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Source: *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (Winter, 1985), pp. 104-127
Published by: University of North Carolina Press
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174198
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Natural Supernaturalism in *Wuthering Heights*

by Anne Williams

WUTHERING *Heights*—popular, powerful, but enigmatic—has always been controversial. Readers agree about its secure position as a "classic," but not about its meaning, nor its merits. Herbert J. Rosengarten has noted two major traditions established by the book's critics: the naturalist and the supernaturalist. Some, like Q. D. Leavis, have seen in *Wuthering Heights* a masterly but orthodox Victorian novel; for others, it is a metaphysical romance.[1] And most recently the book has become a star exhibit in the exemplary post-structuralist gallery of "indeterminate" texts. For Frank Kermode, *Wuthering Heights* remains interesting chiefly because it is "complex and indeterminate enough to allow us our necessary pluralities."[2] He finds this indeterminacy primarily in the "mingling of generic opposites—daylight and dream narratives—creating a need, which we must supply, for something that will mediate between them."[3]

[1] George H. Ford ed., *Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research* (New York, 1978). Q. D. Leavis, "A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*" in *Lectures in America* (New York, 1969). The two seminal essays of the "metaphysical" school are, of course, Lord David Cecil's discussion in his *Early Victorian Novelists* (New York, 1935) and Dorothy Van Ghent's "On *Wuthering Heights*" in *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York, 1953). Charles I. Patterson, Jr. considers the role of the "daemonic" in his "Empathy and Daemonic in *Wuthering Heights*," included in *The English Novel in the Nineteenth Century: Essays on the Literary Mediation of Human Values* (Urbana, Ill., 1972). None of these readers is concerned with the question of distinguishing between prose fiction genres; all assume the work is a "novel." I believe however that Northrop Frye's distinction between "novel" and "romance" is useful in understanding *Wuthering Heights* as an unusual generic hybrid. Frye's discussion appears in *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 303–7. Frye uses *Wuthering Heights* as his example of pure romance (p. 304).

[2] Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (London, 1975), p. 121.

[3] Kermode, p. 129. A debate concerning the "indeterminacy" of *Wuthering Heights* has recently been conducted in *Critical Inquiry*. See James R. Kincaid, "Coherent Read-

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It is not my purpose to quarrel with a criticism which *a priori* posits indeterminacy in all texts; nor, on the other hand, do I insist upon one "right reading." But since Professor Kermode raises the problem of "mediation" between generic modes, between daylight and dreams, I suggest that *Wuthering Heights* may profitably be read in light of a principle of mediation quite familiar in Brontë's time and place, in the earlier works of English Romanticism which constituted her own compelling native tradition.

The Byronic and Gothic strains of Romanticism have long been taken for granted in *Wuthering Heights*, and certainly the Brontë juvenilia reveal a pervasive obsession with Romantic supernaturalism and Romantic agony. But the mature work of Charlotte and Emily, *Wuthering Heights* in particular, suggests that they shared other principles with their neighbors, the Lake Poets: above all, an intuition that the natural and supernatural provide the complementary contexts for the revelation of what Wordsworth called "the primary laws of our nature."[4] *Wuthering Heights* is a quintessential example of "natural supernaturalism."

This phrase is Carlyle's, and M. H. Abrams has identified as definitive of English and German Romanticism this tendency to reformulate theological ideas (the Fall, redemption) within the realm

ers, Incoherent Texts," *CI*, IV (1977), 781–802; Robert Denham, "The No-Man's Land of Competing Patterns," *CI*, IV (1977), 194–202; Kincaid's reply, "Pluralistic Monism," *CI*, IV (1978), 839–45.

[4] The Brontës' (and particularly Emily's) degree of acquaintance with the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge can only be inferred; but there is considerable indirect evidence that the entire family admired and was thoroughly familiar with these poets. In 1834 Charlotte gave some advice about reading to her school friend Ellen Nussey: "If you like poetry, let it be first-rate: Milton, Shakespeare, Thomson, Goldsmith, Pope . . . Scott, Byron, Campbell, Wordsworth, and Southey." (*The Brontës: Life and Letters*, ed. Clement Shorter [repr. of 1908 ed., New York, 1969], 2 vols. I, p. 111). The Brontës also bombarded their famous contemporaries with manuscripts. In 1840 Charlotte sent part of a story to Wordsworth, who replied. (Shorter, I, p. 145). Branwell wrote to Wordsworth, addressing him (in deliberate flattery) "as one whose works I have most loved in literature, and who most has been with me a divinity of the mind." (Shorter, I, p. 135). Two letters of Branwell to Hartley Coleridge survive. In 1847 Charlotte sent a copy of the sisters' *Poems* to Wordsworth (Shorter, II, p. 329). Winnifred Gérin writes that the Brontës approached Moxon as a prospective publisher because he had published Wordsworth (*Charlotte Bronte: The Evolution of Genius* [Oxford, 1968], p. 307). Fanny Ratchford remarks that "Charlotte at fourteen was steeped in eighteenth-century and Romantic poetry" and notes echoes of "Resolution and Independence" and "She Was A Phantom of Delight." (*The Brontës' Web of Childhood* [New York, 1964], p. 48). Charlotte also sent a copy of *The Prelude* to Mrs. Gaskell in 1850, saying she preferred it to *In Memoriam*, which she found "monotonous." (Elizabeth Gaskell, *Life of Charlotte Bronte*, ed. Alan Shelston [1975], p. 345).

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of mind and nature alone—the human imagination becoming our means of salvation.[5] Abrams' analysis focuses on the longer prophetic and philosophical poems such as "The Prospectus" and *The Prelude*, which define the concept explicitly; but it is (as Abrams recognizes) equally embodied in such works as the *Lyrical Ballads*. They not only show variants of the concept thematically (the idea of "freshness of perception"), but also imply it in their highly original artistic procedures. Hence, while *Wuthering Heights* manifests the great theme of Wordsworth's "Prospectus" (the loss and rediscovery of paradise on earth), the book's complex blending of genres and perspectives may more usefully be compared to such poems as "The Thorn" or "Lucy Gray"—works dramatizing imaginative power through experiences of the "supernatural" in the commonplace. Wordsworth's self-proclaimed "experiments" fuse the particularized consciousness of a Romantic lyric speaker with a spare, ballad narrative characterized by archetypal ballad themes: love, betrayal,

