoyed "a month of fine weather at the sea-coast", is included in its first chapter. He had been unable to declare his feelings towards "a most fascinating creature – a real goddess" in his eyes, so long as she took no notice of him. On her looking a "return", Lockwood shrank "icily" into himself "like a snail", until at last "the poor innocent was led to doubt her own senses, and, overwhelmed with confusion at her supposed mistake, persuaded her mamma to decamp". Given this, as well as those instances in the novel when Lockwood imagines himself in the role of a lover, the reader may wonder about his ability to appreciate the novel's great love-story. The view of Ellen Dean, the omnipresent housekeeper who relates the story to a passive but interested Lockwood, also needs to be approached with a degree of caution since Nelly is not only conventional in her thinking, but likely to approach events with her master's wishes very much in mind. She too, because of this, can seem less inclined to be in sympathy with the lovers, and hence less than fully cognisant of their deep feeling for each other.

Lockwood, as his name implies, is rather woodenly locked within himself, and his somewhat conventional attempt to be sociable at an inconvenient time is what his landlord Heathcliff does not find convenient. Contrasting figures as their names imply, these two are distinct opposites in their attitudes and experience. Lockwood had thought it only right he should pay a visit to his landlord, and the difference between the two men, despite Lockwood's assuming otherwise, is captured in the novel's opening:

> I have just returned from a visit to my landlord – the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a beautiful country. In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthrope's

> Heaven: and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow!

That Lockwood continues to entertain this assumption is clear from his attempt to interpret the reason behind what he sees as Heathcliff's reaction: "He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat as I announced my name." "'Mr. Heathcliff?' I said." All Lockwood receives for answer is "a nod". He goes on announcing the reason for his visit, expressing the hope he has "not inconvenienced" Heathcliff, when a sharp response from Heathcliff saying he would "not allow anyone to inconvenience" him is followed by a brusque, "Walk in!" Though the "walk in" was uttered "with closed teeth and expressed the sentiment, 'Go to the deuce,'" Lockwood still "felt interested in a man who seemed more exaggeratedly reserved" than himself.

Before entering the building, Lockwood "paused to admire a quantity of grotesque carving lavished over the front", and detected above the principal door "the date '1500' and the name 'Hareton Earnshaw'." The significance of this name is revealed in the way the novel ends, but it is also subtly underlined on the second unwelcome visit Lockwood makes to the Heights. Denied entrance by old Joseph, Lockwood is aided by "a young man without coat, and shouldering a pitchfork" named Hareton. Though presently degraded from the station in life he should have had, and seemingly just an uncouth yokel, Hareton Earnshaw as descendant of the original family was an appropriate person to have aided a visitor who needed help.

The courtesy Lockwood attempts on his second visit reveals how wide is the gulf between the world he has entered and what he imagines from his own experience of society it should be. His attempts to be socially pleasing make him look more out of place and discomfited than did his behaviour on his first visit. His attempt to pat a "canine mother" eventually led to his being attacked by a whole pack of dogs, from which he was only saved by a "lusty dame" from the kitchen wielding a frying-pan and using her tongue to such effect "that the storm subsided magically". When Heathcliff came back into the room with something to drink, defending the dogs' "right to

be vigilant", and pressing a "flurried" Lockwood to take a glass of wine, as a visitor he perceived "it would be foolish to sit sulking for the misbehaviour of a pack of curs". He found Heathcliff "very intelligent on the topics we touched", and before he went home, he was encouraged "to volunteer another visit tomorrow". Though Heathcliff "evidently wished no repetition" of Lockwood's "intrusion", Lockwood reveals a side of his character in saying: "I shall go, notwithstanding. It is astonishing how sociable I feel myself compared to him."

On his second visit Lockwood first mistakes "a heap of dead rabbits" for a group of the lady's pets, assuming that, having been referred to by Joseph as "t'missis", she must be Mrs Heathcliff. When she asks whether he was "asked to tea" (keeping "a spoonful of the leaf poised over the pot"), Lockwood says he would "be glad to have a cup". On her repeating, "Were you asked?", he replies "half smiling" in the negative, adding: "You are the proper person to ask me." At this "she flung the tea back, spoon and all, and resumed her chair in a pet".

In the troubled atmosphere at the Heights since Catherine's death, Lockwood's unease is increased by having Hareton looking down on him "from the corner of his eyes, for all the world as if there were some mortal feud unavenged between us". When Heathcliff comes, Lockwood, trying to be cheerful, says he has "come, according to promise", though he feels he will be "weather-bound for half an hour, if you can afford me shelter during that space". Incredulously repeating "Half an hour?", Heathcliff, shaking "the white flakes from his clothes", tells Lockwood what the real situation is: "I wonder you should select the thick of a snowstorm to ramble about in. Do you know you ran a risk of being lost in the marshes? People familiar with these moors often miss their road on such evenings; and I can tell you there is no chance of a change at present."

