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Author(s): John T. Matthews

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John T. Matthews

Framing in *Wuthering Heights*

> The question that he frames in all but words
> Is what to make of a diminished thing.
> —Robert Frost, "The Oven Bird"[1]

Diminished Things

Frames are meant to be forgotten. Whether in painting, sculpture, architecture, or narrative art, framing devices give themselves to setting off central artifacts. Wooden frames, pedestals, corniced recesses, or narratives that bracket other stories all articulate the space within which the primacy of another work establishes itself. In all its effects the frame seems to take its identity as a function of something else—the center, the destination, the interior that it serves. Meyer Schapiro remarks that the practice of framing visual art extends from the evolution of an organized representational field.[2] Until the late second millennium B.C., drawing took place on random surfaces, which often included even those bearing earlier drawings. Eventually the idea emerged of preparing a surface and demarcating a receptive space, a practice that implies a representational field "cut" by the boundaries of the surface. Framing developed later as part of the historical advancement of these fundamental ground-figure relations. The prepared surface altered various conventions of representation. For example, the bounded space, its edges anticipating the actual frame, tended to turn the plane of the picture "transparent." Schapiro contends that such transparency led to the development of perspective, which depends on the frame to make the surface of the picture seem recessed (deeper than the slant of the frame's outer thickness), and inaugurated the illusion of depth lines that recede into simulated distance in the represented field. Devoted to these ends, the frame pays tribute to the value of a selected visual field, to that part of an implicitly infinite representational array

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articulated and made valuable by its bounds. The fashion of richly ornate frames asserts literally that the painting is a precious piece of the field.

Framed narratives profit in similar ways from the subservience of their frames. As in paintings, the literary frame often appears as little more than a preliminary passage: pre-liminary literally, in the sense of being before the threshold, before the liminal division of introduction and story proper. Such antechambers of narrative mediate the reader's passage from a contingent exterior world to the highly determined interior world of plot, character, and meaning. Whatever specific effects any individual frame has for its core story or stories, we may generalize about its status by observing that the frame is always that which is first to be passed through or beyond. It is at once outside the reader's field of concentration and the determinant of that field, beneath one's notice yet the foundation of it. By indicating all that is not-the-story, the frame's marginality becomes indispensable to providing the ground which defines the figure of the narrative. Often, then, in both our reading experience and in our critical attentions, we neglect the frame, as in one respect we are meant to, because it has no place of its own. The literary frame exists as a function which enables a relation between differentiated realms (the reader and author, the world and the artwork, reality and imagination, and so on). So far as it is successful the frame must suppress its content, for otherwise it diminishes the enframed by exaggerating what is to be taken as preliminary ornamentation.[3]

The Sinking Frame

Wuthering Heights is a novel preoccupied with the idea of boundary. In vast variations of single-mindedness, it haunts the sites of division—between self and other, individual and family, nature and culture, mortality and immortality.[4] It is not surprising, then, that Emily Brontë should be drawn to a formal expression of her concern with boundaries by enclosing her "central" story in an outlying narrative episode. What is the relation of the story *itself*—the chronicle of Earnshaw-Linton transactions crowned by Catherine and Heathcliff's love—to the story's *other* in its frame —Nelly Dean's entertaining account to her convalescent master Lockwood? Brontë means us to cross this question repeatedly in her deployment of the frame, in part because *Wuthering Heights* broods both at its center and in its margins on the problem of articulation. As in its structure, the novel's imagery and diction are saturated to the same purpose by the rhetoric of framing.

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Dorothy Van Ghent and others have written insightfully on the prominence of doors and windows as representations of the mind's and spirit's grasp of interior and exterior.[5] We will come to see, in addition, that the narrative frame is required by the incapacity of the central lovers to utter their relation. Perpetually frustrated, they cannot articulate the relation that would bind them, and so they leave a gap to be framed and filled by the loquacity of the narrators. Accordingly, Brontë brings into play a subtle and widespread terminology of framing that sounds almost all of its senses: to frame is to set off, to encompass, to edge, but also to invent, to lie, even—in the idiomatic "frame-off"—to cease, to leave off, to escape. Likewise, a frame may be a border, but also one's state of mind, skeletal build, or bodily condition. Brontë invites us to entertain the agreements between these kinds of framing as she considers how establishing a ground for the story's figure is indistinguishable from inventing the story "itself." Disclosure is enclosure. The discreteness of the frame wavers under the labor of setting off the story.

The way painters use the term "frame" might confirm our understanding of the literary frame, since the frame refers both to the hidden understructure upon which the canvas is stretched and to the highly visible but unnoticed outer ornament. The frame is a double structure that opens the space of representation as it is covered over and closes the space of articulation as it mediates a boundary with the outer world. When Nelly describes old Earnshaw's declining health as "his sinking frame,"[6] she locates as well an image for the disposition of larger fictive entities in the novel, for the framing activities of *Wuthering Heights* are continually being noticed as forms of disappearance, as the creation of virtual presences that absent their own premises. Like Catherine and Heathcliff, Nelly and Lockwood remain palpable by virtue of their borderline fadings and absences.

The frame portion of *Wuthering Heights* sinks into the background of the monumental passion which it discloses. Unsurprisingly, interpretations of the novel readily ignore the circumstances of storytelling that appear in the opening and concluding pages and intermittently throughout. When Ellen Dean and Lockwood are discussed at all, their effects are confined largely to their status as characters *in* their story, not as its confabulators. Lockwood's "normalcy" or priggishness and Nelly's meddlesomeness or salt-of-the-earthness do bear on a few points of the central story—the moments of Lockwood's admiration for Heathcliff and attraction to Catherine the younger, or Nelly's protection of the innocent and censure of the indulged.[7] In those few instances in

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which their roles as narrators are taken up, however, what is emphasized is their passivity. The usual paradigm for Lockwood's part is as the dreamer of the story.[8] Nelly, perhaps because of her subservient marginality to the culture she describes and to the cultured gentleman for whom she describes it, typically comes across as a transparent narrator. But the transparency of narratorial disinterest we scarcely grant anymore, even to professionally objective narrators like historians.[9] There is little reason to expect that the equivocations of Lockwood's tremulous misanthropy or the gnarls of Nelly's ambivalence toward her supportive oppressors should not condition the story one transcribes as the other tells. My contention goes beyond the view that the narrators' personalities simply color the story they relate; rather, in this novel so absorbed by the instabilities of identity,[10] story becomes the only mode of being, a temporary shelter which permits the transient sense of stilled, collected selfhood for its telling tenants. Having encountered themselves in the passages of *Wuthering Heights*—the house of the narrative—the narrators sink back into the greater oblivion of all that is unframed.

The two principal narrators of *Wuthering Heights* are actively interested in their story, and thus they are intimated by it. Although their position as frame narrators implies that they simply transmit events that have already taken place, Brontë never wholly gives those narrators over to the dictates of the story. They reemerge regularly to remind us of their agency and the requirements of the telling scenes. In accepting the substance of the past, each narrator measures, revises, and preserves what he or she sees fit. Lockwood refers to his willingness to record the essence of Nelly's account: "I'll continue it in her own words, only a little condensed" (p. 132); but condensation is a form of composition. Elsewhere he accents the actual vigilance of the listener's apparent passivity; he is so intent on following the details of Nelly's narration that he will abide no leaping over spaces in the story. Nelly is impressed by the laziness of such a mood, but Lockwood protests that it is "a tiresomely active one. It is mine, at present, and, therefore, continue minutely" (p. 52). Lockwood's engagement with the story draws him into a version of a strenuously contemplative life, one he thinks Nelly enjoys in her isolated condition ("You have been compelled to cultivate your reflective faculties," p. 52). And she agrees that both experience and her reading have made her wise ("I have read more than you would fancy," p. 53). Both Lockwood and Nelly are careful to describe their states of mind during the reveries stimulated by the story as grounded in waking reality: Lockwood's dreams early

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in the novel and Nelly's fantasies on Heathcliff's behalf are varieties of "imaging" (p. 280),[11] a practice suggesting active creation, or framing. As Nelly, encouraging the rude foundling Heathcliff, once puts it: "Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!" (p. 48). How Nelly specifically manages to frame herself is a question I shall take up shortly, but at this point we note that "imaging" requires exertion. Whatever impulses toward self-fulfillment and self-restraint Lockwood and Nelly exhibit, they emerge most forcefully in the aims and strategies of their narrating. An interpretation of the frame in *Wuthering Heights* must account not only for how the narrators take their story but what they make of it. The energies of desire, imaginative compensation, revenge, subversiveness, and ambivalence toward moral and social rectitude—the very stuff of the core story—have already been set off, are already under way, in the novel's frame. Brontë associates imagination with marginality (as the insinuation of Catherine's diary into the margins of Branderham's sermons confirms); what is imagined is the outside of what is possessed—the frame is for framing. If, as so many readers are willing to have it, Catherine and Heathcliff's passion involves a yearning for self-possession by means of the passage through the other,[12] then central to that passion is the sense of lack, of an interiority yearning for completion by (or through) its exterior. The structure of the core story is a synecdoche for the novel's structure, then, since the existence of the frame narrative signals that the central story lacks self-sufficiency, just as each of the lovers defines love as lack. The central story's compromised self-sufficiency actually constitutes its unity by calling forth the encircling frame. A silence, a reticence, some stunted power of speech in the lovers' relation requires the supplement of Nelly's telling and Lockwood's writing. The frame's preliminary nature requires completion by the central story it serves, but the self-insufficiency of the enframed story returns us to the required frame. This conceptual cycle is doubled by our actual reading experience of the novel, since we sink past the circumstances of the narrating scene only to rise back into the frame at the conclusion.

