



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

**Destruction and Sympathy in Emily
Brontë's *Wuthering Heights***

***Heathcliff's Loss of the Reader's Sympathy Through Self-
Destructive Behaviour and Ruination of Others***

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs í ensku

Daníel Ingi Þórarinsson

Janúar 2013

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Abstract

There are various interesting aspects to be observed in Emily Brontë's renowned novel, *Wuthering Heights*. Among these are the notions of destruction and sympathy, as damaging attitudes and commiserative feelings pervade the story in the shape of its characters. One of these characters is Heathcliff and it has sometimes been argued how he is one of the most obscene characters to enter the world of English fiction.

Throughout the course of the novel he proves himself to be an embodiment of malignancy and wickedness, as he wreaks destruction and misery upon himself and those around him.

However, despite Heathcliff's eventual meanness and maleficent intentions, his introduction to the novel portrays him as an innocent, empathetic character. Hence, the revelation of a poor past, of a past with no carers, of a past of loneliness and sorrow, serves to awaken the reader's sympathy with him which is in turn reinforced by the initial indifferent and cruel reception he receives from several of his new family members.

Thus, this thesis attempts to delineate the loss of Heathcliff's sympathetic side and establish his identity as a detestable, self-destructive villain. To achieve this end, first his introduction to the story is discussed and an association to the reader's compassion is made. Second, Heathcliff's inexcusable actions towards his neighbours are related and interpreted in order to manifest his ruinous mentality and to reveal his maleficent nature. Finally, the complete removal of Heathcliff's formerly sympathetic aspect and the loss of the reader's commiseration will be related and linked to his process of self-destruction, in the context of his despicable treatment of the inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*.

Útdráttur

Það eru ýmis atriði sem hægt er að virða fyrir sér í hinni þekktu skáldsögu Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Meðal þeirra eru sjónarmið sem lúta að eyðileggingu og samúð, þar sem eyðingarmáttur og samúðar tilfinningar eru allsráðandi í sögunni og birtast bersýnilega í sögupersónum hennar. Ein þessara persóna er Heathcliff og færð hafa verið rök fyrir því að hann sé einn mesti hrotti í enskri skáldsagnahefð. Í sögunni staðfestir hann þann áfellisdom þegar hann birtist lesandanum sem holdtekja illsku og bræði, á sama tíma og hann veldur eymd og eyðileggingu hjá sjálfum sér og öðrum sem honum tengjast.

Samt sem áður, þrátt fyrir að illska og skaðlegur ásetningur taki sér á endanum bólfestu í Heathcliff, þá er hann kynntur til sögu sem skaðlaus, viðkunnanlegur einstaklingur. Afhjúpun sögunnar á snauðri fortíð Heathcliff, fortíð án foreldra, fortíð einmanaleika og sorgar, vekur þar með samkennd hjá lesandanum. Slík samúð eflist ennfremur vegna þess hversu áhugalausir sumir í nýju fjölskyldunni eru um hann, og vegna grimmilegrar meðferðar sem hann þarf að þola í framhaldinu.

Þessi ritgerð leitast við að útlista þær breytingar sem verða á Heathcliff, m.a. með því að sýna fram á að viðkunnanleiki hans og sakleysi í upphafi sögunnar eiga sér enga stoð í seinni hluta hennar, þegar ný hlið á persónu hans kemur fram í andstyggilegum einstakling sem þjáist af sjálfseyðingarhvöt. Til að ná því markmiði, þá er í fyrsta lagi fjallað um innkomu Heathcliff í söguna og útskýrt hvers vegna hann á skilið samúð lesandans í upphafi. Í öðru lagi er greint frá skaðsamlegum og óafakanlegum brotum Heathcliffs gagnvart íbúum Wuthering Heights og Thrushcross Grange og sýnt er hvernig þau brot endurspeglar hans

aumkunarverða eðli og illt hugarfar. Í þriðja og síðasta lagi eru færð rök fyrir því hvernig fyrrum viðkunnanleg hlið á persónu Heathcliffs er orðin að engu í lok sögunnar samhliða því að hann missir samúð lesandans. Í þeirri umræðu er ennfremur talað um sjálfseyðingarhvöt Heathcliff og hvernig hún hefur verið stigvaxandi frá því að hann setti það sér fyrir hendur að eyðileggja líf fólksins í kringum sig.