Refused when requesting a guide to see him back to the Grange, Lockwood is forced to stay the night at the Heights much to Heathcliff's displeasure. But before it comes to this, there being no other possibility, Lockwood is in error supposing the lady who initially refused him tea to be Heathcliff's wife. When Heathcliff shifts his "ferocious gaze" from Lockwood to the young lady, asking, "Are you going to mak th' tea?", Lockwood, noticing

the tone he uses to her would appear the sign of “a genuine bad nature”, “no longer felt inclined to call Heathcliff a capital fellow”.

When, following Heathcliff’s remarks, they gather round the table – “an austere silence prevailing” before their evening meal – Lockwood, thinking it his duty to dispel any “cloud” he might have caused, says “in the interval of swallowing one cup of tea and receiving another”:

> It is strange how custom can mould our tastes and ideas: many could not imagine the existence of happiness in a life of such complete exile from the world as you spend, Mr. Heathcliff; yet I’ll venture to say that, surrounded by your family, and with your amiable lady as the presiding genius over your home and heart –
>
> “My amiable lady!” he interrupted, with an almost diabolical sneer on his face. “Where is she – my amiable lady?”
>
> “Mrs. Heathcliff, your wife, I mean.”
>
> “Well, yes ----- Oh! you would intimate that her spirit has taken the post of ministering angel, and guards the fortunes of Wuthering Heights even when her body is gone. Is that it?”

When Lockwood specifies “Mrs Heathcliff” as Heathcliff’s “amiable lady”, he is obliged to think of his late wife, whom he despised, and who brought him no happiness. But the way in which his last remark begins suggests he just might have been thinking at first of someone who did hold sway over his heart. Moreover, the “almost diabolical sneer on his face”, as well as his questioning her whereabouts may not only be his way of exposing how wrong Lockwood has been for assuming his “amiable lady” is the lady present, but could perhaps be also indicative of how, after his Cathy’s death, Heathcliff comes at times to feel because of his being unable to make contact with her who did have control of his “heart”. Indeed, contributing to his earlier look and tone towards the young lady present was surely the fact that her features – especially what he later refers to as her “infernal eyes” – so remind him of the love he has lost, and with whom in his frustration after her death he has been unable to make contact.

Turning to Hareton, Lockwood continues mistaking the situation: “Ah, certainly – I see now: you are the favoured possessor of the beneficent fairy”. Hareton “grew crimson and clenched his fist, with every appearance of a meditated assault”. “Unhappy in your observance, sir!” observed Heathcliff; “we neither of us have the privilege of owning your good fairy; her mate is dead. I said she was my daughter-in-law; therefore she must have married my son.” When Lockwood wants to know about “this young man”, Heathcliff asserts: “Not my son, assuredly!”

During his second visit Lockwood reveals not only how ridiculous his speculations are in his attempt to be sociable, but an inability to respond appropriately to a given situation or what is going on around him. It is Lockwood’s naivety or lack of awareness in coping or dealing with situations, especially human situations, that leads us to suspect he would be unable to appreciate or understand the eternal, elemental love that Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff shared.

Lockwood’s obtuseness is obvious the evening of the snowstorm when he tries to get a guide to see him home, and finally attempts to get away by snatching a lantern, by the light of which Joseph sat “milking the cows”, until the dogs brought him down, “extinguishing the light”. It is the “stout housewife” Zillah who attends to his nosebleed, gives him “a glass of brandy” on Heathcliff’s orders, and finally leads him to a bedroom. She asks Lockwood to “hide the candle” and make no noise because “her master had an odd notion about the chamber” he was being led to, “and never let anybody lodge there willingly”. When asked the reason, Zillah said she did not know: “she had only lived there a year or two; and they had so many queer goings on, she could not begin to be curious”.

From his own tendency to be curious, Lockwood encounters enough of the place’s past history early in the night to whet his appetite to hear more; and it is not until he later hears the story Nelly tells that he conceives something of the significance of what he went on to experience. As he gets into his closet-like place of rest and pulls “the panelled sides” together, he feels “secure from the vigilance of Heathcliff, and every one else”. But he becomes far from secure from “queer goings on” as he encounters Catherine Earnshaw’s names “scratched on the paint” of the window ledge, and learns

other things from perusing her books. From these he derives knowledge of Hindley's harshness towards Heathcliff and herself, which prompted them jointly to rebel. He also learns of Joseph's religiosity that causes unnecessary hardship to them both. What had caused Catherine untold distress is also conveyed:

> How little did I dream that Hindley would ever make me cry so! My head aches, till I cannot keep it on the pillow; and still I can't give over. Poor Heathcliff! Hindley calls him a vagabond, and won't let him sit with us, nor eat with us any more; and, he says, he and I must not play together, and threatens to turn him out of the house if we break his orders. He has been blaming our father (how dared he?) for treating H. too liberally; and swears he will reduce him to his right place.