[5] M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York, 1971). The notion that *Wuthering Heights* is "Romantic" or even Wordsworthian is of course not original, but while casual allusions to its Romantic qualities abound, no one has attempted to show how the implications of the kinship provide a key to the persistent critical issues, such as the book's problematic structure, theme, narrative technique, and Gothic intrusions. Lionel Stevenson writes, for example, that "*Wuthering Heights* is a belated masterpiece of romanticism" (*The English Novel* [Boston, 1960], p. 276). In his *History of the English Novel*, Ernest H. Baker remarks "Like Wordsworth, [Brontë] had her moments of intense vision, when she seems to see into the life of things" (London, 1937, Vol. 8, p. 65). Critics have often found in the lyric poem a pleasing generic analogy to explain the book's mode and power, a tradition, beginning with Swinburne (*The Atheneum*, 16 June 1883, pp. 762–3) and continuing in (among others) G. D. Klingopoulos' "The Novel as Dramatic Poem (II): *Wuthering Heights*," (*Scrutiny*, XIV, 269–86) and Walter E. Anderson's "The Lyrical Form of *Wuthering Heights*" (*UTQ*, XLVII [1977–8], 112–34). Discussions of isolated aspects sometimes implicitly declare, without definite attribution, the book's fundamental Wordsworthianism, as in Irving R. Buchen on "Emily Brontë and the Metaphysics of Childhood Love" (*NCF*, XXII [1967], 63–70): "Before birth, the soul exists in a prenatal heaven and is an integral part of the purity of God. Significantly, the embrace of God is parental in nature and heaven is rendered consistently as the soul's home . . . the world is a prison. . . . But there is one period of life when the soul is least thwarted—infancy and childhood" (p. 65). Other critics have also argued that the book is a generic hybrid: cf. U. C. Knoepflmacher's description of "tragicomic romance" in *Laughter and Despair: Readings in Ten Novels of the Victorian Era* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 84. And still other readers have made specific, though casual, comparisons to the *Lyrical Ballads*. J. F. Goodridge says the book "belongs essentially to a deeper stream, that which Coleridge and Wordsworth sought to make use of in their lyrical ballads" ("A New Heaven and a New Earth," in *The Art of Emily Brontë*, ed. Anne Smith [New York, 1976], pp. 160–81). Barbara Hardy briefly compares Brontë's narrative technique with that in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in her handbook to *Wuthering Heights* in Blackwell's Notes on English Literature series (1963).

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suffering, and death. (Hence his deliberately paradoxical indication of the fusion of two traditions in the new phrase, "lyrical ballads.") In Brontë, a similar mixture of genres (romance and novel) is directed toward the same end. Moreover, careful attention to this technique leads us straight to the work's ubiquitous yet seldom acknowledged theme: the paradoxical power of human love to create a heaven or hell of earthly experience.

In this essay, then, I shall seek to establish several major points about the book, all of them closely intertwined, and all either wholly ignored or but glancingly acknowledged by the many critics of *Wuthering Heights*. First is the notion that natural supernaturalism is an indispensable context for understanding Brontë's masterpiece. In supporting this claim, I shall point out parallels between *Wuthering Heights* and the purposes of the *Lyrical Ballads*, as described by Coleridge in the *Biographia Literaria*.[6] Second, I will try to show a further way in which this perspective on Brontë's aesthetic strategy validates the familiar assertion that her tale is "mythical": within this complex narrative are numerous evocations of two traditional tales, one a pervasive modern myth in most senses of that term ("Tristan and Iseult"), the other a fairy tale or *Märchen* ("Beauty and the Beast"), a genre which, as Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, and others have persuasively argued, is in essence a kind of miniature, domesticated myth. To tell a more or less plausible modern story colored by numerous reminiscences of myth and fairy tale constitutes

[6] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (London, 1907), Chapter XIV. Perhaps further clarification of the term "natural supernaturalism" is in order here. Carlyle meant the phrase to designate a perception of the miraculous, transcendent qualities present in everyday events, especially in natural phenomena, and he used the phrase as the title of a chapter in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4). He was of course familiar with the concept, if not the phrase itself, from the work of various German Romantic writers. And, as Abrams implies in using *Natural Supernaturalism* as the title of his large-scale study of Romantic literature and thought (mostly but not exclusively English and German), the general notion behind the term is so pervasive in most Romantic literature that it serves perhaps as well as any single term could, to define the movement. As is clear from my discussion, Coleridge, when he defined his and Wordsworth's purpose in the *Lyrical Ballads* as "faithful adherence to the truth of nature and giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination," was in effect pointing to the same notion intended by Carlyle (who applied it to acts of perception directly) and Abrams (who applied it to literary works in which acts of perception are recorded)—even though neither he nor Wordsworth ever used the precise phrase "natural supernaturalism." Indeed there are few writers or painters in the Romantic tradition—from Blake and Turner to D. H. Lawrence and Gaughin—to whom it does not have considerable relevance.

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"natural supernaturalism" at yet another level. (Indeed, that phrase aptly characterizes myths and fairy tales themselves, clothing as they do "the primary laws of our nature" in the garb of fantasy.)

Finally, I shall argue that "Tristan and Iseult" and "Beauty and the Beast," in addition to being congruent with the "natural supernaturalism" found at various levels of the work, are relevant to her purpose because they are pure expressions of Brontë's main theme: the varieties of human love, its possibilities, limitations, and consequences. I can hardly claim originality in noting that this book is about love; yet, seemingly, the very obviousness of such an acknowledgement has prevented readers from perceiving how pervasively, and through what an astonishing variety of artistic means, this theme constitutes the vital principle of *Wuthering Heights*.

I

Before Nelly has gone far into the tale of the first Catherine, Lockwood remarks, "[people in this region] do live more in earnest, more in themselves and less in surface change and frivolous external things."[7] Lockwood cannot be taken as an authorial voice—though by this point (as I shall argue below) he may be a somewhat more sensitive observer as a result of his nightmare experience at the Heights. Still, he expresses, characteristically, a commonplace sentiment—which may be seen either as the classical-pastoral preference for rural over urban life, or as the Romantic (Rousseauistic) idea about the more authentic mode of life enjoyed by those who live "close to nature." Both are versions of that basic assumption about man, society, and the universality of certain human passions which had led Wordsworth to choose rural people as his subjects in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

But Lockwood's remark, though a fashionable cliché, is pertinent to the story to follow in a way he does not suspect: the aim of *Wuthering Heights*, like that of the *Lyrical Ballads*, is to reveal "the primary laws of our nature" as they may be apprehended through human experience in a wild and isolated setting. Lockwood has much in common with the narrator of Wordsworth's "The Thorn"—a prosaic and literal-minded person who moves to a strange village, listens to a tale

[7] Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (ed. W. R. Sale), Norton Critical Edition (New York, 1963), p. 56. All references to the text are taken from this edition.