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1. Introduction

Although her first and only novel, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* attracted enormous attention. Evidently, that attention was in the form of both positive and negative criticism, where the latter outweighed the former quite heavily around the date of its release in 1847. Additionally, since its publication various character and thematic analyses of the work have been put forth. As such, a recurring theme in the novel has to do with the power of destruction, or as Melvin Watson justly claims in his article on "*Wuthering Heights* and the Critics," the novel "is a study of the development and issues of evil, of anti-social passions, of hate and malice, working freely, based and unfolded by exceptional strength and ability" (Watson 254). However, whereas the sentence just quoted provides an apt summary of the novel's subject matter, Watson loses his footing when he agrees with Mrs. Robinson, another critic of Emily Brontë's work: "She insists rightly that Heathcliff is the central figure and that he harms no one seriously who had not either harmed him or asked for trouble and that his punishment is the wrecking of his own life and a lifelong torment" (Watson 250). Leading into the subject of this dissertation, one of the most notable critics of *Wuthering Heights*, Philip Drew, clarifies the fault of this observation when he says that "One can see that this is simply an inaccurate account of the novel, but as Watson's article shows, it may fairly be taken as representative of much recent criticism¹ of *Wuthering Heights*" (Drew 372). Drew then poses the question, "Why, in short, have critics responded so readily to Heathcliff as the hero of the novel and paid so little attention to his more conspicuous qualifications to be considered the villain?" (372). This question is critical to the topic of this thesis, since in it

¹ By "recent criticism", Drew is referring to criticism written in the middle of the 20th century.

attention will be primarily directed at Heathcliff, who, it is maintained, is the story's anti-hero and arch-villain; it is through him that the reader is led into a world full of trouble, a place of abusers and the abused, a place of total annihilation. The notion of ruination and self-torment in relation to Heathcliff's character is discussed in specific terms: his destructive impact on the characters of both the young and the old Catherine, on Hareton and Hindley Earnshaw, on Edgar and Isabella Linton as well as on his own son, Heathcliff Linton, will be demonstrated, and it will be argued that through the process of harming others, Heathcliff gradually approaches complete self-destruction. In addition, Heathcliff's development from a likable and sympathetic character to the opposite will be discussed, as Heathcliff moves from having the reader on his side during the period of his ill-treatment to a state in which his repulsive behaviour has pushed off any kindly felt sympathies after he has ravaged and ruined those around him, and done so deliberately. To obtain this goal, various perspectives will be introduced, either to be acquiesced with or contradicted, or both. While Heathcliff is initially one of the story's most sympathetic characters, grief-instigated vengeance soon inhabits his mind as he adopts a destructive mentality to bring misery and ruin to the lives of his neighbours, relinquishing the compassion of the reader on his road to self-ruination.

2. Sympathy and Heathcliff

As Nelly begins her storytelling in chapter four, the reader is immediately introduced to Heathcliff as a child, and a notion of malignancy is attached to his character, when the housekeeper says, "from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house" (Brontë 32). However, despite this assertion, the boy whom Mr. Earnshaw happened to find during his stay in Liverpool, quickly becomes an object of our sympathy. Both the fact that he is

introduced as an orphan whom “Mrs. Earnshaw was ready to fling ... out of doors” and that Nelly initially refers to him as *it*, “I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow” (31-32) is enough to evoke empathetic feelings from the reader, and although they are not reinforced by Earnshaw’s favouritism, they are certainly not weakened, primarily because of the story’s progression of creating friendship and union between Catherine and Heathcliff, and posing Hindley as a threat. Consequently, when Earnshaw has passed away and Hindley gains possession over the Heights, it is seemingly only to fulfil one purpose: to degrade his former competitor as much as possible. At this point, then, Heathcliff is at Hindley’s mercy and wholly deserving of everyone’s compassion, as the reader observes him to be badly abused and mistreated. To make things worse, Heathcliff’s eavesdropping on Nelly’s conversation with Catherine, where the latter says, “it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff” (Brontë 71), greatly increases the amount of sympathy attributed to his character, and simultaneously initiates a detrimental process of change within him. Drew’s following assessment supports this reading of Heathcliff: “In the early part of the book, we are led to suspect him of nothing worse than a hot temper, a proud nature, and a capacity for implacable hatred. Indeed until he is sixteen the balance of sympathy is with him, since he has been treated so ill” (Drew 369).