Their being together in each other's presence was at the heart of Catherine and Heathcliff's binding relationship, so the separation that Hindley ordered caused them great distress.

The dreams Lockwood subsequently has are vivid, strange experiences related to what he has been reading. In the first he accompanies Joseph to a sermon preached on the text of "seventy times seven", and is himself cast out by the Reverend Jabes Branderham for committing the "the four hundred and ninety-first" sin. He is awakened by the "rappings" against him of "pilgrims' staves", which prove to be nothing more than "the branch of a fir-tree" blown against the window "lattice, as the draft wailed by, and rattled its dry cones against the panes!"

Lockwood's second dream is ghostly, forcing him to cry out, which brings an awakened Heathcliff to the room. He again hears the tapping on the window, and imagines

> knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch, instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice- cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me; I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, "Let me in – let me in!" "Who are you?" I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself. "Catherine Linton," it replied shiveringly (why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton); "I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!"

> As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes; still it wailed, "Let me in!" and maintained its tenacious gripe, almost maddening me with fear. "How can I?" I said at length. "Le*t me* go, if you want me to let you in!" The fingers relaxed, I snatched mine through the hole, hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it, and stopped my ear to exclude the lamentable prayer. I seemed to keep them closed above a quarter of an hour; yet the instant I listened again, there was the doleful cry moaning on! "Begone!" I shouted, "I'll never let you in, not if you beg for twenty years." "It is twenty years," mourned the voice: "twenty years, I've been a waif for twenty years!" Thereat began a feeble scratching outside, and the pile of books moved as if thrust forward. I tried to jump up; but could not stir a limb; and so yelled aloud in a frenzy of fright.

Since the yell was not part of the dream, Lockwood heard hasty footsteps approaching and a surprised Heathcliff asked, "Is any one here?" When Lockwood opened the panels, he saw what he would not "soon forget". "Heathcliff stood near the entrance, in his shirt and trousers, with a candle dripping over his fingers, and his face as white as the wall behind him. The first creak of the oak startled him like an electric shock: the light leaped from his hold to a distance of some feet, and his agitation was so extreme that he could hardly pick it up." His agitation at first derives from seeing Lockwood in that room; and having learnt Zillah put him there, Heathcliff has a mind to turn her "out of the house this moment". Lockwood agrees "she richly deserves it" for apparently wanting proof at his expense that "the place was haunted". Heathcliff, yet to hear Lockwood's dream, tells him to "lie down and finish out the night, since you *are* here! but for Heaven's sake! don't repeat that horrid noise; nothing could excuse it, unless you were having your throat cut!"

Lockwood immediately says in his defense:

> If the little fiend had got in at the window, she probably would have strangled me! I'm not going to endure the persecutions of your hospitable ancestors again. Was not the Reverend Jabes Branderham akin to you on the mother's side? And that minx Catherine Linton, or Earnshaw, or however she was called – she must have been a changeling – wicked little

> soul! She told me she had been walking the earth these twenty years – a just punishment for her mortal transgressions, I've no doubt!

As soon as he'd said this, Lockwood "recollected the association of Heathcliff's with Catherine's name in the book", and in attempting to put right what had "slipped" from his "memory", he tried to explain what had occurred as merely "like counting", to send one to sleep. "'What *can* you mean by talking in this way to *me*?' thundered Heathcliff, with savage vehemence. 'How – how *dare* you, under my roof? – God! he's mad to speak so!' and he struck his forehead with rage."

Lockwood didn't know whether to resent such language or continue his explanation, but he decided to do so and show "pity" because Heathcliff "seemed so powerfully affected". As he went on "Heathcliff gradually fell back into the shelter of the bed", and Lockwood guessed "by his irregular and intercepted breathing, that he struggled to vanquish an excess of violent emotion". Then not liking to show he "heard the conflict", Lockwood "continued the toilet rather noisily" and looking at his watch, "soliloquised on the length of the night". Heathcliff had the presence of mind to answer him rationally, offering him the opportunity of going into his own room since his "childish outcry" had "sent sleep to the devil" for Heathcliff. He also warned Lockwood not to go, as he had suggested, into the yard, or even the house, where the dogs were unchained or kept watch: "You can only ramble about the steps and passages. But, away with you! I'll come in two minutes."