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of love and death, and finally believes that he has seen the unfortunate Martha Ray. Both Lockwood and Wordsworth's narrator have been widely misunderstood by readers, principally because each author eschews any direct analysis or discursive information about the speaker. One must infer his character mostly from his speech and his responses. (Wordsworth added the biographical detail about the narrator of "The Thorn" in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*.) This use of a fallible and commonplace voice reinforces rather than weakens the dimension of universality: if so practical, so unimaginative a person may see, who may not?

Like Wordsworth and Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads*, Brontë offers the reader, in various portions of her book, two ways of grasping the interrelationship of the natural and the supernatural—by humanizing the latter, or by using characters' imagination-charged perceptions to lend an eerie enchantment to the former—and always to the same purpose of exciting our sympathy "by faithful adherence to the truth of nature and giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of the imagination."[8] Just as the earlier authors drew upon two disparate poetic traditions, those of the lyric and the ballad, so Brontë reconciles novel and romance. Those parts of *Wuthering Heights* which dramatize Lockwood's direct experience begin in the "novelistic"; they are also Wordsworthian in that they show an unimaginative man growing increasingly sensitive to the wondrous strangeness residing in what first seems to be ordinary, if rather trying experience. This implied education of Lockwood, though not a continual object of the reader's attention and hardly the book's narrative core, is nevertheless unmistakably hinted at; further, it is crucial to Brontë's method of modulating between two realms of experience (and two genres).

The first three chapters already effect a movement from novel into romance, from the everyday into the realms of night. Then Nelly's tale, beginning at the introduction of Heathcliff (Chapter 4), commences with the equivalent of the fairy-tale formula "once upon a time" (and, as we shall see, with a narrative situation pointedly reminiscent of one particular fairy tale); it is analogous to the Ancient Mariner's "There was a ship" (an explicit demand for the suspension of disbelief frequently anticipating the intrusion of the supernatural)—it is the point at which the book's "mythic" level can be

[8] Coleridge, p. 5.

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glimpsed for the first time. "One fine summer morning," Nelly says, "Mr. Earnshaw came downstairs dressed for a journey." Whether or not the strange events soon to occur do in fact represent an intrusion of the supernatural remains—as it always will in this book—an uncertain matter. (In the *Biographia*, Coleridge notes that not the *absolute* presence of the supernatural, but merely the protagonist's *belief* in its presence is necessary in order to demonstrate the universality of the "primary laws" he seeks to reveal.)

The essential reconciliation of natural and supernatural sought by Wordsworth and Coleridge required, according to the latter, only one thing: "A meditative and feeling mind to seek after them, or to notice them when they present themselves."[9] Lockwood's mind does not at first seem a promising medium for the experiences he is soon to relate to us. As I have already suggested, he arrives at the Grange plainly shallow and bookishly conventional, posing as a man of feeling, affecting misanthropy as the consequence of a trivial would-be love affair. Initially he seems an object of gentle satire, reminiscent perhaps of Jane Austen's Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*. That he actually does encounter baffling "unnatural" forces, serves Brontë as a powerful way of authenticating and humanizing those forces for the reader.

Lockwood is eventually educated in things never before dreamt of in his philosophy, which can be seen when the book's quiet narrative "frame" returns at the end, seemingly several lifetimes later. (In time I shall return to that scene for a closer look.) Like the Wordsworthian descriptive-meditative lyric, *Wuthering Heights* begins and ends with the same landscape described by one speaker. But the two descriptions are subtly contrasting; they show that Lockwood has at some level changed, and so they provide a measure of his enriched, subtilized final understanding. There *was* truth, we finally see, in his first conventionally naive description of the moors as "a perfect misanthropist's heaven." In his final words we perceive a Wordsworthian "charm by thought supplied," a significance borrowed from the mind as much as from the eye, from a mind now sobered by its new—if mostly vicarious—experiences.

It is Lockwood's night at the Heights which initiates him forcibly into this new experience. The occasion is unique for him: "I don't remember another that can at all compare with it since I was capable

[9] Coleridge, p. 5.

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of suffering," he says. Yet the events of the night are more than a mere passive ordeal; they are above all *his* dreams, and thus evidence of the potential widening and deepening of his perceptive capabilities. In contrast to the gothic trappings of the conventional prose romance, all the happenings of that night can readily be attributed to the interactions of mind and nature—arising from "bad tea and bad temper," as Lockwood himself says.[10] Before falling asleep he amuses himself by perusing the various "Catherine's" scribbled on the sill and the volume of sermons containing Catherine Earnshaw's journal. There he meets Catherine for the first time, speaking in her own voice, describing her own and Heathcliff's childish rebellion against their lot.

The first dream, the sermon at Gimmerton Kirk (a place Lockwood has seen with waking eyes), is perhaps a mere preliminary to what will follow; it belongs more nearly to the Coleridgian "fancy" than to the "Imagination." This lower faculty manipulates "fixities and definites" which come from perception and which are linked by association.[11] Lockwood's sleepbound "fancy" places himself and Joseph the religious fanatic on the familiar road. And yet the narrative which fancy constructs reveals associative principles suggesting Lockwood's unconscious empathy with the child Catherine. Like her, he is a prisoner of Joseph's inflexible Calvinism. Like her, he is subjected to a sermon of grotesque length and bizarre content—"odd transgressions that I had never imagined previously" (a clear foreshadowing of the revelations he will later receive as an auditor of Nelly's tale). The unfamiliarity of the doctrine forced upon his dreaming self implies early in the book that at the Heights Lockwood is to be introduced to a new and strange "religious" principle. Like the Cathy of the journal he rebels, and like her, he is chastized. *"Thou art the man!"* shouts the Reverend Mr. Branderham. Lockwood awakens to find that the dream's last element, the noise of the cudgels as the people attack him, is a natural element, the "pine boughs" tapping on the window (natural supernaturalism again). But Branderham's accusation, the end of the first stage, may most appropriately be read in the

[10] My reading of the dreams is influenced by Edgar F. Shannon, Jr.'s essay, "Lockwood's Dreams and the Exegesis of Wuthering Heights," *NCF*, XIV (1959), 95–109. Shannon also insists on the natural causes and psychological plausibility of the dreams, though he reaches rather different conclusions about their thematic significance.

[11] Coleridge, I, p. 202.

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symbolic language of dream or myth as a call to adventure, a sign of election.[12] (At the beginning of the dream Joseph had chided him for having no pilgrim staff.)