An Existence of Yours beyond You

Perhaps the millions of interpretive words which have come to encase this love story measure the incapacity of Catherine and Heathcliff to speak for themselves. Most readers register the

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ferocious privacy and thick silence which close off Catherine and Heathcliff from the rest of their world. Such remoteness surely deepens our impression of their mysterious, suprapersonal passion, and it rallies our discontent with the oppressive institutions of civilization that conspire to frustrate their happiness. Yet it is the lovers' own powers of expression that fail to find a form or even to name the nature of their relation, and not merely the commonsensical incomprehension of Nelly and Lockwood or Brontë's respectful reticence. Catherine recognizes that somehow her need of Heathcliff involves his representation of all that she is not, including her language: "I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of creation if I were entirely contained here?" (p. 70). Catherine wants to get at the notion that selfhood is distributed between one's contained identity and all it is not.[13] The "I" is also elsewhere, not "entirely here." In part, such a conception of selfhood stuns the potency of language because it blocks the clear passage of the word into the outer realm of the signified; that is, the zone of mind or experience that would complete Catherine, the "existence of yours beyond you," is not separate from her present state and so cannot simply be named as something else. Her words for it cannot break into that imagined space and represent it, since that space has no place of its own; instead, the conjoined self haunts the threshold of self and other, inside and outside, as if it were a site, though it is nothing more than the placeless line of differentiation. The lovers ceaselessly survey and traverse the line between themselves. Catherine resorts to the vocabulary virtually of figure and ground to elaborate this unutterable notion: "my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but as my own being—so, don't talk of our separation again—it is impracticable" (p. 70). Ostensibly the separation but also the talk are "impracticable" in this situation, for there is no term, no form, for the relationship that would fulfill Catherine's and Heathcliff's wants. Like both sorts of framing, Heathcliff serves Catherine as the ground for her figure—the necessary foundation against which she distinguishes herself—and also as the imaged otherwise of herself—"the use of creation." In both regards he is the container that gives shape to the contained.

For all of the differences in Heathcliff's management of passion, he shares Catherine's grasp of an unspeakable edge of interlock-

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ing unity. When Catherine's death finally makes their incessant separations incurable, Heathcliff offers his own version of love's meaning: "You said I killed you—haunt me then! . . . Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!" (p. 143). Heathcliff's words, like Catherine's, disappear into the abyss of the inexpressible, which is the lovers' boundary. Each is the other's ground and life, being and soul; each is the other's essence experienced as external, one's core the other's frame, and that frame the first's sought center. Nelly finds the suitable image for their state when they reunite on the eve of Catherine's passing: "An instant they held asunder; and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring, and he caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive" (p. 137). The parts of the lock are indistinguishable to Nelly's modest eyes, but the configuration of interlockedness is what signifies their love to her.

It is this configural nature of Catherine and Heathcliff's attachment that stays them on the threshold of fulfillment throughout the novel, whether we employ the vocabulary of metaphysics, theology, psychology, sociology, or grammatology to characterize that nature. As the figure-ground relation might suggest, and the lock image might embody, the current that draws together Catherine and Heathcliff runs from the arbitrary opposition of their polarity rather than from any literal circumstances dividing them. What keeps them apart as it attracts them is less the simple facts of class discrepancy, or the conflict of natural appetite and social repression, or the incest prohibition, or the irretrievability of childhood's innocence—less these than the plain unavailability of a form for their bond. If we subscribe, for example, to the simple view that Catherine betrays her heart by marrying Edgar instead of Heathcliff, we ignore the lovers' own unquestioned devotion to *maintaining* the very barriers that keep them apart.[14] The kinds of prohibitions that seem to forestall their merging acquire force from being respected as actual obstacles when they are only virtual ones. It must strike every reader, for instance, that Catherine's prediction that marrying Heathcliff would degrade them seems a rationalization of some other reluctance to articulate their attachment in a common form: out of Heathcliff's hearing she elaborates that her love for him is fundamental to her "because he's more myself than I am" (p. 68), as if mere marriage were somehow simply beside the point of their relationship. Catherine thinks that she can concentrate on the strictly practical ad-

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vantages of marriage because to her the potency of their love escapes confinement to any recognized container. Conversely, Catherine's match with Edgar is the soul of conventional romantic love; she furnishes a nice litany of the ordinary attributes of the beloved when she explains to Nelly her decision to marry him and concludes that she loves him "as anybody loves" (p. 66).

In other ways Catherine and Heathcliff are balked by their powerlessness to represent the union they crave. If the prospect of marriage is no answer, neither is the recovery of childhood. It has become one of the truisms of the novel's critical edifice that Catherine and Heathcliff suffer exile from a world of preconscious, natural intimacy which they struggle ever after to recover or recall.[15] But *Wuthering Heights* steadfastly resists picturing either such original moments themselves or even sharp memories of them. In childhood the times of companionship that Catherine and Heathcliff enjoy are always the *products* and *not* the *predecessors* of discord, violence, and the often brutal reestablishment of social order. Catherine and Heathcliff are never closer than when one has been momentarily hurt or banished by the family, against which they can maintain their separation. Lockwood's acquaintance with the character of their love comes in the diary entry he happens upon in Catherine's former bed, and its first passage shows that the two children are thrown together by their rebellion against Hindley's "tyranny" and their mourning for old Earnshaw's patronage. The two are inclined to defy and mime the patriarchal order of the family, and yet they depend upon it to solidify their intimacy and purpose. Heathcliff's irruption into the Earnshaw household, of course, occasions his celebrated ostracism and objectification (he is "it"), and Nelly remarks that "from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house" (p. 31). Heathcliff's very place in the family is the product of its rending, and his maintenance of his authority—from Earnshaw's favoritism through Hindley's oppressiveness to the foundling's eventual mastery—depends on his manipulation of the legalized violence of domestic arrangements. Likewise, his intimacies with Catherine, scrupulously concealed by the novel as they are, are indicated only by the constraints they habitually defy. The so-called fullness of childhood innocence rarely if ever appears in *Wuthering Heights*; it is a virtual condition made palpable by the incessant flights and breakings out of the two children as they seek "to have a ramble at liberty" (p. 39), liberty meaningful only in the context of tyranny. Even the paradisiacal state of unity, then, is already a curative ghost called forth by what was an intolerable present. The remembered wholeness of

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childhood is the memory of a dream that was to have redeemed what was already lost. Nelly's account of the earliest phases of Heathcliff's and Catherine's positions in the family (the fourth and following chapters) invariably demonstrates that separation is the condition of their attraction, displacement the location of their alliance, exile the origin of their union.

Neither marriage in the future nor memory of their past will serve to denominate the state sought by Catherine and Heathcliff. Instead, the object of desire owes its mass to the velocity with which it recedes before the pursuit of the lovers. The collapse of the distinction between natural and cultural forms contributes to this same air of desire without nameable content. One of the murkiest restraints on Heathcliff's and Catherine's relationship is the simulated incest prohibition that periodically grows legible. Q. D. Leavis has been the most emphatic champion of the taboo's evocation in the novel,[16] and though the evidence is striking, Brontë meticulously prevents it from being conclusive. Throughout *Wuthering Heights* it is always *as if* Catherine and Heathcliff were brother and sister: though he is named for the deceased, perhaps oldest, Earnshaw son, Heathcliff is not that son (and his missing surname forever declares the family's willingness to bring him in, but not all the way into, its lineage). Even the hint of Heathcliff's bastardy only draws half a line between brother and sister. Edgar identifies the nature of their relationship as all but siblings when he pouts to Catherine about "the sight of your welcoming a runaway servant as a brother" (p. 81). For reasons that may escape them, Catherine and Heathcliff often behave as if the barriers they take to separate themselves are the terms for their intimacy.

Our impression that their love constantly drives them to the moors from the drawing room may make us forget that the lovers strictly observe the structuring codes of society. As they accept the burden of class dictates and the restrictions of consanguinity, so their instincts have been made highly conventional. Since Heathcliff is so regularly misrepresented as the thrust of stormy nature at the foundations of culture, it might be worth pointing out that Heathcliff, having survived the Earnshaws' instinctive equation of his swarthiness with bestiality, constantly surprises Nelly by being more refined, better mannered, and more amply furnished than the loutish gentry at which he takes aim. In the later, vaster stages of his revenge, Heathcliff leaves no doubt about the lawfulness of his design—from confining himself to the regulations of gaming in order to acquire Hindley's fortune to mastering the ins and outs of inheritance law.[17] Throughout his

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avenging career, Heathcliff follows the letter of the law, as he gives notice in warning Edgar through Nelly not to interfere with his marriage to Isabella: " 'But tell him also, to set his fraternal and magisterial heart at ease, that I keep strictly within the limits of the law' " (p. 129). Heathcliff's patient study of the ways of the world and Isabella's careless forfeiture of privilege for passion seem to create a reversal; in Nelly's view, "He was the only thing there that seemed decent, and I thought he never looked better. So much had circumstances altered their positions, that he would certainly have struck a stranger as a born and bred gentleman, and his wife as a thorough little slattern!" (p. 125). Nelly has an unconscious reason for repeatedly forgetting Heathcliff's advanced culture too (and I will take it up shortly), but even if she had simply remembered their shared childhood, she might have had a fuller appreciation of Heathcliff's polish.

The most striking facet of Heathcliff's early intimacies with Catherine is their refinement—however its youthful liveliness makes it jar on the ill and sobersided old Earnshaw. Indeed, when he dies Nelly is impressed by the wayward children's conversation: "no parson in the world ever pictured Heaven so beautifully as they did, in their innocent talk" (p. 36). Heathcliff's discoloration by the grime of the earth and his mental benightedness are the products of a "reform" (p. 43) in the order at the Heights, not his natural condition. Whatever further enameling Catherine picks up under the hands of the Lintons, it is certain that she is no savage to be transformed by them into a lady. It is Heathcliff and Catherine, staring through the Grange's windows, who already have an eye for luxury ("We should have thought ourselves in heaven!" [p. 40], Heathcliff reports to Nelly). When Heathcliff chooses to regress to a comparative state of nature upon Catherine's return, he acts with a sense of the gestural quality of his action; the dirt he bears signals his analysis of Catherine's too perfect absorption by the codes which are there to set off people, not pulverize them. Heathcliff's entire career from this point is a series of advances to be made against the pressures of exclusion and degradation; what he hopes to gain he is in fact simply regaining.