However, despite the immense sympathetic feelings the reader is left with at Heathcliff’s consequent departure and absence for three years, they begin to decrease upon his return. The first indicator of this is the fact that his absence proved to be one of financial growth:

Now fully revealed by the fire and candlelight, I was amazed, more than ever, to behold the transformation of Heathcliff. He

had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man, beside whom my master seemed quite slender and youth-like ... his countenance ... looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. (Brontë 85)

Thus Nelly describes her prospective master upon his arrival at the Grange. He has gone from being pitied and scorned by most, to now being feared and, at first, shown more respect. She further adds in her conversation with Catherine about Heathcliff: “He is reformed in every respect, apparently—quite a Christian—offering the right hand of fellowship to his enemies all round!” (Brontë 87). Still, this overly positive description of Heathcliff quickly loses impact as it becomes clear that Nelly’s assessment of Heathcliff’s character was hasty and incorrect, as his change proves to be for the worse. Thus, “Catherine herself says [of him in chapter ten], ‘He’s a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man’ [Brontë 90,] and Nelly confirms that he is leading Hindley to perdition” (Drew 369).

Another perspective on Heathcliff’s character after his return is offered by Edgar. As such, early in chapter 10 he observes that “though [Heathcliff’s] exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable, and unchanged. And he dreaded that mind” (89). The reason Edgar feels this way can be attributed to the incident that occurred at Wuthering Heights earlier in their adolescence, where Heathcliff “seized a tureen of hot apple-sauce ... and dashed it full against [Edgar’s] face and neck.” This behaviour, Nelly remarks, resulted from the fact that “Heathcliff’s violent nature was not prepared to endure the appearance of impertinence from one whom he seemed to hate, even then, as a rival” (Brontë 51). However, the reader’s attention and judgement has to be different at the time of its occurrence from after the novel’s conclusion. In the case of the former, the

reader's sympathy is on Heathcliff's side, and as such his behaviour is more easily excused, but in regard to the latter, the incident becomes a revelation and foreshadowing of the villain's destructive mentality and emerges in a more negative light. Then, although Heathcliff returns only with intentions of avenging himself on those who wronged him the most, Hindley and Edgar, his actions spread like a disease around the Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and affect more or less every single character within the two residencies, with the anti-hero "never once swerving in his arrow-straight course to perdition," as Brontë's sister, Charlotte, aptly puts it (Charlotte Brontë 309).

Despite the aforesaid, it has been argued that Heathcliff is less deserving of sympathy during his childhood at the Heights than actually seems to be the case. Marianne Thormählen details that:

While the boy Heathcliff's wrongs at Hindley Earnshaw's hands at least foster a feeling that he is the victim of harshness and injustice, the growth of true sympathy for him is checked by several circumstances, such as his lack of discernible affection for his benefactor, old Mr Earnshaw; the realization that Hindley has cause to be jealous, having had his nose cruelly put out of joint by the sudden arrival of the new favourite; Heathcliff's blackmailing effort over the colts; and his intractable sullenness, even to Catherine, during his years of degradation. (Thormählen 184)

The reasons cited above that delineate the obstruction of increasing sympathy with Heathcliff, and instead plead its decrease, are justifiable but inadequate in the sense that their impact is not very notable. Firstly,