The second dream shows the progress of the reluctant pilgrim. This dream is intrinsically less "fanciful," for Lockwood believes himself awake and in the closet bed. Like the speaker of Wordsworth's "Lucy Gray" or "The Thorn" (two of the *Lyrical Ballads* specifically concerned with the question of how things heard and seen may shade into "supernatural" experience), his mind is now in a state of "Heightened" awareness, willing to work and to be wrought upon. The interplay of mind (fed by the books) and nature (the tapping of the pine boughs, the wailing of the wind) leads him far into the depths (or "heights") of this strange place. He now grasps—literally—the spirit of the place, the ghostly child who is the reason that Heathcliff is harshly misanthropic, Hareton brutalized, the younger Catherine rude and unhappy. Lockwood's intuition of the first Catherine as a waif wandering the moors, yearning to return home, is an act of Wordsworthian Imagination, a spontaneous synthesis of conscious and unconscious perception. The essence of the first Catherine *is* waif-like, as we learn in the course of Nelly's ensuing story; at the same time every element of this intuition is implied in the old narrative Lockwood has just read concerning the proposed "scamper over the moors," the child's affinity with Heathcliff the "vagabond," and his threatened exile from the Heights. (Hindley, Cathy reports, may "turn him out of the house.") And so, once again, external and internal factors seem inseparable in producing this new glimpse "into the life of things."

Such unaccustomed Imaginative experience would itself presumably be frightening (Wordsworth speaks of that faculty's "awful" power), even if the objects of its creation were not themselves terrifying. Spilling the child's blood because "terror made me cruel" marks Lockwood's final and most dreadful stage of initiation, the one which vitally, unmistakably links him with the denizens of the Heights. The ghost's "Let me in, let me in" is again in the language of dream symbolism a significant plea to Lockwood's psychological self. But Lockwood, like Heathcliff, Hindley, and Catherine herself, is here

[12] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (New York, 1949), p. 36. (Does "Thou art the man!" echo Pilate's "Behold the man!"—thus making Lockwood an ironic Christ figure at this point?)

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at least capable of passion; like them (and several other characters we come to know) he is driven by its extremity ("terror") to act cruelly and above all selfishly. The child ghost is piteous at the same time that she is scary—but in his fear Lockwood can act only in self-defense, or what he believes to be self-defense. He screams, and emerges thoroughly frightened from the closet bed.

Like the hero of romance he has been symbolically reborn, if only provisionally. The bed is like a coffin, as Shannon notes,[13] and Heathcliff later dies there, experiencing another form of rebirth. But at this phase of the narrative, at least, Lockwood's fulfillment of the archetypal patterns of the heroic journey is chiefly ironic. He does not understand what he has experienced. Still, when he returns to the Grange he asks Nelly to guide him through the labyrinthine ways of the history into which he has been plunged. Like the wedding guest in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," he cannot choose but hear, being overcome with curiosity and housebound by illness. Mind and nature have again conspired to force revelation upon him.

II

The setting, events, and actors in the story that Lockwood now hears belong to the novel at one moment, to the romance the next, existing in a paradoxical duality-in-unity of mode congruent with the narrative's thematic "natural supernaturalism" (dealing as it does with both cosmic and earthly love). Place names may seem to belong primarily to the world of nature and circumstance, but (though generally lacking the explicit allegory of Spenser's place names) they are nevertheless subject to symbolic interpretation. It is a commonplace to note that Thrushcross Grange represents civilization and Wuthering Heights the harsh, intractable aspects of nature and humanity, but I should stress that these two places are not irreconcilable opposites. Both are farms, though the Grange ("farm," "barn") is a gentleman's estate and the Heights a humbler property. The Heights is exposed to the elements, the Grange sheltered, but each is a place of human habitation and cultivation. The places represent abstract qualities (thus evoking the world of allegorical romances); they also designate two kinds of physical environment in which men of different natures may feel equally at home.

[13] Shannon, p. 105.

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Surnames similarly represent the different potentialities in the human natures they indicate. The Lintons of Thrushcross Grange are soft, malleable, susceptible to refinements—"highly cultivated." The Earnshaws are tough, hardy, unconcerned with society and appearances. The typical Linton vice is a weakness which may become cowardice, but more often is merely quarrelsome pettiness or petulance: their chief means of survival is adaptability, their chief virtue a capacity for gentleness. The Earnshaw failing is an uncontrollable temper turning inward or outward to violence; their best quality is the ability to endure almost anything, and their greatest virtue a steadfast fidelity equal to their hardness. Lintons die of consumption; Earnshaws of alcoholism or heart attacks. When Hindley's wife dies young, he dissipates himself in rowdy evenings of brandy and whist and sporadic violence. When Edgar's young wife also dies, he retreats from the world and languishes in his library, eventually, like Hindley, dying prematurely.

Thus the systematic combining of names in intermarriage and the shifting of scene from the Heights to the Grange and back provide beneath the realistic level of the story a symbolic dramatization of the complex interaction in human behavior between heredity and environment. People flourish or die according to their natures—as plants moved to a new place. The less hardy souls (Frances, Isabella, Linton Heathcliff) waste away when transplanted to unsuitable soil. It is an indication of the first Catherine's Earnshaw nature (and of her affinity with Heathcliff) that she dies, though more by choice than by physical necessity, when she goes to the Grange. Others such as the younger Catherine and Hareton adapt and survive when subjected to unaccustomed harshness; the Earnshaw in each aids in endurance while the gentler heritage of one parent helps them to adapt and insures them a future of mutual sympathy. The emblem of the younger Catherine's successful cultivation of Hareton is her desire to have a flower garden at the Heights, and correspondingly, Hareton's willingness to uproot Joseph's treasured currant bushes. These dramatic workings out of the nature-nurture problem, then, though they would seem entirely at home in a realistic novel of society (such as Q. D. Leavis finds *Wuthering Heights* to be), are managed artistically with a patent symmetry and a quasi-allegorical use of names which keep the romance always luminously visible beneath the novelistic particulars.

The intimate relation between human heredity and environment

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in determining the nature of one's experience on earth (whether it will be hell or heaven) is further implied by the abundance of botanical, biological, and landscape metaphor used to describe human character and feeling in *Wuthering Heights*.[14] Yet the symbolic congruity seen here between persons and setting—though common in the romance—cannot here be called allegory in the usual sense. In Spenser or Bunyan, the scenic backgrounds are sketched in primarily to objectify and illustrate the crucial element—the human and spiritual essence. In Brontë, character and setting are more evenly weighted. This is one indication that in her vision of experience, a person's psychology is partly a function of his early experience, while at the same time that experience can only shape and cultivate innate possibilities. Thus early cruelty hardens Heathcliff, but his own lack of softness may have itself evoked that cruelty. And while unkindness hardens the second Cathy, its ultimate effect, given her nature, is to temper her character rather than to coarsen it; steel (an alloy) can be sharpened to a fine edge; sandstone cannot. Similarly, deeds are not independent of one's earthly experience: choices are made in response to the complex, often conflicting claims of will and circumstance, not in a free choice between metaphysical right or wrong, as in the Garden of Eden. In showing this paradox, Brontë's world is modern, pointing forward to Hardy or Lawrence. Yet, as in these later writers, the impact of social environment upon human destiny tends to be indicated not only realistically by the action, but also by means of a symbolic shorthand which derives from pre-novelistic romance: setting and character are made to balance, mirror, even interpenetrate one another.