Lockwood "obeyed, so far as to quit the chamber", but not knowing where "the narrow lobbies led", he "stood still, and was witness, involuntarily, to a piece of superstition on the part of my landlord, which belied, oddly, his apparent sense":

> He got on the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears. "Come in! come in!" he sobbed. "Cathy, do come! Oh, do – *once* more! Oh! my heart's darling! hear me *this* time, Catherine, at last!" The spectre showed a spectre's ordinary caprice: it gave no sign of being: but the snow and wind whirled rapidly through, even reaching my station, and blowing out the light.

Lockwood, while showing a hint of chagrin at being present, tends to confirm the sense we get of a certain arrogance and self-conceit: he records “such anguish in the gush of grief that accompanied this raving” gave rise in him to a “compassion” that made him “overlook its folly”. He “drew off, half angry to have listened at all, and vexed at having related” his “ridiculous nightmare, since it produced that agony, though why” was beyond his comprehension.

The significance of this episode for the love-story that will follow shows how overriding and volcanic were the passions of those involved. These opening chapters not only confirm the contrast between Lockwood and Heathcliff, but suggest how creative was Emily Bronte’s own indomitable character as she lived out her life in her father’s country parsonage, set in bleak moorland, able to respond to the setting of Wuthering Heights and the character whose name reflected so well its surroundings. Cruelty and brutality are, moreover, not without a place in Emily’s imagining, and it has been remarked by Christine Alexander “it is to the beast and not just the man in Heathcliff that Emily Bronte extends her sympathy”.[1] Despite the apparent cruelty he can show, resulting not just from the loss of his Cathy in both life and death but from his previous harsh treatment, Heathcliff’s human side is evident from his discriminating attitude to a wide range of other characters; while the way this novelist develops and portrays her characters is testimony to her consummate artistry.

Though Heathcliff is early plagued by Lockwood’s conventional attempt to be sociable, and doubtless found him foolish by his own lights, he shows by certain actions a due regard for him. Despite his own agitation he warns Lockwood to keep clear of the dogs for his own safety, and when next morning Lockwood set off for the Grange, Heathcliff “hallooed” for him to stop before he got clear of the garden, offering to accompany him “across the moor”. In the description Lockwood gives “it was as well he did”. The “deep swamps on either hand” now made indistinguishable “the firmer path”, and Lockwood reports “my companion found it necessary to warn me frequently to steer to the right or left, when I imagined I was following correctly the windings of the road”. Heathcliff took Lockwood to “the entrance of Thrushcross Park”, saying he could then make no error. But the difficulty Lockwood still had in losing himself “among the trees and sinking

up to the neck in snow" shows how his life had been saved by having Heathcliff as his guide across the snow-laden moors.

On a later occasion, when Lockwood had taken to his bed for four weeks with a violent cold, and lamented "bleak winds, and bitter, northern skies, and impassable roads, and dilatory country surgeons", Heathcliff had paid him a visit at the Grange. In Lockwood's words:

> Mr. Heathcliff has just honoured me with a call. About seven days ago he sent me a brace of grouse – the last of the season. Scoundrel! He is not altogether guiltless in this illness of mine; and that I had a great mind to tell him. But, alas! how could I offend a man who was charitable enough to sit at my bedside a good hour, and talk on some other subject than pills and draughts, blisters and leeches?

II

When Earnshaw returned from Liverpool dog-tired from his sixty-mile walk, having slumped in a chair he opened "his greatcoat, which he had bundled up in his arms". What emerged, as Nelly Dean tells Lockwood, was "a dirty, ragged, black-haired child; big enough both to walk and talk". From Nelly's account we learn that with its old-looking face "it only stared round, and repeated over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand". While Nelly was "frightened", "Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors", upbraiding her husband for bringing "that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for". Earnshaw related "seeing it starving and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool; where he picked it up and inquired for its owner". No one "knew to whom it belonged", and Earnshaw "determined he would not leave it as he found it". After Mrs Earnshaw had "grumbled herself calm", Earnshaw told Nelly "to wash it, and give it clean things, and let it sleep with the children".

Earnshaw's children, Hindley and Catherine, at first "refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room". The waif from Liverpool is given the name of Heathcliff, which "was the name of a son who died in childhood", and within a few days he and Catherine were "very thick, but Hindley hated him". Nelly reports that after Mrs Earnshaw's death "the young master had

learned to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges; and he grew bitter with brooding over these injuries". While it is interesting to note, given what follows, how quickly Catherine and Heathcliff became so friendly, Nelly conjectures Heathcliff was "hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment" because he "would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear". She says "old Earnshaw" was "furious, when he discovered his son persecuting the poor, fatherless child, as he called him. He took to Heathcliff strangely, believing all he said . . . and petting him up far above Cathy, who", according to Nelly, "was too mischievous and wayward for a favourite". Nelly added: "From the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house."