Even when Heathcliff behaves at his most despicable, he invariably turns out to be reflecting the violence inherent to the structure of social order. In the aftermath of Heathcliff's nearest disregard of the law, the kidnapping of Catherine the younger and her forced marriage to Linton, Brontë is careful to show that power, often exerted violently, is the condition of lawful order. Though Heathcliff detains Catherine against her will, she negotiates her

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own release by deciding that marrying Linton, a prospect she earlier pursues (with her father's belated approval, moreover), is an acceptable price to pay for rejoining Edgar before he dies. If Heathcliff is fiendish in holding her to her earlier promises, his monstrosity in part just magnifies the flimsiness of one's word in common society and the coercive selfishness of affectional relations. When Nelly evaluates the state of Catherine's dispossession, furthermore, she is forced to conclude that Heathcliff's occupation of the Heights cannot be opposed "I suppose legally[;] at any rate Catherine, destitute of cash and friends, cannot disturb his possession" (p. 250). Nelly exposes how fully the protection of the law depends upon the exercise of simple power—cash and friends.

Heathcliff's advent into the family flushes this intrinsic violence to the surface: Catherine spits at the poor creature, "earning for her pains, a sound blow from her father to teach her cleaner manners" (p. 31). And Hindley, "who had learnt to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend" (p. 31), may owe less to Heathcliff's literal usurpation than to his own Oedipal, unconscious realization that every father is first his son's oppressor. Heathcliff masters the economy of civil brutality by accepting Hindley's blows as a kind of capital: when he wants to exchange his now lame pony for Hindley's, Heathcliff threatens to tell Earnshaw of Hindley's earlier beatings, "and, if I speak of these blows, you'll get them again with interest" (p. 32). It is no wonder that when Nelly looks for vestiges of Heathcliff's youth in the man, she finds at worst a "half-civilized ferocity" (p. 81) yet lurking, and when Catherine looks out onto the moors of her childhood, she can imagine having been at best "half savage and hardy, and free" (p. 107).

Brontë's strategy is folded, then, in a way too readily ignored by readers who want to identify the contents of the opposing wings of *Wuthering Heights*. The realms of nature and culture, person and family, and male and female, for example, bear features which seem to divide them on the basis of intrinsic content; but the force of Brontë's writing simultaneously evacuates the contents by showing that each realm is at once the outer zone defining the other and also the required, essential, central, interior supplement to the other's lack. The namelessness of Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship accents this situation and helps explain the odd pointlessness of the characters' schemes for satisfaction. Many critics imply that Catherine and Heathcliff simply miss or renounce possibilities for contentment available to them out there—as if with Heathcliff grinning at her side, Catherine

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might have had the roof removed from the Heights and set up an authentically natural household, with Nelly serving them supper on the moors.[18] I have sought to show instead how their longing cannot abide the congealment of representation.

However, Brontë does allow the narrative to propose two modes of being for the lovers' sought union that accord more exactly with their inexpressible nature: the image of the border and the gesture of effacement. Given the fusion that desire seeks, it is not surprising that the imagery of the margin, the shared boundary, the dividing line, rules the lovers' vision of their merging. Heathcliff's most spectacular description of uniting with Catherine depicts the confusion of their remains in the graveyard. Heathcliff demands of Nelly that his burial arrangements be respected; he threatens to haunt her if she does not see to it that the sexton performs the service he has agreed to:

> "I got the sexton, who was digging Linton's grave, to remove the earth off her coffin lid, and I opened it. I thought, once, I would have stayed there, when I saw her face again —it is hers yet—he had hard work to stir me; but he said it would change, if the air blew on it, and so I struck one side of the coffin loose—and covered it up—not Linton's side, damn him! I wish he'd been soldered in lead—and I bribed the sexton to pull it away, when I'm laid there, and slide mine out too, I'll have it made so, and then, by the time Linton gets to us, he'll not know which is which!" (p. 244)

Heathcliff makes central the space of the barrier between them, the interval that both interferes with and makes possible a site for their reunion. The thickness of the missing coffin boards corresponds to the emptied forms of desire throughout the novel; the disfigured coffin frames open a virtual space that is the trace of the missing borderline.

That the space between desire and its object has been made a fetish in *Wuthering Heights* helps explain other prominent images to which the lovers resort. Catherine, for example, interpreting her dream about exile from childhood, concentrates less on her innocent pleasures or marital sufferings than on the gap opened by the sundering "stroke": "the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank" (p. 107). The imagery of her dream elaborates the derangement of being lost in that gaping blankness, the placeless line that cuts adulthood out of childhood: "But, supposing at twelve years old, I had been wrenched from the Heights, and

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every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and been converted, at a stroke into Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, and the wife of a stranger; an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world—You may fancy a glimpse of the abyss where I grovelled!" (p. 107). The abyss is the space that measures and makes the margin of desire, the barrier literally imaged in the window frame through which Catherine looks as she says this sentence and contemplates her return to her "all in all." She looks from the Grange's bedroom into "the outer darkness" (p. 109), where her home in the kirkyard lies; yet she also sees her candlelit room at the Heights, another home that awaits her. As throughout the novel, it is the "journey," "a way," the passage, that preoccupies the lovers, and not any destination privileged in its own right.

In that each lover thinks of the other as, paradoxically, an essential supplement to himself or herself, each encounters that other as a kind of pressing blankness that gives contour to the self. In *Wuthering Heights* the blankness of desire also attaches to the desired, and Catherine and Heathcliff each become, as lovers, the haunting specter of the other. Catherine promises that she will never rest "till you are with me" (p. 108), and Heathcliff welcomes just such a possession: "haunt me then! . . . Be with me always" (p. 143). The odd, satisfying change that seems to overtake Heathcliff at the end of the novel arises from closer approach to Catherine's blankness; having arranged for the communication of their remains underground, Heathcliff begins to "see" Catherine. At breakfast soon after, "he cleared a vacant space in front" of him and "gazed at something within two yards distance" (p. 281). According to my argument, such an emanation is as full a representation of the beloved as may be drawn; Catherine's haunting Heathcliff simply perpetuates the spacing and separation which constitute desire. We might not be as surprised as Nelly to find that "the fancied object was not fixed, either" (p. 281).

Edgar Linton's presence in Heathcliff's vision of perfectly possessing Catherine adds one final significance to blankness in the core story. Throughout their struggles to represent their relationship, Catherine and Heathcliff draw on context, ground, and margin to distinguish their love by what it is not. Linton's character is the structural embodiment of this principle, since he is invoked constantly to foil the lovers' sameness by his difference. Heathcliff pictures Edgar's belated arrival in the grave's decomposing processes to set off his own merging with Catherine. Catherine needs Linton's feeble courtship and marriage proposal to articulate the substance of Heathcliff's uniqueness. Nelly intuitively

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recognizes Linton's function when she notices that Heathcliff has discarded a lock of the husband's hair in Catherine's locket and substituted his own; Nelly reports that she retrieves Linton's: "I twisted the two, and enclosed them together" (p. 144). A curious gesture, and one that marks the inescapably triangular nature of this represented love. In his contempt for his plight, Heathcliff names Linton's function by referring to him as "the cipher at the Grange" (p. 177). Edgar as cipher sounds monotonically, marking a place that has no intrinsic value in order to let the other figures signify.

As the configuration of their coffins will suggest, the frame and framing of each lover is the boundary, the pressing edge of the other, that might give way to allow passages of communication. As their physical frames decompose, they will merge in the empty space opened by the removal of the casket sides. In Heathcliff's view, their union is less the accumulation of a new entity than the motion of eternal transit; it is as if the bodies will cross and recross the space that demarcates separation and reparation. This idea has consequences for two other crucial registers of *Wuthering Heights*, the language and gestures of transport. We have seen that the terminology of love in the novel falls toward inexpressibility; likewise, the vocabulary reserved for the satisfaction of desire effaces the object and emphasizes movement. In the following passage, for example, Catherine envisions her fast possession of Heathcliff in heaven; yet her prepositional desperation betrays the absence of place for such a state: " 'he's in my soul. . . . I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it. . . . I shall be incomparably beyond and above you all. I *wonder* he won't be near me!' " (pp. 136–37). Although Catherine's utterance appears to describe the state of union, in fact her language fails to consolidate the divergent ideas that Heathcliff is both already within (her soul) and also to be joined out there (beyond and above). One can hardly be "with" and "in" at the same time: to be with Heathcliff is for Catherine to be beside him; to be in Heathcliff is to obliterate the very boundary that makes the concept of "with" possible. The effect of seeking what is in, through, with, beyond, and above is to void the notion of "there." Beside the namelessness of their relationship, then, we might place this second class of verbal behavior, in which what is desired as central can be called only the outside.

The equivalent for this state of language in the novel is the

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largely unremarked oscillation of the characters' actions. If perfecting their passion were a question of getting hold of something or someone, any gesture might set off a genuine precipitation of action in the plot. As I have argued, however, there is nothing for the lovers to say or do, and so they clench, separate, and fade into the parting of potential reunion. Heathcliff follows a course deprived of destination throughout *Wuthering Heights*. Perhaps the most eerie example is the first occasion of his visit to Catherine's grave. He describes the scene to Nelly:

> "Being alone, and conscious two yards of loose earth was the sole barrier between us, I said to myself—
> "'I'll have her in my arms again! . . .'
> "I got a spade from the toolhouse, and began to delve with all my might—it scraped the coffin; I fell to work with my hands; the wood commenced cracking about the screws, I was on the point of attaining my object, when it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave, and bending down. . . . but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth." (p. 245)

Heathcliff's mad effort to thrust below and within produces the sensation that Catherine is above and without: he is "unspeakably consoled. Her presence was with me" (p. 245). This incessant reversal of interior and exterior, origin and destination, governs virtually all of the lovers' movements. Heathcliff is constantly coming in from the outside (from Liverpool, the stables, the moors, the Grange, the American war for independence, the conditions of dispossession and subservience, the position of Catherine's brother or servant), only to be driven, or to drive himself, back outside. Likewise, Catherine stands at windows looking out upon freedom, but once out (in nature, in childhood, in heaven), she longs to return inside. Late in the novel, on the eve of his death, Heathcliff signals the positioning of his desire when Nelly enters his room: "He was leaning against the ledge of an open lattice, but not looking out; his face was turned to the interior gloom" (p. 279). Heathcliff occupies the threshold of the casement frame, and his posture reflects the attitude of the novel toward the centrality of the open barrier. Heathcliff's pose predicts his death scene, in which "the lattice, flapping to and fro, had grazed one hand that rested on the sill" (p. 284), and recalls his lover's hand, which thrusts through the locked window, wanting to enter, only to be

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cut by the threshold's half-broken pane. The lovers incessantly flee from enclosure to expanse and back, reversing themselves at the moment of their "arrivals," encountering each other as remains left in the space between.