If both Lintons and Earnshaws have a natural home, however different they may be, Heathcliff has none, and is barely susceptible (as his name implies) to any cultivation: that name which serves him as both Christian and surname hints at an almost inhuman consis-

[14] These metaphors are seemingly innumerable and are significantly the ones that tend to be debated and remembered. "[Edgar] possessed the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half-killed or a bird half-eaten" (Ch. 8); "My love for Linton is like the foliage of the woods. . . . My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath" (Ch. 9); Heathcliff is "an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone" (Ch. 10); "a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" (Ch. 10); "[Catherine and Edgar's marriage] was not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing them" (Ch. 10); "Now, my bonny lad, you are mine! [exclaims Heathcliff after Hindley's death] And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" (Ch. 17).

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tency. His entrance into the world of Earnshaw and Linton upsets the balance of nature. Yet Heathcliff is the only character in *Wuthering Heights* equally in the "novel" *and* "romance" aspects of the book, who is prominent in both halves of the narrative, and who seems to have validity both as "natural" and "supernatural" *being*. The effects of his presence are equivocal, too, as old Earnshaw knew from the beginning, and his experience of love proves a paradigm of the book's theme, also much illustrated elsewhere: his frustrated desire for Catherine is transformed into cruelty and vents itself in revenge on both Linton and Earnshaw, largely through appropriating both their homes. And yet, had he never been adopted, never loved Catherine, never sought to avenge himself on those who separated him from her, the paradise regained by the second Catherine and Hareton, a domestic bliss which is "a simple produce of the common day," could not have been.

We have been speaking, up to now, mainly of characters and of settings. The two successive plots of *Wuthering Heights* (more precisely, two phases of a single plot) can also be read either as novel or romance, as realism or symbolic abstraction—though the first tends more to romance, the second to the novelistic. The literal level of the whole, being the story of a mother and daughter who lose and find happiness in marriage, is supported at another, mythical level, by the familiar romantic spiral pattern of the fall from Eden through a "circuitous journey," to paradise regained in a transformed version of the lost childhood home.[15] A diagram of the movement of the two Catherines would show two spirals which are mirror images of each other. The first Catherine's Edenic childhood is passed with Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights, "half-savage, and hardy and free." It is lost when she chooses to marry Edgar and move to the Grange, where she dies; and she wanders the moors during twenty purgatorial years she waits for Heathcliff to join her in death. Only then is her paradise regained, presumably at the Heights.

The story of the second Catherine reverses her mother's pattern, but recapitulates its structure. Her Eden is more conventional—a childhood spent in an enclosed garden. (Nelly remarks that she never left the park alone until the age of thirteen.) This childish paradise is lost when she marries Linton Heathcliff and is imprisoned at the Heights; her mother's place of Eden and Paradise is a purgatory

[15] Abrams, pp. 141–237.

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for the daughter. At the end, however, she anticipates a return to the Grange, her childhood home, regaining a paradise of domestic happiness.

III

We modern readers have learned to see such elements as character, setting, plot, and even genre as working together toward the achievement of a theme or "vision" of things; theme being for us the soul or animating principle of fictional narrative. But what is the "first principle" illustrated by Brontë's complex artistic structure? What are the essential insights which Lockwood, in his night of trial, is being prepared to perceive? The "supernaturalist" critics have usually been content to state that *Wuthering Heights* shows certain "forces" or "principles" at work. To say that the book is "mythic," another favorite term of these readers, is both true and inadequate. We should do well to remember that "myth" and "plot" were subsumed within the same word in Aristotle's vocabulary. The stories of the two Catherines correspond to, and pointedly recall, two traditional myth-plots in particular: "Tristan and Iseult" and "Beauty and the Beast." The first of these is a myth in the precise sense; the second is a fairy tale.[16] Their common theme is the paradoxical power of human love both to elevate and to destroy, both to transcend human experience and to sanctify it. According to comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell, myths and fairy tales are similar kinds which concern (in Wordsworth's phrase) "the primary laws of our nature." But the laws they reveal, though similar and congruent, are relevant to different contexts of human experience: myths are enacted on a cosmic stage and reveal religious truths—universal insights about the relation of man to the eternal. Fairy tales occur within the domestic, earthly realms and concern the merely psychological principles of self-discovery and adjustment to family and society.[17] Tristan and Iseult are reunited in death, implying love's transcendence of the

[16] Goodridge, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," mentions the first lovers' similarity to Tristan and Iseult, but accepts Denis de Rougemont's reading of the myth, as I do not. (See p. 16 of the text, below.) Elliot B. Gose analyzes Nelly's fairy-tale beginning, but reads it as an introduction to the first Catherine's story only ("*Wuthering Heights*: The Heath and the Hearth," *NCF*, XXI [1966], 1–20). Q. D. Leavis regards the fairy-tale allusions as juvenile failures of technique.

[17] Campbell, *Hero*, pp. 37–8.

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natural realm it grows in. Beauty and her Prince Charming live happily ever after in *this* world. But each pair is saved through love, however differently it manifests itself in the two stories.

To embody this ultimate principle of universal order in a love story is of course to create a metaphor, a synechdoche, though a traditional one, in which sexual love stands for the ineffable and universal principle. The metaphor has been used at least since the time of the pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles. Its history is much too long and too complex to summarize here, but it is worth noting that the tradition was adopted and adapted by Coleridge in "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" (set at a wedding feast), and by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* as he struggles to articulate a definition of the power *he* has come to perceive as the sustaining force of nature and of man.[18] In Brontë, the abstract principles remain implicit in the complications and resolutions of the plot.

The identification of the "love principle" as the heart of the book's ethos is supported by a fact surprisingly neglected by critics: sexual and romantic love (or attempts at or approximations or parodies of it) constitutes the most pervasive plot element in *Wuthering Heights.*[19] *All* the complications, trivial or major, stem from loving or failing in love. In Brontë's world, "sin," the root of all woe, the cause that leads to expulsion from Eden, is redefined as misplaced or mistaken love. (These are the "odd transgressions" that Lockwood dreamed of.)[20] Lockwood fails the call of love and so rents the Grange. Hindley slowly destroys himself after the death of his beloved wife, and is thus vulnerable to Heathcliff's machinations. Isabella marries Heathcliff, impelled by misguided love and by the mistaken assumption that she is in love with him.