While Nelly admits she at first took a set against Heathcliff, her attitude changed when he was "dangerously" ill with measles: "Cathy and her brother harassed me terribly; *he* was as uncomplaining as a lamb; though hardness, not gentleness, made him give little trouble." She adds after narrating a disagreement between the two boys: "He complained so seldom . . . that I really thought him not vindictive. I was deceived completely, as you will hear."

To what extent our interpretation of events with regard to Heathcliff will prove to be the same as Nelly's we shall discover as we read on. We may also come to wonder whether her carping at Cathy's "sauciness" or "waywardness" does justice to the young girl's lively personality and spirit. Despite her reference to Heathcliff's vindictiveness, we may think that his treatment of Hindley Earnshaw, or even of Edgar Linton, should to some degree be seen in relation to what he had himself been forced to suffer at their hands. And since Nelly's more conventional views are generally accepted by Lockwood, we may wonder to what extent they were able to comprehend the depth of feeling that came to exist between Catherine and Heathcliff as they continued to look forward to each other's company.

What prompted Nelly originally to think Heathcliff was not vindictive was his behaviour after a violent disagreement between the two boys. Earnshaw had bought them two colts "at the parish fair". When the more handsome one, which Heathcliff had claimed, fell lame, he said to Hindley: "You must

exchange horses with me. I don't like mine; and if you won't, I shall tell your father of the three thrashings you've given me this week, and show him my arm, which is black to the shoulder." Though this kind of self-interest might be shown by a child, what Heathcliff had suffered when alone in the streets of Liverpool no doubt prompted him to try to look after himself and get whatever he could. When Hindley put out his tongue, and cuffed him, Heathcliff said: "You'd better do it at once, you will have to; and if I speak of these blows, you'll get them again with interest."

"Off, dog!" cried Hindley, threatening him with an iron weight used for weighing potatoes and hay. "'Throw it,' he replied, standing still, 'and then I'll tell how you boasted that you would turn me out of doors as soon as he died, and see whether he will not turn you out directly.' Hindley threw it, hitting him on the breast, and down he fell, but staggered up immediately, breathless and white." Had not Nelly prevented it, Heathcliff would have gone to the master and got full revenge, letting his condition plead for him.

Hindley's boast that he would turn Heathcliff out of doors ironically contrasts with what later happens when Heathcliff manages to wrest the ownership of the Heights from a drunken and gambling Hindley. Yet Hindley's boast does anticipate what he later causes to happen when, having strongly contributed to what Catherine sees as Heathcliff's degraded state, her words cause Heathcliff to leave the Heights, helping to make permanent a separation from each other that causes both of them immense heartache. On the present occasion young Earnshaw says: "Take my colt, gipsy, then. And I pray he may break your neck; take him and be damned, you beggarly interloper; and wheedle my father out of all he has: only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan. And take that: I hope he'll kick out your brains!"

Nelly relates how "Heathcliff had gone to loose the beast, and shift it to his own stall; he was passing behind it, when Hindley finished his speech by knocking him under its feet, and without stopping to examine whether his hopes were fulfilled, ran away as fast as he could". She expresses surprise at how Heathcliff subsequently behaved, but what she relates adds to our impression of Heathcliff's character and the self-possession he shows throughout the novel. Having "coolly . . . gathered himself up", he "went on

with his intention; exchanging saddles and all, and then sitting down on a bundle of hay to overcome the qualm which the violent blow occasioned, before he entered the house". Nelly adds: "I persuaded him easily to let me lay the blame of his bruises on the horse; he minded little what tale was told since he had what he wanted."

Heathcliff does not bend to the views of others, but tends to be unflinching in what he takes to be a justified course of action. He is never side-tracked from what he feels to be right, or is in his own interest. He is determined to see things through until he gets what he wants, and his self-confident and resolute bearing contrasts with the generally unimpressive behaviour of the conventional and self-centred Lockwood and that of the more mild-mannered Edgar Linton of Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff, as his name suggests, not only is vitally part of a wider world, but is openly responsive to Catherine's spirited and unconventional nature.