Finally, we might see Heathcliff's devotion to a revenge he cannot come to execute as the most telling example of love's dependence on the gestures and language of inefficacy. What has struck all readers is how demeaning and uncharacteristic Heathcliff's revenge plot is. The rise of the second generation of lovers and Heathcliff's descent into grumpy sniping threaten to break the coherence of *Wuthering Heights* structurally, as indeed its coherence endures strain at other points as well. Yet Heathcliff's determination to usurp Hindley's fortune and lands lawfully and his assumption of authority over Catherine the younger and the Heights constitute more than simply an effort to correct the ills he has suffered in childhood. While Heathcliff surely succeeds in rewriting the past in part, forcing Hareton into a parody of his own degradation and exclusion, the motives of an avenger, oddly, also empower his attraction to Catherine the elder from the beginning. The origin of Heathcliff's affection for his new stepsister is not clear, but a measure of it seems to be an initial appetite for revenge and restitution. Heathcliff's study of the Earnshaw family teaches him that people must *take* that to which they are entitled.[19] This puzzle—that law is force and acquisition robbery—licenses Heathcliff to seize the place of the firstborn and to reach for both the rights of the oldest brother (the father's favor, lands, and wealth) and the rights of a brother-in-law (Hindley's sister). By responding to Catherine's love, then, Heathcliff entrenches his tenuous position within and without the family. We need not attribute a conscious motivation to Heathcliff to read his determined rise and return to Catherine's favor as inextricably bound up with a self-made gentleman's advance. More profoundly, Heathcliff not only loves because he seeks revenge, he avenges because he loves.

The formless love required by Catherine and Heathcliff frequently drives them to gestures of cancellation to indicate their desire. When Heathcliff returns from his financial exploits, surely he cannot intend to marry Catherine. What he wants somehow is to *un*marry her from Edgar, whether by loosening the grounds of her affection or by alienating her husband's devotion. Heathcliff seeks to recover the state of the threshold, the blank abyss, that demarcates their relation. As the nature of revenge demands, Heathcliff is left with eradicating an action by repeating it, with curing exclusion by destroying the inside. It is not surprising that Heathcliff sees that such gestures finally express the futility

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of expression. Just as there is not destination for his or Catherine's career as lovers, so there is no point to the machine of his revenge:

> "It is a poor conclusion, is it not," he observed, having brooded a while on the scene he had just witnessed. "An absurd termination to my violent exertions? I get levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready, and in my power, I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished! My old enemies have not beaten me—now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives—I could do it; and none could hinder me—But where is the use?" (p. 274)

The answer that the novel frames in all but words is "nowhere."

A Frame Concealed It

Although we are meant to forget the narrative frame of *Wuthering Heights* periodically, Brontë does not allow us to relinquish it entirely. As if to recall us from the illusion of depth created by the frame's perspective, the novel draws us back to the surface intermittently, in part to remind us that the three-dimensional passion situated in front of the vanishing point is strictly a virtual presence. As we have seen within the core story, the product of representation is an effaced presence, a haunting specter arising out of the motions of naming and picturing. In the relation of the frame to the core story, the same condition of representation rules; the enframed reaches of *Wuthering Heights* constitute the spectral creation of the framing narration.

Glancing up from the graphic vitality of the novel's central action, we may be startled to remember that *Lockwood writes Wuthering Heights*. While I will not insist that we are to read every word of the novel as a direct expression of Lockwood's person, still the narrative's status requires us to understand the entire book as his diary. *Wuthering Heights* is framed by the pretext of Lockwood's entries, from the "1801" that marks the opening to the "1802" that initiates the closing sequence of three chapters. And as our diarist occasionally reminds us, the whole story passes through the filter of his transcription (at least) to reach us. Like any diary, this one must be privately kept and demands its author to sift, reflect upon, and construe events. Moreover, as the explicitly self-expressive introduction demonstrates Lockwood's

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writing up of the Earnshaw-Linton story cannot be untangled from his consideration of his own life. For instance, Nelly clearly supposes that Lockwood wants the story from her as a way to approach a relation with Catherine the younger, whose beauty smites him on his first visits to the Heights. Aside from fanning his infatuation, however, Lockwood's writing down of Nelly's story also opens opportunities for both self-encounter and self-evasion. Even when Lockwood seems literally or figuratively to fall asleep to the story enfolding him, his agency can never be wholly discounted. In the famous scene of his dreaming, which so many readers take as emblematic of the story's impingement on his unconscious, Lockwood's role as diarist intrudes, already covering his dream with the glaze of analysis. For example, he says that in his dream he and Joseph "came to the chapel—I have passed it really in my walks, twice or thrice" (p. 18); Lockwood's "really" is not reality itself, it is his assertion that a writer is sorting dream from waking. Just like the dreams he records, then, Lockwood's mere recording of Nelly's story never can be pried free of the frame of his reception and appropriation.[20]

This is not to argue, of course, that every reader does not leave Lockwood and Nelly behind for long stretches. But if we do, it is because as writer and teller they have concealed themselves in the very frame that makes their story possible. The subtlety of this relationship is captured by a moment later in the diary when Lockwood observes in passing that he will "continue" Nelly's account "in her own words, only a little condensed"; since she strikes him as "a very fair narrator," Lockwood doubts that he can "improve her style" (p. 132). Such a claim is an epitome of the clouded relationship of producer and text, however, as "Nelly" 's style first appears after Lockwood's preliminaries with no more notice than a shift in the referent of the first-person pronoun and a skipped line of type (p. 29): the "I" of the diarist simply turns into the "I" of Nelly's gossip by passing through a blank. Thus, Lockwood's later identification of himself as the "new" author is actually a disavowal of his earlier authorship, since Nelly's style has been embedded in his style throughout and since he has been the narrative's former author no less than its present one.

By showing that Lockwood's, and later Nelly's, casting of the narration has specific effects, I hope to dispel any suspicion that I am belaboring the premises of the novel. If we do return to the outermost rim of the frame, we may notice that Lockwood's encounter with the remnants of the core story—with the tortured survivors of the tale about to be told—prefigures much of what

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follows. Lockwood's overture begins by proposing that barriers are forms for concourse; he exults that "Mr Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us": "A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows" (p. 1). Lockwood likes the prospect of intimacy with a "man who seemed more exaggeratedly reserved than myself" and signals his attraction with his horse's "breast fairly pushing the barrier" (p. 1). The remarkable interpenetration of identity that founds Catherine and Heathcliff's passion also emerges in Lockwood's eagerness to compare Heathcliff's behavior with his own because it strikes "a sympathetic chord within" (p. 3). He begins to surmise:

> I know, by instinct, his reserve springs from an aversion to showy displays of feeling—to manifestations of mutual kindliness. He'll love and hate, equally under cover, and esteem it a species of impertinence, to be loved or hated again—No, I'm running on too fast—I bestow my own attributes over liberally on him. Mr Heathcliff may have entirely dissimilar reasons for keeping his hand out of the way, when he meets a would be acquaintance, to those which actuate me. (p. 3)

Our diarist notes two central impulses: to bestow himself onto his subjects and to retreat from too strong an identification. Indeed, to love and hate "under cover" describes Lockwood's behavior as he hides himself in other people's books and beds.

The outer edge of the novel's frame also identifies the confusion of interior and exterior with which the reader will grow familiar: pausing on the threshold of Wuthering Heights, Lockwood notices the inscription "1500" and "Hareton Earnshaw," and "would have made a few comments, and requested a short history of the place," but "the surly owner's" "attitude at the door appeared to demand my speedy entrance, or complete departure." Are these alternatives or appositives? The farther within the "penetralium" of the story Lockwood proceeds, the more completely he departs our notice and his own. Accordingly, both the structure and the contents of Wuthering Heights appear as functions of the frame, the frame which supports and opens the space for living hidden by what it encloses: at the Heights, supplies stretch to the kitchen's roof, "the latter had never been underdrawn, its entire anatomy lay bare to an inquiring eye, except where a frame of wood laden with oatcakes, and clusters of legs of beef, mutton and ham,

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concealed it" (p. 3). The exposed structural frame of *Wuthering Heights* is partly concealed by the position and contents of the interior frame.

Lockwood's marginality to his own writing defines his relation to the core story throughout. Despite his ejaculation that the younger Catherine possesses "an admirable form, and the most exquisite little face that I have ever had the pleasure of beholding" (p. 8), Lockwood prefers to behold her safely through Nelly's tale rather than to risk growing beholden to her. Given Lockwood's notorious confession of his seaside flirtation and retreat, and his mother's prophecy that he "should never have a comfortable home" (p. 3), the story is bound—by the very conditions which bring it into being—to fail in its overt plot to interest Lockwood in Catherine. Nelly's belated realization that in fact Hareton and not Lockwood will make Catherine the better husband, then, is already the charted course of the narrative as Lockwood brings it into being. His disposition in the narrative frame determines the fate of the plot both as it predicts his disinclination and doom and as it engenders Nelly's story as the protective barrier within which he may spy on a passion that is not for him. Lockwood's engagement with Nelly's story arises from a thoroughgoing ambivalence: on the one hand, he seeks to bestow himself on his protagonists, beholding the power of their attraction and the strength of their attachment; on the other, he wants to efface too minute a reflection of his own failed desires, taking refuge in the almost indecipherable misery of its characters.