And Catherine's fall from childhood grace occurs when she chooses wrongly between two kinds of love, allowing her attraction to Edgar (which she knows is to the wealth and position he would give her and gratification at being loved by a handsome young man) priority over her fundamental kinship with Heathcliff, so that she unwittingly wounds both men and destroys herself. Like the Ancient

[18] *The Prelude* (1850), Book 14, 11, 162 ff.

[19] The role of love as a theme in *Wuthering Heights* has been much noted. But so far as I know, no one has also marked its crucial function in the plot, at various levels.

[20] Lockwood has already committed the same sin that Catherine did, out of a similar ignorance; his "sin," however, seems a trivial and parodic version of hers. Still, Lockwood's "crime against love" provides a further reason for the fittingness of his being made to undergo the kind of initiation he does.

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Mariner in killing the Albatross, Catherine disturbs her universe by violating a natural order whose ruling principle is love. Like the Mariner's, her deed springs from an obliviousness which seems not entirely blameworthy, a kind of innocence. Her sin consists of loving selfishly and immaturely. She is incapable of sympathy; ironically her "identification" with Heathcliff does not enable her to consider his feelings as in any way autonomous, as separate or different from her own. And like the Mariner, she consequently suffers a hell of isolation and loneliness.[21]

It is impossible to know whether or not Brontë's use of a third, "mythical" level of narrative—the texture of allusions to myth and fairy tale—was a conscious choice. But its unmistakable presence in the book is both a further manifestation of "natural supernaturalism," and a powerfully evocative enhancement of the theme of love as the work's animating principle. Recognizing the multi-levelled nature of the narrative, we see that Brontë has clothed her bipartite story in the appearance of nineteenth-century Yorkshire, in the same way that Dante peopled the inferno as well as paradise with medieval Florentines; or, to cite perhaps a closer analogy, in the way that George Eliot in *Silas Marner* clothed her charming and instructive fairy tale in the carefully observed details of a small Midlands village of the same era to which the plot of *Wuthering Heights* belongs.

[21] In its dramatization of love as the moving and sustaining force of nature and of man, *Wuthering Heights* might be considered another, Romantic and naturalistic version of the *Divine Comedy*. Like Dante's poem, it begins in the Inferno (the Heights after the Fall), and though Brontë does not conduct us through paradise (and describes the Edenic bliss of both Catherines in a sentence or two), she leads us to its threshold. Love, or the lack of it, creates heaven or hell out of nature, states of bliss or suffering as real and as just as those created *ex nihilo* by Dante's God. In this world debts of love and hate are paid according to their merits, and the punishments fit the crimes as exactly as in *The Inferno*. Human love, like divine love, is shown to be paradoxical; but in *Wuthering Heights* its opposing manifestations are empathy or hostility, compassion or cruelty, rather than the more abstract theological contraries of love or wrath.

God has not, therefore, disappeared from this world in quite the sense J. Hillis Miller intends in his essay on *Wuthering Heights* (in the *Disappearance of God*, 1963). Miller is right in seeing the influence of Calvinism on Brontë's world view, even when God is comprised within the duality of mind and nature. Yet there is a positive implication in this Calvinism that Miller overlooks: Calvin believed in grace for the elect, and so does Brontë, though she is less restrictive than he in defining and granting it. (In theological terms, Lockwood's initiation is the inexplicable visitation of the knowledge of election.) Like Calvin, Brontë may appear chiefly pessimistic, but her world is sustained by a fundamental optimism rooted in recognition of the possibility of grace. Such grace is found on earth, however, in life or in death; and one is predestined to one or the other not by divine foreknowledge but by the accidents of heredity and environment.

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Heathcliff and Catherine move plausibly enough among real people, but they also fulfill Campbell's definition of myth, because they are "larger than life," and because their deeds are "world-historical" within the limits of the book: it takes two generations for the effect of their passion to exhaust itself. Indeed, at the book's conclusion the local folk believe them to walk the moors still—they have been translated into perhaps the only eternity earthly imagination can grant: they have been translated into myth. Tristan and Iseult were similarly real people transposed into myth through their own deeds, most fundamentally through their appropriation of the divine prerogative of omnipotent love. Brontë's lovers like Tristan and Iseult are drawn to each other from the moment of meeting. Significantly, however, they meet as children and their affinity comes not from the magical *Liebestrank* of romance but from shared experience, and possibly, shared heredity. Tristan and Iseult's love for each other, like Cathy and Heathcliff's, ignores the restrictions imposed by society (their marriage to others) and by nature (death apparently cannot separate them). In this context, one minor theme of *Wuthering Heights* criticism is elucidated: Nelly's ambiguous role in unwittingly precipitating certain catastrophes (which has led some readers to focus disproportionate attention on her "unreliability") at the mythic level recapitulates the action of the unfortunate Brangwyn, Iseult's maidservant who unknowingly offers the love-drink to Tristan and Iseult. (The nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* is another analogue from the same tradition.)

If my argument is correct, then Denis de Rougemont might well have discussed *Wuthering Heights* in his survey of the Tristan myth, *Love in the Western World*, for Cathy and Heathcliff appear to embody that experience which he decries, "passionate love at once shared and fought against, anxious for happiness it rejects, and magnified in its own disaster—unhappy mutual love."[22] Judging "Tristan" from the fixed perspective of Christian morality and theology, de Rougemont insists that the affinity of passionate love and death is perverse. Freed of this judgment, however, the story may mean something quite different, and I believe it is part of the myth's effect (and of Brontë's deliberate intention) to make us question the universal validity of such categories.[23] Brontë's manner of telling the tale seems

[22] Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*, trans. Montgomery Belgion (New York, 1940), p. 46.

[23] See Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (New York, 1968), pp. 64–5. Campbell argues that such suspension of the conventional view is demanded by the original twelfth-century version of "Tristan," because it represents a new kind of

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carefully designed to forestall the application of conventional categories. Lockwood fails comically at such categorizing early in the book (he mistakes dead rabbits for kittens, fierce watchdogs for pets, and misapprehends the muddle of relationships among the people at the Heights). His dream of Gimmerton Kirk also emphasizes that the old, habitual assumptions are no longer valid for these new realms of experience. As the book evolves, the utter inadequacy of conventional wisdom to grasp experience of certain kinds and depths is repeatedly implied. This is done largely, though not exclusively, through the "choral" commentaries of the sensible but essentially uncomprehending Nelly Dean; and the comic, Calvinistic Joseph, with his very different but equally conventional view of things, has a similar function.