Having adopted Heathcliff into the family, Earnshaw as he aged seemed to get it into his head that "because he liked Heathcliff, all hated and longed to do him an ill turn". This meant that those who "did not wish to fret the master" humored him, which provided "rich nourishment" to what Nelly regarded as "the child's pride and black tempers". When their curate advised Hindley should be sent to college, "Earnshaw agreed, though with a heavy spirit, for he said Hindley was nought, and would never thrive as where he wandered". Earnshaw was encouraged "to regard Hindley as a reprobate" by old Joseph, who gained "more influence" the "more feeble the master became", and whom Nelly summed up as "the wearisomest self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself and fling the curses on his neighbours". Joseph "regularly grumbled out a long string of tales against Heathcliff and Catherine, always managing to flatter Earnshaw's weakness by heaping the heaviest blame" on Catherine.

Nelly's assessment of Catherine reflected the child's individual and spirited approach to life, as well as the difficulty this could present in putting "all of us past our patience, fifty times and oftener in a day". While something of this about her seemed to linger in Nelly's mind, her appreciation of the child's good qualities is clear from the following passage, which mentions

not only Catherine's mischievousness, but her intent and ability to make up for it:

> Her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going – singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same. A wild, wicked slip she was, but she had the bonniest eye, the sweetest smile, and lightest foot in the parish; and, after all, I believe she meant no harm, for when once she made you cry in earnest, it seldom happened that she would not keep you company, and oblige you to be quiet that you might comfort her.

Catherine's behaviour clearly distressed the aged Earnshaw, "who did not understand jokes from his children", with whom "he had always been strict and grave"; while the young Catherine "had no idea why her father should be crosser and less patient in his ailing condition than he was in his prime". In his last hour he had said to her: "Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?" In her childish response "she turned her face up to his, and laughed, and answered, 'Why cannot you always be a good man, father?'" Nelly's account of her youthful attempt always to make things right is exemplified by her description of what followed: "As soon as she saw him vexed again, she kissed his hand, and said she would sing him to sleep. She began singing very low, till his fingers dropped from hers, and his head sank on his breast. Then I told her to hush, and not stir, for fear she would wake him."

When Cathy later tried to kiss her father goodnight and discovered her loss, "she screamed out, 'Oh, he's dead, Heathcliff! he's dead'". "They both set up a heartbreaking cry" as they went to their room. When Nelly later sees them there, she relates:

> Their door was ajar, I saw they had never lain down, though it was past midnight; but they were calmer, and did not need me to console them. The little souls were comforting each other with better thoughts than I could have hit on: no parson in the world ever pictured heaven so beautifully as they did, in their innocent talk; and while I sobbed and listened, I could not help wishing we were all there safe together.

Nelly as good as admits there was that in their talk and "better thoughts" which went beyond her conventional form of belief, beyond what her

feelings and understanding traditionally embraced. The heaven Nelly believed in nevertheless contrasted sharply with old Joseph's kind of religiosity, against which the novelist was clearly outspoken. As arguably the most interesting and distinguished of her talented sisters, Emily Bronte had an undying faith that went beyond conventional modes of belief. This she reveals in her poem "No Coward Soul is Mine":

> Vain are the thousand creeds
> That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
> Worthless as withered weeds
> Or idlest froth amid the boundless main
>
> To waken doubt in one
> Holding so fast by thy infinity
> So surely anchored on
> The steadfast rock of Immortality.

Whatever were the "better thoughts" of the youthful pair, this strong belief in some immanent and infinite power seems not irrelevant to the love which comes to be represented as existing between Catherine and Heathcliff. The last verse of Emily Bronte's poem begins, "There is not room for Death". Its last line – "And what thou art may never be destroyed" -- though referring to the infinity of her "Deity", can be taken as representative of the never-ending, infinite, and indeed elemental love that continues to exist between Catherine and Heathcliff. Any suggestion that the presence of the dead Catherine was not involved in such a relationship would seem negated by the vivid reality in Catherine's former bedroom of Lockwood's dream, or as he termed it "nightmare"; while Heathcliff's conception of a never-ending and elemental relationship involves him throughout the second half of the novel in an obsessive, anxious, tormented, but ultimately satisfying attempt to make contact with Catherine's presence.

Nelly's reference to "the children's room" is also of paramount importance and significance for their relationship because it emphasizes what proves throughout the novel to be so singular in their relationship, namely, their need to be together. When they are driven asunder by circumstance, their life becomes a kind of nothingness without each other, putting an end to the happiness that is theirs when in each other's presence. We shall later see

when Catherine is in a state of delirium, because of the kind of choosing that Edgar Linton subjects her to, how she is conscious of that room, yet plagued by feeling “some great grief” that she is at first unable to account for. And when she does, it relates not to the agonizing marriage she has endured with Edgar Linton, but to her memory of being “laid alone, for the first time”, when Hindley ordered her to be separated from Heathcliff.