The latter of these two attitudes forges Lockwood's steady depreciation of the story he is told. A chain of regressions produces Catherine and Heathcliff's tale for Lockwood. Retreating from seaside to London, London to Thrushcross Grange, the Grange to Wuthering Heights, kitchen to bedroom to bed, waking to dozing, Lockwood accelerates the process of shrinking "icily into myself" (p. 4). Within his diary—transcribed during the day's marginal moments, reserved for life's surplus reflection—Lockwood recounts idly turning the pages of Catherine's books as he waits on the threshold of sleep. On the edge between reading and dreaming he discovers Branderham's volume of sermons, only to be drawn into the marginal account of a diarist's oppressed existence. Reading this literal frame narrative, then, invites Lockwood to slip into his own story. Haunted by the "form" of the young, nameless woman at Heathcliff's hearth, Lockwood is beset in reverie by the names written on the ledge of his framed-in bed: suddenly "a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres—the air swarmed with Catherines" (p. 15). Catherine's name ap-

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pears to him transformed from text to margin—the glare of white letters; and those openly white characters invite the marks of Lockwood's own writing as he attempts to decipher and supplement the writing which covers the margin of the volume he turns to read. This scene prepares us for the complicated ways in which Lockwood insinuates and conceals himself in the story which follows. The blankness of the meaningless name points to the story as a vacant space to be filled by the diarist's hand; this centered margin offers refuge but also threatens engulfment. Lockwood's manipulation of the texts which surround him suggests that he is both sheltered and condemned by them: he uses Catherine's books to block the broken window, but Branderham's discourse also threatens to confront him with his own place in the story of illicit passion: "*Thou* art the Man!" (p. 19). Lockwood rouses himself because he wants to "dispel the obtrusive name" (p. 15), and his deportment throughout the novel seeks the dispersal, dispelling, and deferral of the desire figured in the name "Catherine."

Lockwood's visit to Wuthering Heights nearly makes him lose his bearings altogether. Looking out on the grounds the morning after the blizzard of whiteness assails him, Lockwood notices that the tracks he followed before have vanished; they have been "blotted from the chart which my yesterday's walk left pictured in my mind" (p. 25). In the symbolic register we have been examining, Lockwood is engulfed by the snowy whiteness of the margin—both his marginal passion suddenly made central again through the agency of "Catherine" and the fearful possibility of having to open his diary, his own marginalia, to the beholding of himself and his readers. Thus when Lockwood initiates his return (to the Grange, to his senses, to good health), he plays down the pertinence of the story to himself. Lockwood relies on Heathcliff as a guide through regions of the emotions he will never master on his own, and he collapses into Nelly's tale as into her ministrations. Lockwood always means her "gossip" to serve another end—"either rouse me to animation, or lull me to sleep" (p. 27). The symptom of his illness and incapacitation, the story is always the sign of a lack, something serving in the stead: "I am too weak to read, yet I feel as if I could enjoy something interesting. Why not have up Mrs. Dean to finish her tale?" (p. 77). Nelly's story seems merely to fill the interval of Lockwood's recovery. Yet in view of his own ability to exorcise the ecstasies of desire through the fate of the "hero" and "heroine" (p. 77), I might also propose that the core story is the very cure that restores Lockwood to tranquillity by the end of the novel.

Lockwood steadfastly wants to keep himself out of the way of

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the Heights story. Several times he is unsettled by the suspicion that he has grown implicated in the family's doings, once imagining that Joseph has insulted him instead of Catherine, who has crept behind him. Heathcliff's discovering him in Catherine's bed climaxes Lockwood's terror at being exposed as a culpable participant. The dream of Branderham's accusation, interwoven with Catherine's swarming name and beseeching hand, reflects Lockwood's guiltiness and thirst for release. Indeed, Catherine's breaking of the windowpane, whatever manifold psychosexual significances it also carries, suggests the rupture of the frame by the creatures evoked under a diarist's hand: "my ghostly Catherine" (p. 28) is the product of Lockwood's reading, listening, and writing (the letters of her name, we recall, "are vivid as spectres"), but the writer seeks to release his hand from the grasp of the written. Writing, for Lockwood, is a way of dispossession; it is his main method "for keeping his hand out of the way" (p. 3).

The frame is there to protect the framer through its diversion toward the center. Having discovered Catherine's diary in a margin, Lockwood is led to read the center text as well. Filtered through his reverie, Branderham's discourse gives Lockwood a view of himself—his impotence, guilt, and matriarchal domination (he wonders to Heathcliff whether his host is not related to Branderham on his mother's side). But Lockwood's "dreams" are already the margin of a margin's margin—a center derived from the displacements of waking reflection to reading Catherine's diary, to dozing, to reading Branderham's sermon, to dreaming. Such shuttling about enables Lockwood to elude a direct confrontation with himself; the shifting center forestalls his own extrusion. This remission of the center posits one of the main figures for identity in *Wuthering Heights*, as we have seen, and it establishes the fact of transgression as significant not because of any violated contents but because it manifests boundaries. Though he does not, or cannot, say what they are, Lockwood notices that he dreams of "odd transgressions that I never imagined previously" (p. 19). That there is a zone beyond his imagination, transgressions that he will never name, constitutes the bulwark of Lockwood's marginalized life; that his reverie is composed purely of transgression suggests that Lockwood is in part the author of Catherine and Heathcliff's purely transgressive love.

Lockwood seeks a mediated relationship with desire, one that will open a passage through the precincts of passion without detaining him permanently. Nelly's story kindles his craving for the representation of love and its objects, not for those objects "themselves." Though Lockwood is attracted to the face and form of

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the younger Catherine, he encourages Nelly to concentrate on the story of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, as if the first generation actually derives from and displaces the second. It is the told passion of Catherine and Heathcliff that happily gets in the way of Lockwood's untold passion for Catherine Linton. Throughout Nelly's tale Lockwood keeps his eye trained on the coming of the younger Catherine, referring to her once as the "second edition" of her mother (p. 132) and conceding that the latter stages of the story move him to request the hanging of her portrait over his fireplace (p. 217). Lockwood will not go beyond a framed representation of his "beloved," however; he protests to Nelly that though he might succumb to Catherine's charms, he is only a sojourner in an unfamiliar land: " 'It may be very possible that *I* should love her; but would she love? I doubt it too much to venture my tranquillity, by running into temptation; and then my home is not here. I'm of the busy world, and to its arms I must return. Go on" (p. 217). The story serves to conduct Lockwood into and out of love's presence. Though the effects of his repression and timidity seem obvious, Lockwood's use of the core story to accomplish these ends may not be.

Lockwood attaches himself to Heathcliff as a representative of the vigorous lover and to Edgar as the soul of the responsible husband. At the beginning of the novel, Lockwood takes Heathcliff to be Catherine Linton's husband, a condition he envies mightily. This posited and then corrected relationship stimulates Lockwood's fancy, which rides Heathcliff's desire for Catherine Earnshaw as it suppresses his own state of longing. At crucial moments in Nelly's account, Lockwood interrupts to locate himself more centrally in the telling. At the beginning of chapter 15, for example, when Lockwood promises to "continue" Nelly's tale after a week's suspension, he steps in to describe Catherine's recovery of beauty after her illness: her features have been "altered," but "there seemed unearthly beauty in the change" (p. 133). Lockwood has an interest in Catherine's situation here because she has survived temporarily the collision of contrary allegiances—to Heathcliff's consuming love and to Edgar's limited peacefulness. Lockwood, too, finds himself wavering in fancy between these strains—admiring the urgency of Heathcliff's demands, but sympathizing with Edgar's civilized restraint. Indeed, Lockwood reminds Nelly of Edgar at one point when she searches for a way to describe Linton's unusually cultivated talk: "He had a sweet, low manner, of speaking, and pronounced his words as you do, that's less gruff than we talk here and softer" (p. 59). Catherine's altered beauty testifies to the potential balance of these conflict-

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ing calls; she stands in for her daughter, who remains similarly suspended in Lockwood's deferred desire.

Lockwood's intrusion in chapter 15 also precipitates the scene of Catherine and Heathcliff's most strongly sensual contact, their clench on the threshold of life and death. Their faces "hid against each other, washed by each other's tears" (p. 138), the lovers kiss, Heathcliff "covering her with frantic caresses" (p. 137). Lockwood intervenes interlinearly at this point in the narrative because such scenes are exactly what he wants to picture—though only picture—for himself and his own Catherine. Drawn as he is to the spectacle, Lockwood accepts Nelly's discomfort at the scene, too, since he must hold himself away from this prospect. Lockwood surely endorses Nelly's view that "I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species" (p. 137). This feeling arises from their conventional certainty that abandonment to such passion is unseemly, hardly even human. The bestial nature of such a relationship is what initially sent Lockwood shrinking icily inside himself and what makes him reinscribe his repression in the face of Catherine's beauty at the end of the story: "and her face—it was lucky he [Hareton] could not see her face, or he would never have been so steady—I could, and I bit my lip, in spite, at having thrown away the chance I might have had, of doing something else besides staring at its smiting beauty" (p. 261). But this "something else besides," the unnameable content of perfected love, coincides exactly with the effaced center of Catherine's and Heathcliff's passion, the fictional opening that marks and displaces Lockwood's self-confrontation.

Like the Grange that is Lockwood's home away from home, or his bed at the Heights that is his room within a room, the narrative of *Wuthering Heights* shelters Lockwood as a retreat. He inhabits the book like his house, master for a term. Though he vanishes for an interval, he reemerges at the end of the novel as "Mr Lockwood, the master" (p. 259). The story puts him in fleeting contact with his emotions and temperament, but also leaves him safe passage out. Lockwood's framing of the core story is an exercise of fancy; it affords self-identification as self-effacement, possession as encirclement, involvement as rimming. Lockwood and Nelly disclose themselves as the imaginative occupants, ghostly tenants, of the story they collaborate upon, ciphers beside the story they give themselves to, yet deciphered in the act of telling it.[21] Lockwood has a right to speak of his later reappearance at the Grange as "my unwelcome apparition" (p. 259).