Joseph Campbell suggests as an implication of the Tristan myth that "if one and the same Being is what is beheld in these living things . . . the experience that dissolves the I and the not-I cannot be false."[24] The principle of metaphysics which Tristan and Iseult, Catherine and Heathcliff, demonstrate by violating the laws of nature (apparently united as they are after death) can also be seen in life with*in* those laws of nature. Passion is the symbolic (and semantic) mother

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"secular mythology," one in which "the structuring themes were not derived from dogma, learning, politics, or any current concepts of the general social good, but were expressions of individual experience." In other words, the medieval myth itself implied that the "supernatural" is derived from the natural and is not an arbitrary mental hypothesis. "Thus the mythmakers," continues Campbell, "were no longer to be saints and priests, but men and women of *this* world; and their first requirement is that both their worlds and their lives should unfold from the convictions derived from their own experiences." Hence Campbell's interpretation of the Tristan myth is very different from de Rougemont's, and shows the myth's natural affinities with the later assumptions of Romanticism:

> The Celtic hero (Tristan) as though moved by an infallible *natural* grace, follows without fear the urges of the heart. And though these may promise only sorrow and pain, danger and disaster—to Christians, even the ultimate disaster of hell for all eternity—when followed for themselves alone, without thought or care for consequences, they can be felt to communicate to a life, if not the radiance of eternal life, at least integrity and truth.
>
> (p. 43)

If "Tristan" embodies a heresy, then, it is not the Manichean, as de Rougemont argues (which emphasizes the irreconcilable duality of good and evil, spirit and matter), but the Pelagian, which teaches that grace is available through nature and that salvation may come through one's own experience and striving. This myth is itself, then—if Campbell's view is correct—an early example of the principle of natural supernaturalism as Abrams defines it in regard to the Romantics: human experience on earth leads to an apprehension of all the qualities usually reserved for divinity: permanence, harmony, undying love.

[24] Campbell, *Creative Mythology*, p. 75.

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of *com*passion. In *Wuthering Heights* the relationship of passion and compassion is demonstrated by the two symmetrical halves of the plot, and by the juxtaposition of the myth and the fairy tale underlying these phases of the story, a story which tells of the love experienced by mother and then by daughter. The first Catherine's mystical, mythical identification with her beloved, though known within earthly limits, proves incompatible with them (as in the Tristan story), an implicitly tragic situation. The mother's passion was blind to all else but its object, which was also indistinguishable from herself (as shown in her famous "I am Heathcliff" speech in Chapter 9). The daughter, Cathy, if incapable of such intense passion, is capable of sympathy, the unselfishness which permits change, development, maturation within the limits of circumstance, and is thus part of a "comic" phase of the narrative: the second Cathy's nature leads to the fulfillment of the happy ending anticipated much earlier by Nelly's formulaic fairy-tale beginning, when she started with the story of Mr. Earnshaw's journey, from which he returned (like Beauty's father) with a "present" in the form of Heathcliff. The mode of the first Catherine's eternal rebellion against circumstance is in keeping with her "hard" nature; the second Catherine, in keeping with *her* nature, successfully comes to terms with the duties and demands of this world.

This adaptation by the second Catherine takes place entirely within this world, and is embodied in both the happy domestic story which rounds out the book, and in the familiar fairy tale it recreates. Cathy triumphs over Heathcliff in his aspect as ogre, and she finds a Prince Charming in Hareton, whom she transforms (through sympathy and affection) from the beastliness Heathcliff's malice had imposed, into a loving mate. The younger Catherine's difficulties, like her mother's, spring from loving in an immature way. But whereas the mother was doomed to fail by her unalterable selfishness, the daughter's generosity, shown even in her immature infatuation for Linton, first makes her Heathcliff's prisoner and pawn, and removes her from the garden of Thrushcross Grange—but then the consequences of such movement prove no longer tragic, given her adaptive nature. The younger Catherine's experiences at Wuthering Heights (unlike her mother's there, which made a hard nature harder) become a process of education. The trials undergone in this harsh atmosphere evoke her best qualities; her spoiled-child selfishness is transformed into womanly love, as her mother's never could be.

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Seen through Bruno Bettelheim's psychological perspective, the tale of "Beauty and the Beast" implies that "while sex may at first seem beast-like, in reality love between woman and man is the most satisfying of all emotions, and the only one which makes for permanent happiness."[25] In reworking this traditional plot, the second Cathy's story shows how the power that is love can find a home on earth, within the reality of daily life. Critics have speculated as to whether the love of Catherine and Heathcliff is sexual; undoubtedly it was, and yet this fact is almost irrelevant to apprehending their affinity. It is unthinkable that those two could fulfill the usual implications of sexual attraction, to settle down, rear children and live happily ever after in this world; but such *is* the destiny of the younger pair, for adaptability (necessary to their kind of existence and maturation) is part of their natural heritage.

As in the story of "Tristan and Iseult," the motive force of all plot complications in "Beauty and the Beast" is love in one form or another. Bettelheim writes that when Beauty asks for a rose from her father (consciously wishing not to be greedy or demanding), her action can be seen symbolically as a plea to continue their relationship, the genuine, pure, but immature love of father and daughter.[26] This request, however, eventually puts her in the Beast's power, for her father plucks the rose from the Beast's garden. Cathy's first marriage is parallel to that action, for it takes her away from her father, ostensibly, while her relationship to him remains unchanged. This is a parodic marriage, plainly an expression of immature love, for it is sexless and the bride and groom are still children. Cathy's husband, significantly, is named for her father.

But Cathy, like Beauty, is now in the power of the Beast and constrained to live in his mysterious house. The Beast of Cathy's tale appears in three separate guises. (If this part of my explication seems forced, I note that such fragmentation of one being into several characters has often been seen—by Freudians and others—in both dreams and fairy tales.)[27] Heathcliff has the fairy-tale beast's wealth and power, while Linton's personal "beastliness" provokes a

[25] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York, 1976), p. 306.

[26] Bettelheim, p. 307.