The death of old Earnshaw marks an important stage in the development of the novel since Hindley comes home for the funeral, bringing a pretty but sickly wife with him. He immediately takes over as the new master of Wuthering Heights, “on the very day of his return” telling Nelly and Joseph that they must quarter themselves “in the back kitchen, and leave the house for him”. Hindley’s “old hatred” of Heathcliff, whom his father had adopted, was reinforced by his wife’s “dislike” of him. Hindley “drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead, compelling him to do so as hard as any other lad on the farm”.

In her early reference to Catherine Nelly had remarked: “She was much too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him.” Seeing them together after Earnshaw’s death must have had some bearing on her subsequent view of them; and her comment about Catherine’s being kept separate from Heathcliff is germane to what was so necessary to the happiness of each, for neither was able to be happy when banished from the other’s presence. Emily Bronte clearly saw their being with each other as the very essence of their love. Heathcliff bore “his degradation pretty well at first, because Cathy taught him what she had learned, and worked or played with him in the fields”. While Nelly remarks that “they both promised fair to grow up as rude as savages”, she records the “young master” was “entirely negligent how they behaved, and what they did, so they kept clear of him”. But when they did not go to church on Sundays, Joseph and the curate “reprimanded his carelessness”, so that he ordered “Heathcliff a flogging, and Catherine a fast from dinner or supper”. This served to bring them closer together because, as Nelly relates, “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”.

Nelly, though seeing “the unfriended creatures” growing more “reckless”, refused to speak out in order to retain “the small power” she still had over them. That they could be described as “unfriended” was owing to Hindley, who effectively rejected Heathcliff’s adoption into the family by his father. What they got up to “one Sunday evening” led to that spectre which appeared to and troubled Lockwood complain she had lost her “way on the moor”. On that evening Catherine and Heathcliff had been “banished from the sitting-room for making a noise, or a light offence of the kind”. This prompted them to undertake a jaunt across the moors to Thrushcross Grange. While being out and having a “ramble at liberty” in the open air must have appealed to them after the restrictive, claustrophobic experience of being with Hindley and his wife indoors, they wanted to see whether the Linton children “passed their Sunday evenings standing shivering in corners, while their father and mother sat eating and drinking, and singing and laughing, and burning their eyes out before the fire”.

When Heathcliff returns without Catherine and relates the purpose of their visit to Nelly, he asks how she thinks they pass their time – whether they are required to be “reading sermons” and be “catechised by their man servant, and set to learn a column of Scripture names, if they don’t answer properly”. Nelly replies, “Probably not. They are good children, no doubt, and don’t deserve the treatment you receive for your bad conduct.” At this Heathcliff tellingly replies: “Don’t you cant, Nelly, nonsense!” Emily Bronte employs this Johnsonian response, against speaking or thinking foolishly,[2] to establish Heathcliff’s clear-sightedness when confronted with nonsense. Since what he and Catherine saw at Thrushcross Grange gave the lie to what Nelly assumes, her reference to his and Catherine’s “bad conduct” by comparison with the Linton children’s conduct is clearly nonsense.

Their jaunt nevertheless ultimately contributed to years of unhappiness for them both, since Catherine’s subsequent marriage to Edgar Linton effectively shut Heathcliff out of her life, apart from the visits he was for a time able to make to Thrushcross Grange. Since Hindley had effectively caused this, Heathcliff must in a sense have partly held him responsible for what led to the marriage, which would also have given him cause for including Edgar Linton in his planned taking of revenge. It was, however,

Hindley who, against his father's wishes, called him a "vagabond" and shut him out of the Earnshaw family; who ordered or administered his constant punishment; and who subjected him to the degradation he was forced to suffer, this being the reason in Heathcliff's mind why Catherine initially appeared to reject him.

III

What Heathcliff and Catherine saw when planted "on a flower pot under the drawing-room window" at Thrushcross Grange was a boy and a girl, at different ends of a large room, quarreling over who should have possession of "a little dog" that had suffered injury to its paw since it had nearly been "pulled it in two between them". On the inclement night Nelly had waited up to let someone in against what had been Hindley's orders to keep the door bolted, Heathcliff drew attention to how stupid the Linton children were in behaving as he and Catherine never would have behaved. Despite having been flogged by Joseph on Hindley's orders, Heathcliff stated: "I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange -- not if I might have the privilege of throwing Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley's blood!" Though Nelly tried to hush such thoughts, they clearly show Heathcliff unwilling to suffer insult and cruelty without being able to return them in some measure. Such thoughts reveal him ready to cope with and repay whatever is inflicted on him, so that Nelly's comment about his vindictiveness needs to be seen in the context of what life had caused him to suffer.