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To Frame High Notions

Like her fellow teller, Nelly too haunts the narration of Catherine and Heathcliff's history. She is so much with them as a character that we may forget her responsibility for representing them to Lockwood and us. And yet if, like Lockwood, Nelly allows the story to absorb her, that absorption actually enlarges her place in the novel, letting her appropriate all of the narrative's passages for her own reflection and tenancy. Though the story seems to speak in its own voice through her, Nelly is far more than a medium for the reappearance of the past. Paradoxically, her remarkable recall of speeches, accounts, confessions, and letters actually testifies to a *freer* imaginative hand; the more letter perfect Nelly claims her memory to be, the more confident we can be that she has had to make up at least the surface of the narration. We might want to ask how much of herself gets in the way of Nelly's reanimation of the voices of her youth.

Nelly's youth powerfully evokes that of her hero. Like Heathcliff, she seems perpetually to shuttle between occupying a rightful place in the Earnshaw family and being excluded from it. Nelly remembers that old Earnshaw treated her like one of his offspring; after asking Catherine and Hindley what they want from Liverpool, he turns to Nelly: "He did not forget me. . . . He promised to bring me a pocketful of apples, and pears, and then he kissed his children good bye, and set off" (p. 29). Earnshaw almost numbers Nelly among "his children," and later she summarizes her closeness to her virtual siblings when she defends her loyalty to the dissipated Hindley: "and besides, you know, I had been his foster sister" (p. 55). As foster child, however, Nelly is prone to repeated degradation. Nelly cannot bring herself to force the foundling on Catherine and Hindley against their wishes, for instance, and so she abandons "it" in the passage outside their room; her "cowardice and inhumanity" are repaid by her "banishment" from the house. Yet she does not consider her exile "perpetual" and returns to the status to which she feels entitled, ambiguous though it is. Nelly vastly understates her prominence and power in the household when she refers to herself as "an elderly woman, and a servant merely" (p. 237). Nelly accepts such subordination because she exorcises the uge to rebel against her lot through the complex fate of another failed insubordinate, Heathcliff.

Almost from the outset, Nelly simultaneously encourages and blocks Heathcliff's drive to ascend. When he despairs of compet-

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ing with young Edgar and fending off Hindley, Nelly supplies imaginative compensation: "You're fit for a prince in disguise. . . . Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!" (p. 48). Nelly incites Heathcliff's dream of equality and even superiority. They bond when Nelly nurses him back to health after he suffers an initial illness in the Earnshaw house. She assures Heathcliff of his greater force when she promises to improve his appearance:

> "And now, though I have dinner to get ready, I'll steal time to arrange you so that Edgar Linton shall look quite a doll beside you: and that he does—You are younger, and yet, I'll be bound, you are taller and twice as broad across the shoulders—you could knock him down in a twinkling; don't you feel that you could?" (p. 47)

Nelly fosters in Heathcliff the potential for subversive violence, and it is no accident that she "steals" time from her own domestic labor to do so. Heathcliff is the emblem of the disadvantaged orphan who may be groomed to overthrow the privileged gentry. Nelly remains faithful to this impulse in Heathcliff's course throughout, constantly noting his increasing accomplishments and acquisitions, deftly furthering his repeated attempts to regain Catherine's affection. Though she protests, Nelly never fails to negotiate Heathcliff's requests to see Catherine; indeed, she stoutly defends Heathcliff's claim during the famous confession scene, in which Catherine declares her love for Heathcliff after it is too late to prevent his flight. Nelly amplifies this restitutive strain in Heathcliff's career when she recalls how his death leads her to "imaging some fit parentage for him; and repeating my waking meditations, I tracked his existence over again, with grim variations" (p. 280). The reveries of "imaging" correspond with Lockwood's early dreams, and both suggest that Heathcliff is a delegate to be "tracked" in the imagination into realms inaccessible to cold common sense. Nelly *is* in Heathcliff's "place" in important respects, and she reveals her own need to "frame high notions of my birth" in order "to support the oppressions of a little farmer."

Yet the ambiguity of this last phrase—"to support the oppressions"—suggests that Nelly's every subversive whim is chastened by the fear and guilt of the subservient. For Nelly teaches herself through Heathcliff's lot to support oppression in two senses: to withstand it but also to uphold it. Only by seeing that Nelly at once furthers and condemns Heathcliff's dream can we

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appreciate the full indecisiveness of her behavior. The confession scene offers us a clear example, since Nelly not only fails to prevent Heathcliff's misunderstanding and flight but forces Catherine to pronounce her love *because* it is too late. Nelly becomes "sensible of Heathcliff's presence" just as Catherine announces that it would degrade her to marry Heathcliff; he disappears before she says that "he shall never know how I love him" (p. 68). Since Heathcliff's stirring, Nelly's realization, and his departure cannot occur in the space of a single word, we must assume that Nelly is paralyzed by motivation and not inopportunity. Her depth of feeling for Heathcliff's rights, as she explains them in the subsequent dialogue, rules out idle malice; instead, Nelly is seized by the need to promulgate Heathcliff's fortunes and punish them in the same motion. She secures Catherine's love for him by eliciting an extravagant description of Heathcliff's centrality and an exhaustive catalog of Linton's triviality. But she must do so, given the now widening gulf between the "true" lovers, more as a kind of mourning than of matchmaking. Nelly is driven to entertain transgression only as she is sure it can be repelled. Her strained allegiances constantly put her in the way of accepting confidences only to betray them, offering her aid only to retract it, essaying a judgment only to regret it, fostering disobedience only to expose it.

Nelly's obedience to patriarchal order and her craving to have it overthrown suspend her loyalties in the story she tells Lockwood. As it does for her auditor, the narrative offers temporary refuge for Nelly from the exacting oppressions of her marginal life. As she fuels and frustrates the transgressive love at the center of her story, we repeatedly see her face appearing behind those of her hero and heroine. Taking the young Heathcliff to a mirror, Nelly tries to interpret his fiendish features as a prince's disguise: "Come to the glass, and I'll let you see what you should wish" (p. 47). Nelly's commenting reflection peers back at Heathcliff too, and she comes to insinuate her own wishes in her decipherment of his. In a bracketing scene, Nelly tries to restore Catherine from the alienation of her intellect. Horrified by a face she no longer recognizes as her own, Catherine listens to Nelly's explication:

> I took her hand in mind, and bid her be composed, for a succession of shudders convulsed her frame, and she *would* keep straining her gaze towards the glass.
>
> "There's nobody here!" I insisted. "It was *yourself*, Mrs Linton; you knew it a while since."
>
> . . . .

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> "Why what *is* the matter?" cried I. "Who is coward now? Wake up! That is the glass—the mirror, Mrs Linton; and you see yourself in it, and there am I too by your side." (p. 105)

This moment marks Nelly's place in her story, a marginal face in the frame, urging Catherine to see herself and, in doing so, to see that a lover is the nobody who is there. We have seen that in the core story the lovers' selves are spectral; in the frame the narrators concordantly possess and empty themselves.

Nelly's tenancy in her narrative puts her in the way of passion and personal ascendency, but also allows her safe passage past them. Nelly's story repeatedly displays her placelessness and yearning for lodging. Although she is emphatically degraded to the periphery of the society she serves—daughter of a poor man, her mother her predecessor as nurse, a "human fixture" (p. 26) barred from economic or marital advancement—Nelly often finds herself vaulting into vacated positions above her. The list of her temporary posts is impressive: when Frances is about to die after delivering Hareton, the house girl enviously informs Nelly that she is to nurse it, "I wish I were you, because it will be all yours when there is no missis!" (p. 53). Whenever Linton calls on Catherine, Nelly is instructed by Hindley "to make a third party" (p. 59). Having misbehaved, Heathcliff is exiled from the other children's dancing, and Nelly is "appointed to supply the deficiency" (p. 50). Isabella's desperation to communicate her plight drives her to Nelly: "Still, I must write to somebody, and the only choice left me is you" (p. 116). Edgar's failing health eventually deprives his daughter of his companionship, and Nelly "esteemed it a duty to supply its lack, as much as possible, with mine; an inefficient substitute" (p. 195). With the family increasingly decimated, Nelly is required by Heathcliff to hold "the mistress's post in making tea and carving; so I was indispensable at table" (p. 269). And she continues her fancied ascent by mothering Hareton and Cathy: "You know, they both appeared in a measure, my children" (p. 273). Nelly even edges toward betraying her designs on Heathcliff; once she recalls that when Catherine wants to unveil a secret admirer of Heathcliff's, he at first seems to suspect Nelly, not Isabella: "Heathcliff, I'm proud to show you, at last, somebody that dotes on you more than myself. I expect you to feel flattered—nay, it's not Nelly; don't look at her!" (p. 89). And twice at the mention of Heathcliff's death, tears start in Nelly's eyes.

As she presents herself, Nelly takes shape by finding and filling the gaps left in the institutions of society. Granted a degraded

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status, Nelly may only fleetingly occupy positions of entitlement. In one respect, then, Nelly's situation mimes the very principles of inclusion, exclusion, and limited permeability that are the foundation of family and class. Nelly negotiates the boundaries that define inside and outside. Like Heathcliff, "the out and outer" (p. 41), this no-account outsider is brought inside, to serve as the cipher that keeps the configurations of family and class intact by illuminating their borders. As is true of so many structural registers in *Wuthering Heights*, the center is kept in place by the ciphering pressure of the margin. Nelly is by turns the surplus and the deficit upon which society depends. She flows and clots at various ruptures in the family's well-being, only to be dissolved and sent on to another site of breakage. The potency of her restorative place keeping arises from the strength with which she accepts subordination; she assumes the roles open to her but does not appropriate them.