Heathcliff is found on the streets of Liverpool, an orphan, definitely not reared in a home where he was taught manners and proper conduct, and as such any notion of “discernible affection for his benefactor” misses its mark as its importance is minimal. If anything, it is more likely to increase sympathy with the poor child, as the reader discovers Heathcliff’s deprivation of the benefits of civilized human rearing. Secondly, at the same time as Hindley has cause to be jealous, it is indeed this jealousy that stirs things up between him and Heathcliff, and eventually turns the former into a monster. Had Hindley not interfered with his new foster brother, and perhaps not thrown that “iron weight” (Brontë 33) at him, it is likely that more sympathy would be attributed to him, and less to his nemesis, but because of Hindley’s envious conduct, Heathcliff comes out on top. Thirdly, and perhaps most interestingly in the paragraph cited above, is the fact that Heathcliff’s proposed “intractable sullenness” can be completely understood and sympathized with. There is no reason for Heathcliff to put on a mask and act the happy boy to the girl who adopts a habit of humiliating him, for example by referring to him in animal terms. Therefore, “during his years of degradation,” it is even more self-explanatory why Heathcliff would show sullenness to people, and why should Catherine be an exception, just because she happens to be the love of his life? It is difficult enough to cheer up depressed people, such as is the case with Heathcliff at that stage, but to cheer up a depressed person who is also experiencing repulsive behaviour from his closest, is unimaginable.

3. Heathcliff's Destruction of Others

3.1 Hindley Earnshaw

As the most influential instigator of Heathcliff's vengeance, Hindley Earnshaw becomes the primary victim of his wrath. Like Vargish outlines in his article, "Revenge and *Wuthering Heights*" (10), it is during the Christmas party at the Heights from which Heathcliff is excluded, that the notion of destruction between him and Hindley is introduced when the former sits "with precocious dedication ... and studies how to pay Hindley back, the thought of revenge dulling his physical pain" (Brontë 53). Thus, despite Nelly's admonition that "it is for God to punish wicked people," and Heathcliff "should learn to forgive" (53), there is absolutely no space for any spiritual, gentle ideas within his mind. This Nelly later confirms and attributes to Hindley's treatment of Heathcliff which "was enough to make a fiend of a saint." Consequently, it appeared as if "the lad *were* possessed of something diabolical ... and [he] became daily more notable for savage sullenness and ferocity" (58).

Thus, upon Heathcliff's return after three years of absence, it is not long before this diabolical ferocity is unleashed onto Hindley as "The ruffian kicked and trampled on him, and dashed his head repeatedly against the flags," exerting "pre-ter-human self-denial in abstaining from finishing him completely" (Brontë 157). This physical destruction of Hindley's apparently frail character, although only 27 years old, is an addition to Heathcliff's exploitation of Hindley's weaknesses, alcohol, and gambling. As such, like Watson explains, "Heathcliff finishes the ruin of Hindley by catering to his taste for drink and gambling and secures mortgages on *Wuthering Heights*" (97). Further, Watson maintains earlier that Hindley is "as cruel as Heathcliff without Heathcliff's strength" and as such "prepares

for his own destruction by his inhumanity to Heathcliff and the other inhabitants of the Heights” (90). However, whereas Hindley did certainly instigate Heathcliff’s vindictiveness and therefore his own destruction, he neither fostered that ferocity nor did he force it to be applied; that is, Hindley may have “prepared for his own destruction” but he was not the ultimate cause of it, since Heathcliff decided himself to undertake and act upon this counterproductive role of a ravager.

Then, after Hindley’s death, Nelly relates Heathcliff’s disposition: “He maintained a hard, careless deportment, indicative of neither joy nor sorrow; if anything, it expressed a flinty gratification at a piece of difficult work successfully executed” (Brontë 165). Hence, having completed his destruction of Hindley and gained possession of the Heights and of young Hareton, “Heathcliff has completed the first stage of his revenge” (Drew 370).

3.2 The Older Catherine

Whereas Hindley is Heathcliff’s initial and primary target, the older Catherine is the first character in the novel to suffer visibly, and indirectly, at the hands of Heathcliff. However, she is also the main character in the novel whom Heathcliff has no particular intention to destroy. “The boy would do her bidding in anything” Nelly relates, at a time when the two are in their adolescence (Brontë 36). Indeed, as it comes to pass, Heathcliff spends all his time by Catherine’s side before his departure, but it is eventually her carelessness and disrespect towards her good friend and potential soul mate, as well as a betrayal of her true feelings, that turns the tide and sets Heathcliff in opposition to Catherine, as the “destructive consequences of thwarted love” (Bell 188) are set in motion.