Heathcliff's account informing Nelly about Catherine's being "left behind" indicates how strong was the bond that had developed between them, and how foolish was the sense the Lintons had of their privileged self-importance. When Heathcliff and Catherine laughed at the two inside, the young Lintons heard them and cried out for their "papa" and their "mamma". This incited the two outside to make "frightful noises to terrify them still more". But when they heard "the bars" being drawn, they thought they had better flee. Heathcliff had Cathy by the hand and was urging her on, when all at once she fell down. "'Run, Heathcliff, run!' she whispered. 'They have let the bull-dog loose, and he holds me!'" "The devil had seized

her ankle, Nelly; I heard his abominable snorting. She did not yell out – no! she would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow. I did, though. I vociferated curses enough to annihilate any fiend in Christendom; and I got a stone and thrust it between his jaws, and tried with all my might to cram it down his throat."

The reaction of the Linton household becomes evident when Heathcliff adds:

> A beast of a servant came up with a lantern at last, shouting, "Keep fast, Skulker: keep fast!" He changed his note, however, when he saw Skulker's game. The dog was throttled off, his huge purple tongue hanging half a foot out of his mouth, and his pendent lips streaming with bloody slaver. The man took Cathy up; she was sick, not from fear, I'm certain, but from pain. He carried her in; I followed, grumbling execrations and vengeance. "What prey, Robert?" hallooed Linton from the entrance. "Skulker has caught a little girl, sir," he replied; "and there's a lad here," he added, making a clutch at me, "who looks an out-and-outer! Very like, the robbers were for putting them through the window to open the doors to the gang after all were asleep, that they might murder us at their ease."

The servant Robert said to Heathcliff, "Hold your tongue, you foul-mouthed thief, you! you shall go to the gallows for this. Mr. Linton, sir, don't lay by your gun." Linton proves to be no less alarmed, and as undiscriminating and prejudiced as his servant:

> "No, no, Robert," said the old fool. "The rascals knew that yesterday was my rent day; they thought to have me cleverly. Come in; I'll furnish them a reception. There, John, fasten the chain. Give Skulker some water, Jenny. To beard a magistrate in his stronghold, and on the Sabbath, too. Where will their insolence stop? Oh, my dear Mary, look here! Don't be afraid, it is but a boy – yet the villain scowls so plainly in his face; would it not be a kindness to the country to hang him at once, before he shows his nature in acts as well as features?"

Heathcliff's account reveals that Linton regarded his kind as too privileged to be put to any inconvenience, even when, from what he says to his wife, they are only dealing with children who pose no real threat to his family or his "stronghold". "Mrs. Linton placed her spectacles on her nose and raised her hands in horror. The cowardly children crept nearer also, Isabella

lisping, ‘Frightful thing! Put him in the cellar, papa. He’s exactly like the son of the fortune-teller that stole my tame parrot. Isn’t he, Edgar?’”

Cathy regained consciousness in time to hear the last speech and laughed. Realizing from Edgar Linton’s comment who had seen Cathy at church that she is “Miss Earnshaw”, the Lintons begin to treat her as one of their own class. Shown how her foot bleeds, Mrs Linton becomes concerned “she may be lamed for life”. Heathcliff they dismiss as that “strange acquisition” from Liverpool – as “a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway”. The servant Robert follows instructions by dragging him “into the garden”, pushing a lantern into his hand, and then securing the door.

Heathcliff stayed in the garden, looking in, because had Catherine wished to return, he intended shattering their great glass panes into a million fragments “unless they let her out”. His concern for her welfare shows the depth of his feeling for her, but when he sees her being treated with attention – her feet being bathed, old Linton mixing “a tumbler of negus”, and Isabella emptying “a plate full of cakes into her lap” – Heathcliff adds: “I left her as merry as could be, dividing her food between the little dog and Skulker, whose nose she pinched as he ate, and kindling a spark of spirit in the vacant blue eyes of the Lintons – a dim reflection from her own enchanting face. I saw they were full of stupid admiration; she is so immeasurably superior to them – to everybody on earth, is she not, Nelly?”

This episode reveals not only the bond that has developed between Heathcliff and Catherine, including his deep appreciation of and love for her, but the social and, beyond that, the human gulf that exists between the Lintons and what he and Catherine represent. The Lintons’ consciousness of their privileged position is obvious both in the remarks and behavior of the children and in old Linton’s various presumptions, most glaringly in his view that it would be better to put an end to Heathcliff’s life before he committed any villainy. Catherine shows her wealth of difference from them most pertinently in her attitude towards Skulker: feeding him some of her cake and at the same time giving him a pinch on the nose in return for his earlier biting her. Catherine’s delightfully human responsiveness to the situation affords a telling contrast to the young Lintons’ earlier treatment of the little dog.