In a Holier Frame, or Framing a Bit of a Lie

Nelly may be entranced by the unfathomable devotion of the lovers to each other, but she rejoices when their lives finally quiet down in death. Beholding Catherine's now smooth brow, Nelly extols the consolations of the deathbed: "My mind was never in a holier frame, than while I gazed on that untroubled image of Divine rest" (p. 140). Both Nelly and Lockwood are relieved that the destination of their story turns out to be the restoration of tranquillity, with its conclusion that unquiet slumbers can no longer be imagined. What propels the tellers' craving for release from the narrative, however, is finally not the story's strangeness —for all its monstrosity, its characters of nearly another species— but the intimate resemblances of the frame and the enframed. At first, as in so many reaches of *Wuthering Heights*, we might take the tellers as the opposites of their protagonists; yet the novel suggests that here, as throughout, what seems contrary is actually complementary. Just as Catherine and Heathcliff serve as both exterior and essence to each other, so the fiction erects imaginary desires beyond, yet within, its framers. Inquiring into Heathcliff's cracked antics at the end, Nelly allows mildly that "he might have had a monomania on the subject of his departed idol; but on every other point his wits were as sound as mine" (p. 275).

Early in the novel Catherine reminds Nelly that the "use of creation" is to represent "an existence of yours beyond you" (p. 70). As we have already for the lovers, we might apply this formulation to the tellers in order to characterize the purposes of

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imaginative (not only natural) creation. In the interval of their narrative, Nelly and Lockwood both occupy manners of being otherwise inadmissible by them. Through their exacting conventionality, Nelly and Lockwood evoke the spectral satisfactions and transgressions that haunt the repressive order of society. Catherine and Heathcliff's love is the ghost of the prohibitions that structure society: it has the air of unspeakably natural passion, even incest, the spaciousness of escape from tyrannous convention, the heedlessness of self-abandon, the dark allure of disease and deathliness. Toward this representation of an existence beyond the numbing containments of their lives, the narrators grope as they pass into the story. And yet the mysterious "ideal" of Catherine and Heathcliff's passion fails finally to sustain its perfect otherness. Inexorably the script of the framers' hands grows legible in the novel's palimpsest: the subversiveness of passion in the core story—whether we focus on the romantic or social facet of that passion—reverts into subservience to convention, representation, reason, health. The central love is stained, then, from the outset by the strains of its creators' imaginations. Catherine and Heathcliff end up reinforcing the dictates of class, family, the law, and mortality. What they seem to defy they actually verify. And it is in this swerve toward a holier, sanctioned frame that Lockwood and Nelly escape (with) themselves,[22] for the survival of the narrators at the cost of their protagonists defines the triumph of framing this fiction. "Imaging" transcendence, innocence, regression, and naturalness—the zone projected by the novel's fantasy of a perfected society—imaging them is losing them and accepting their loss. When critics speak of Brontë's vision of a world in which authentic values might hold sway, they comply with the very process that Brontë unsettles in *Wuthering Heights*.[23] Brontë shows that—helpless as we are to stop longing for a corrective transformation of our present circumstances—those circumstances determine the very nature of the ideal. The oppressions of society not only compromise our present, they condition the dreams of its reversal and defeat. The "subversive" exterior ends up being seen as the representation of the spectral interior, a conflation of outside and inside that we have noted in every region of the novel. All that beckons to us as the beyond is the blank inverse of what is within. Brontë sees that these versions of personal and social desire are the shapes of their own repression, pressing in to keep the configuration of the boundary in force. Nelly points to this effect of her involvement when she tries to interpret Catherine's outlandish declaration of love for Heathcliff: "'If I can make any sense out of your nonsense,

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Miss,' I said, 'it only goes to convince me that you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying'" (p. 70). The nonsense of Catherine and Heathcliff's behavior always carries the sense of Nelly's containment of it.

Nelly and Lockwood cooperate in the contrary motions of their narration: on the one hand, raising the specter of "something else"; on the other, laying that specter to rest. The ends of the story can accommodate the uncertain end of its characters: Nelly can entertain her lovers' haunting perpetuation at the same time that Lockwood can insist on their quiet slumbers, for the consequence of telling their story arises from both evoking and revoking the ghosts' potential. The resting place for the lovers predictably secures their suspension across boundaries:

> The place of Catherine's interment, to the surprise of the villagers, was neither in the chapel, under the carved monument of the Lintons, nor yet by the tombs of her own relations, outside. It was dug on a green slope, in a corner of the kirkyard, where the wall is so low that heath and bilberry plants have climbed over it from the moor. (p. 144)

Neither inside nor outside, the site of the wall's rupture, the obliteration of nature's and culture's demarcation. Like the holy frame of the kirkyard wall, Nelly and Lockwood's frame story aspires to bring the remains of the enframed story within safe confines. In a telling phrase that carries beyond the immediate circumstance, Nelly once confesses that to get rid of Heathcliff she is forced into "framing a bit of a lie" (p. 99). To vacate the story they tell, she and Lockwood likewise must traffic in deception: Nelly convincing herself that the restitution of social order (the oppression she supports) in the marriage of Catherine the younger and Hareton will assure that "there won't be a happier woman than myself in England" (p. 268); Lockwood satisfied that he can return to the arms of tranquillity leaving a world well lost behind.

Lockwood the diarist succeeds in keeping his hand out of the way. Although he is earlier startled that the ghostly product of his reading and writing might come to demand entry and seek intimacy, he knows too that he must himself break the pane of the locked casement in order to quiet the noise. The frame remains locked but penetrable, the very figure for the writer's situation in *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood would lock the interior story in the wooden lock of his frame, attempting to contain the characters within the bound space of representation. But to do so

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he must also break through the frame, displaying for the reader that the threshold of the novel's frame (figured in the window's ledge) provides the space for sought but feared intimacy. Lockwood's writing everywhere frames that bit of a lie to his created specters: "'Let *me* go, if you want me to let you in!'" (p. 20).

Frame Off

Wuthering Heights would be unimaginable without its framing. Although its frame portions always appear preliminary and subliminal to its central story, we have seen that *Wuthering Heights* interferes with the division and ranking of opposites on the basis of content alone. The urge to establish identity drives the characters—whether they are the protagonists or the narrators—to consider how the articulation of self is a process which sets one apart by setting one within a system of differences. The relation of figure to ground, which we have seen as a prominent motif in both the enframed and framing parts of the novel, suggests one way in which Brontë comprehends the conditions of representation in her book. Each of the lovers seeks to supplement an interior lack by representing it as an other who becomes the "all in all." The lack in each, then, constitutes the unifying lock of their love; each frames and is enframed by the other. At the next remove, the unity of the core story is secured by a lack to be filled by the frame story. The lovers' inability to grasp a form, a word, for their attachment requires the labors of their tellers; yet we have seen that the lack in the core is also the lack of the frame story, since the authors conjure up the emanations of their own and society's discontents. *Wuthering Heights* does not offer us a regulated structural whole; rather, it displays mutually embracing structures that despair of perfected unity while simulating its effect.

I have kept my terminology abstract in this closing account because I wish it to touch the diverse registers of the novel that we have looked at serially. The point of my analysis is not to displace one center of *Wuthering Heights* in order to substitute another; I am not arguing that the frame narrative is "actually" the more important part of the novel, nor that readers must begin with it and see it as the origin of the work's meaning. Instead, I have sought to follow the novel's own leading as it proceeds through the passages of representation, constantly turning us back at the point we take to be the center of significance, our attainment of the "penetralium." For Brontë shows us how the nature of narrative is all frame and framing, the articulation of

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thresholds meaningful as they conduct our passing through them, and not our passing by or over them. Throughout the novel, doors bear words, and words serve as doors. Lockwood notices at the outset that the threshold to Wuthering Heights demands reading.[24] And toward the end Hareton signals his crossing (back) into literacy by reading his (ancestor's) name inscribed on the lintel: "he moved off to open the door, and, as he raised the latch, he looked up to the inscription above" (p. 211). Words promise to be the portals to what we desire and imagine. They offer access to what we do not possess: the perfected self, the object of longing, the exiled regions of the mind. Yet Nelly only once agrees to "leaving the door of communication open" (p. 60); more often she insists on keeping doors closed. Though language promises to conduct us to what it signifies, it can only keep us moving in the passages of communication.

Brontë's narrative shows how the space of fiction is the space opened by framing. Our passages through the story, like the protagonists' and the narrators', conjure up ghosts of other selves, other beings, other meanings. And yet this transit never deposits us at the illusionary destinations it must posit. Narratives are emptied barriers, modes of concourse and not arrival. Like Frost's ovenbird, the artist places his frames around an original fullness known only by hearsay. The ovenbird sings in midsummer, evoking in his paltry voice the floral and choral lushness of spring. The poet adds to the rings of diminishment by attaching a verbal frame to the modest ambiguity of the ovenbird's song. To make the poem speak, the poet must trespass on his subject's voice by framing it. Lockwood initiates us into the corresponding bounds of telling in *Wuthering Heights* when he recounts his first visit to the Heights that "one step brought us into the family sitting-room, without any introductory lobby or passage" (p. 2). Though this description fits the layout of the house, it seems inapplicable to the narrative organization, for Lockwood's opening pages do offer a kind of introductory passage to the design and history of the house, and to the story to follow. Yet in another way, Brontë lets us see that there can be no introductory passage to a story that has no nameable center or definable destination. Since the readers and tellers of the story all are only passing through, any passage might be taken as introductory to any other, any frame actually the enframed. We step immediately into Lockwood's story, which also is to be taken as the novel's "central" subject. It is this incessant dissolving of figure into ground and back that I contend organizes our spellbinding admiration for *Wuthering Heights* and our remarkable inability to agree on what it means.

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When Isabella offers her friendship to young Hareton, she says he curses her and threatens to "set Throttler on me if I did not 'frame off'" (p. 117). As the word does when Joseph uses it to tell the children to vacate the room at Earnshaw's death ("frame upstairs, and make little din," p. 36), "frame" carries the sense of ceasing or vanishing. Framing comes round, then, to be seen as that which invents some existence of yours beyond you by encompassing it, but in so doing lets the framer disappear. Frames are meant, to be forgotten.

Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

Notes

1. Since I will return to this poem, I have included the full text below, as it appears in Robert Frost, *Selected Poems* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1963):

The Oven Bird

There is a singer everyone has heard,
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
He says the early petal-fall is past
When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
On sunny days a moment overcast;
And comes that other fall we name the fall.
He says the highway dust is over all.
The bird would cease and be as other birds
But that he knows in singing not to sing.
The question that he frames in all but words
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

2. Meyer Schapiro, "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs," *Semiotica*, 1, no. 3 (1969), 223–42.

3. Although my argument proceeds without mentioning Jacques Derrida, my approach is indebted to his project in both spirit and letter. In spirit because Derrida inspects indefatigably the marginal, the secondary, the derived. (Among other titles, see "Living On: *Border Lines*," in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, comp. Geoffrey Hartman [New York: Seabury, 1979].) In letter because of Derrida's remarks on the frame as philosophical framework and as aesthetic ornament in "The Parergon" (*October*, 9 [Summer 1979], 3–41), a translation of "Le parergon," part 2 of *La vérité en peinture* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978). Derrida concentrates on Kant's preface to the third *Critique* in order to show that Kant's attempt to establish a foundation in philosophy for art has already been subverted by the preface,

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which founds philosophy in art (through recourse to the aesthetic registers of metaphor and imagery). The content and category of aesthetics, then, determine the ground of the metaphysics that will subsequently be made the ground for aesthetic criteria. This knot occasions a Derridean meditation on the particular disjunctions of philosophical frameworks. I have carried several of Derrida's observations into my approach to *Wuthering Heights*, but I have sought to let Brontë's text suggest its own involvement with the problematics of framing and textual production.

4. Two central examples are J. Hillis Miller's study of the opposition in *Wuthering Heights* of virtue and joy in his chapter on Emily Brontë in *The Disappearance of God* (New York: Schocken, 1965) and Dorothy Van Ghent's consideration of the unconscious and the conscious, or nature and culture, in *The English Novel: Form and Function* (New York: Rinehart, 1953).

5. Van Ghent's essay on *Wuthering Heights* is in many respects still the most perceptive and capacious we have. She isolates the importance of the imagery of thresholds to argue that the novel concerns the "tension between two kinds of reality: the raw, inhuman reality of anonymous natural energies, and the restrictive reality of civilized habits, manners, and codes" (p. 157). I take issue with Van Ghent by maintaining that the opposition of natural innocence and civilized corruption is a false dichotomy in Catherine and Heathcliff's desire and that Lockwood manages—through his narrative procedures—to evade the glimpse of nature within him (a recognition Van Ghent points to in passing). Moreover, Van Ghent specifies the content of the other as dark, savage instincts while I think that the novel shows the radical arbitrariness of all that is other.

6. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. V. S. Pritchett (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Riverside Edition, 1956), p. 34. I shall quote from this edition throughout.

7. See, for example, John K. Mathison, "Nelly Dean and the Power of *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 11 (September 1956), 106–29, and James Haffey, "The Villain of *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 13 (December 1958), 199–215.

8. An example is Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., "Lockwood's Dreams and the Exegesis of *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 14 (September 1959), 95–110. Even in a recent and shrewd application of Derridean deconstruction to *Wuthering Heights*, Carol Jacobs emphasizes the narrators' passivity before the requirements of interpretation and the intractable nature of language ("*Wuthering Heights*: At the Threshold of Interpretation," *Boundary 2*, 7 [Spring 1979], 49–71). This article represents an early stage in deconstructive reading as it follows the dislocating effects of *écriture*: the conditions of imperfect repetition, usurpation, homelessness, and wandering that yoke the central characters and their interpreters. But Jacobs ignores the creative work of reading and the spectral products of writing in her deconstruction. Brontë's text confronts the kind of haunting presences produced by textual exertions, and not the absolutes of absence.

9. Consider Hayden White's study of the narrative tropes that organize the writing of history in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

10. See Leo Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (New York: Little, Brown, 1969), pp. 197–229, for a study of the self as the other and the subversion of identity in *Wuthering Heights*.

11. Emended by Charlotte Brontë in the 1850 edition to "imagining" (*Wuthering Heights*, ed. Hilda Marsden and Ian Jack [London: Oxford University Press, Clarendon, 1976], p. 476).

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12. In addition to Bersani, see Miller's *Disappearance of God.*

13. My focus on the alterity of selfhood differs from both Miller's and Bersani's treatments by concentrating on the prominence of the border or the space between the lovers' desire. Miller, somewhat like Van Ghent, probes the paradox that "a person is most himself when he participates most completely in the life of something outside himself. This self outside the self is the substance of a man's being. . . . It is the intimate stuff of the self, and it is also that which 'stands beneath' the self as its foundation and support" (p. 172). Miller goes on to situate this alienation in a theological context: the individual's estrangement from God. In a second essay on the novel, Miller finds a similar dismantling of unitary identity in the register of textual meaning (*Fiction and Repetition* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982]). *Wuthering Heights* demonstrates, according to Miller, that interpretation produces multiple valid readings, not a single master reading. Though he contributes to our understanding of how the struggles of interpretation are one of Brontë's themes, Miller does neglect the scenes of narration in which Lockwood and Nelly focus these issues.

Besides several studies of the textuality of *Wuthering Heights* that I shall cite in the course of my argument, a recent exchange in *Critical Inquiry* explored the problematics of interpretation by centering on the novel. See James R. Kincaid, "Coherent Readers, Incoherent Texts," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (Summer 1977), 781–802; Robert Denham, "The No-Man's Land of Competing Patterns," *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (Autumn 1977), 194–202; and James R. Kincaid, "Pluralistic Monism," *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (Summer 1978), 839–45.

Bersani extends the line on the alterity of identity by arguing that an individual's sense of an essential other destabilizes the possibility of unitary identity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes the importance of the barrier and the equivalence of the states it divides in her examination of *Wuthering Heights* in *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Arno, 1980), pp. 104–27, and in her more general study of veil imagery in Gothic fiction, "The Character in the Veil: Imagery of the Surface in the Gothic Novel," *PMLA*, 96 (March 1981), 255–67.

14. See Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), for an account of Catherine's suffering under patriarchal domination. Although their feminist analysis of Catherine's predicament is occasionally insightful, Gilbert and Gubar seem to me to subvert the power of their critique of repressive social institutions by implying that Catherine should have married Heathcliff (pp. 278 ff.). It is not the person of Edgar which disappoints Catherine; it is the very contamination with repression of all social forms—along with their ameliorative future forms—that blocks Catherine's hope to fulfill her true desire. As I go on to argue, the very ideology of desire's fulfillment depends on the mechanism of repression and testifies to the deepseatedness of discontentment as the condition of civilization.

15. Miller typifies the view: "The violence of Emily Bronte's characters is a reaction to the loss of an earlier state of happiness" (*Disappearance of God*, p. 170).

16. Q. D. Leavis, "A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*," *Lectures in America* (with F. R. Leavis) (New York: Pantheon, 1969), pp. 85–138, as reprinted in *Wuthering Heights*, ed. William M. Sale, Jr. (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1972), pp. 306–21. William R. Goetz ("Genealogy and Incest in *Wuthering Heights*," *Studies in the Novel*, 14 [Winter 1982], 359–76) perceptively studies the novel from the standpoint of kinship systems. He argues that the story of Catherine and Heathcliff is shaped by the force of the incest taboo to determine so-called free choice; the first part of the novel is based, then, on Catherine's re-

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jection of Heathcliff as "the renunciation of incest" (p. 363). Goetz also analyzes the distinction between nature and culture that is represented by the authority of the incest taboo, finding (after Lévi-Strauss) that the apparent succession of nature by culture in *Wuthering Heights* is illusory and that society for Brontë is constantly threatened by the collapse into incest and nature.

17. C. P. Sanger, *The Structure of Wuthering Heights* (London: Hogarth, 1926).

18. This is the point of Gilbert and Gubar's analysis. Their championing of Heathcliff as the man who might have filled Catherine's dreams reentrenches the dependence on masculine energy and on patriarchal models of self-realization that they want to challenge. They make a belated attempt to correct this drift by claiming that Heathcliff is feminine in his attractiveness; aside from having little textual support, this strategy further consolidates the stereotypes of gender.

19. See Terry Eagleton's Marxist analysis of Heathcliff's threat to class structure and property in *Myths of Power* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1975), pp. 97–121.

20. In "Lockwood's Dreams and the Key to *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24 (June 1969), 16–30, Ronald Fine argues that Lockwood's dreams are founded in the fears and guilt of his unconscious and that his dreams "provide the template for the narrative they introduce" (p. 21). Fine concentrates on the repeated action of violent entrance as an index of Lockwood's fear of sexual union. Jacobs shows that Lockwood's dreams cannot be taken purely as the "reality" of the unconscious in the novel, as Fine insists, since they are already linked to waking reality by Lockwood. Neither approach reckons with the dreams as already being interpretive narratives. Jacobs's attention to the larger properties of language reduces the narrators' effects almost to nothing; hence, Lockwood "becomes the mere recorder of Nelly's story" (p. 50).

21. I mean to balance Jacobs's emphasis on the interpreters' homelessness by considering the tellers' tenancy.

22. From the standpoint purely of the contradictory nature of all texts, Jacobs discusses Lockwood's efforts to deny its textuality and turn *Wuthering Heights* into a good book, a univocal work that can be understood and concluded.

23. I am thinking of Gilbert and Gubar's hypothesis of a satisfactory marriage, or Eagleton's vision of an alternative society free of oppression.

24. Frank Kermode looks at the question of reading in the novel as he makes a case for an unlimited pluralism in critical interpretation ("A Modern Way with the Classic," *New Literary History*, 5 (Spring 1974), 415–34).

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