[27] For recognition of this kind of splitting or fragmentation in dreams, note various references to "condensation" in relation to dreams (condensation is the complementary opposite of the process I am referring to here; this process is given no special term

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repugnance which Catherine overcomes in a lesson of loving unselfishly. Hareton, Heathcliff's son in spirit (his "father" remarks that he is "a personification of my youth"), enacts the part of the Beast transformed through love into man and Prince Charming. Beauty must overcome her repugnance toward the Beast, her lingering attachment to her father, and the Beast's power over her before she can live happily ever after. Cathy faces the same obstacles. Like Beauty she runs away from the Beast to be with her dying father, indicating the strength of her attachment to him. But her father and Linton die within two months of each other, symbolically indicating the removal of this familial barrier to mature love. About this time Hareton begins to show obvious admiration for his cousin and tries to please her (Chapter XXX), but she rebuffs him, as Beauty refused the Beast's early offers of marriage. Her education of Hareton (the realistic version of Beauty's transformation of the Beast) nevertheless begins. And Heathcliff's "immortal longings" start to preoccupy him so that he fails to note—or much care—what is happening between the two young people; thus the third barrier is removed.

Cathy's experiences at the Heights are not merely an education in romantic, sexual love, however. She is prepared to recognize Hareton as her Prince Charming by stages which serve to enlarge her capacities for empathy and unselfish love. She had loved the unappealing Linton unselfishly, protesting to Heathcliff that "Linton is all I have to love in the world, and . . . you cannot make us hate each other, and I defy you to hurt him when I am by." (Chapter XXIX). The older Catherine had proclaimed an empathy with Heathcliff that amounted to identity, but this feeling never manifested itself in any concern for Heathcliff as a person with feelings like her own—otherwise she could never have married Edgar. But Cathy, revealing the differences between herself and her mother in the very act of angrily chastizing Heathcliff, also paradoxically manifests real empathy, perhaps even sympathy for him:

> Mr. Heathcliff, *you* have *no*body to love you; and however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery! You are miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the

by Freud, but he often mentions it): see *The Interpretation of Dreams*, vols. 4 and 5 in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London, 1953).

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devil, and envious like him? *Nobody* loves you, nobody will cry for you when you die!

(Chapter XXIX)

Cathy's words are accurate from her point of view—the entirely human, earthly, and domestic perspective. She cannot imagine the love that awaits him after death, for which he is willing to sacrifice all human companionship; and though her words are acute in pointing to one motive of Heathcliff's cruelty, reinforcing the book's theme of the power of love to make a hell of heaven, a heaven of hell, one must not regard them as a statement of the whole truth about Heathcliff. The greatest difficulty in interpreting *Wuthering Heights* lies in Brontë's refusal to indulge in discursive statement. Its meaning resides entirely in the whole—in the narrative structure, in the juxtaposition of the two plots and their relationship to each other, in the congruence and revealing conflict of character and setting, and in the "layering" of various modes of narrative.

Brontë does not choose between the two modes of love, passion and compassion, any more than Blake chooses one kind over the other in "The Clod and the Pebble." The reader may come away from *Wuthering Heights* suspecting that the author prefers the passionate mode of her earlier characters; certainly the story of the first lovers is more indelible and dramatic than that of the second pair. But the distinction between the passion and the compassion of her two plots, and the reader's proper attitude toward them, is perhaps suggested by analogy with the two categories in the eighteenth-century aesthetics of landscape implicit in the characters and setting of the book—the sublime and the beautiful. Everything associated with Wuthering Heights is akin to the sublime: the natural setting and the passion of Catherine and Heathcliff—dangerous, destructive, mysterious, awe-inspiring.

All associated with the Grange, however, belongs to what these theorists called "beauty": rational harmony, cultivated, tamed nature. Wordsworth, working in this tradition, considered the two categories, as they are manifested in nature, aspects of the one fundamental creative principle in the universe which he associated with the human creative faculty, Imagination.[28] For Brontë, the principle is even more closely tied to nature and to human passion; it is human love.

[28] *The Prelude*, 14, 162 ff.

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IV

Heathcliff's end is as strange as was his introduction into the Earnshaw household. And with it comes a modulation from supernatural back into natural as in the introductory chapters. Heathcliff's increasing preoccupation with the otherworldly, his new attunement to the ghost of Catherine—events in the romantic mode—distract his attention from what is happening under his nose, the blossoming friendship between Catherine and Hareton, which leads to the work's "novelistic" conclusion, and the conventional marriage of the comic ending. When Nelly tells Lockwood the local people believe that Heathcliff "*walks*," we are back in the Wordsworthian perspective of the beginning. She remarks that the little shepherd boy "probably raised the phantoms from thinking, as he traversed the moors alone, on the nonsense he had heard his parents and companions repeat." The Wordsworthian combination of mind and nature is at work to reveal the "supernatural." Yet now even Nelly refuses to take sides entirely with rationality: "I don't like being out in the dark now; and I don't like being left by myself in this grim house." Lockwood is not the only one affected by the experience this book recounts. And by this time the reader can hardly presume to rest content with one mode of experience as against the other.

Lockwood's final visit to the graves belongs, like the opening chapter, primarily to the novelistic and realistic level of experience. And yet the supernatural, romantic elements of this world are somehow present also for him. A view of the lovers' graves concludes almost all literary incarnations of the Tristan myth,[29] providing the final evaluation of a detached observer who places their suffering in a broader, usually historical, perspective. In the medieval romance version of Tristan, the narrator tells of the briar, emblematic of suffering and desire, which magically persists in uniting the two lovers after death, as if their great and tragic love had imprinted itself on nature but in so doing supersedes both death and tragedy.[30] That Catherine is buried between Heathcliff and Edgar—unique in the tradition—is a final hint that love is the final cause of this world, for the two couples were bound together in life as in death by love, however different

[29] For example, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Pope's "Eloisa to Abelard."

[30] Joseph Bédier, *The Romance of Tristan and Iseult*, trans. Hilaire Belloc (New York, 1945), Vintage paperback, p. 151.

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each union was in degree and kind from the other. (The circularity completed by this epilogue is also, of course, analogous to that of the characteristic Coleridgian or Wordsworthian nature lyric.)

The concluding emphasis in *Wuthering Heights* is on a reassertion of natural harmony, as that implied by Tristan's briar. Like Wordsworth's characteristic shift in perspective at the end of his most poignant works (the *Immortality Ode*, "Michael," "The Ruined Cottage") the narrator's final view of nature constitutes a kind of tragic catharsis. Nature, the eternal and impersonal, has begun to restore lost harmony, and the sight is invested with profound significance. Looking at the graves, Lockwood is aware of "coming autumn storms," a suggestion of the cyclical rhythms as characteristic of human passion and suffering as of nature. For the moment, the tone seems affirmative, an assertion of a Wordsworthian natural optimism:

> I lingered round [the graves] under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and the hare-bells; listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.

Yet there is a barely perceptible tension in this equivocal description between suffering and calm, tragedy and comedy, unrest and peace, mind and nature, natural and supernatural. And in this delicate, ambiguous, complex balance comes our last glimpse of Brontë's vision of man, nature, and human life which the entire book has so magically revealed.

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