Those consequences, as they apply to Cathy, become transparent shortly after Heathcliff's return to Wuthering Heights. Thus, as Hagan observes, it is during Heathcliff's visit to the Grange to see his beloved that "the first sign of Catherine's moral and psychological deterioration" can be observed in her "wholly unreasonable expectation ... that Edgar should welcome Heathcliff back to the Grange with open arms" (Hagan 307). Obviously, if Catherine had not suffered any setbacks during Heathcliff's absence, she would never have acted in this manner, as the hateful relationship between Edgar and Heathcliff was something that none but the dullest person would misconstrue.

Hitherto, as the reader will notice, Catherine has been the one to blame for her own destruction, but after Catherine's unexpected reception of Heathcliff just discussed, and until her death, Heathcliff actively pursues Cathy's total ruination. To achieve this, amongst other things, he takes advantage of the inexperienced and young Isabella by marrying her out of spite, and as such Heathcliff gets into Catherine's head, arousing feelings of jealousy within. Cathy is jealous in the sense that if she cannot have Heathcliff, no one can, and certainly not her sister-in-law. Thus, earlier the reader discovered that Catherine's "love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, as winter changes the trees" but her "love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary" (Brontë 73). Then, seemingly affirming Catherine's jealousy, Heathcliff himself says to her, "If I imagined you really wished me to marry Isabella, I'd cut my throat!" To this, Catherine replies saying, "I won't repeat my offer of a wife—It is as bad as offering Satan a lost soul—Your bliss lies, like his, in inflicting misery..." (100). Hence, despite wanting Heathcliff all for herself she is being truthful when she warns

Isabella about him by saying that he is “an unreclaimed creature, without refinement—without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone” (90). However, Isabella, ignoring Cathy’s admonitions, replies that “Heathcliff is not a fiend ... he has an honourable soul, and a true one” (91), providing an immature rationale that he would not have remembered her otherwise. As Catherine is the one who set things up and made their acquaintance possible, it is increasingly ironic that it brings about a speedier degradation of her character than would otherwise have been the case. Although Heathcliff is present in Catherine’s dying hours, to exhibit extreme passion towards her, it does not excuse his behaviour up until that point, which destructively influenced the level of Catherine’s sickness, and, as is to be expected, she blames Heathcliff for the ruination of her character, when she says to him, “I shall not pity you, not I. You have killed me—and thriven on it” (Brontë 140). Thus, in short, as Drew outlines, Heathcliff and Catherine’s “passion for each other is so compounded with jealousy, anger, and hatred, that it brings them only unhappiness, anguish and eventually death” (Drew 374), and although Heathcliff is still alive at the time of Catherine’s death, his self-destructive path is becoming ever so clear.

3.3 Edgar Linton

It is solely through his relationship with the older Catherine, that Edgar Linton becomes a victim to Heathcliff’s vindictive behaviour. The villain’s destructive influence on Catherine’s husband is apparent and paramount in Doctor Kenneth’s observation, when Edgar aims to get Catherine back on her feet: “What he saved from the grave would only recompense his care by forming the source of constant future anxiety—in fact, that his health and strength were being sacrificed to preserve a mere ruin of humanity”

(Brontë 118). Thus, spending all his time watching over Catherine as she lies sick in bed only amounts to the continual deterioration of his own character regardless of any attempt at providing help. Ironically, however, Edgar's immense care of Catherine is advised, as Thormählen claims, by the earlier "repeated admonitions of the rough but apparently capable Dr/Mr Kenneth, who warns ... her husband not to let anything vex or annoy her after the dangerous fever she catches during the night of Heathcliff's departure" (Thormählen 188). After his return, then, Nelly comments,

I wanted something to happen which might have the effect of freeing both Wuthering Heights and the Grange of Mr. Heathcliff, quietly, leaving us as we had been prior to his advent. His visits were a continual nightmare to me; and, I suspected, to my master also. His abode at the Heights was an oppression past explaining. I felt that God had forsaken the stray sheep there to its own wicked wanderings, and an evil beast prowled between it and the fold, waiting his time to spring and destroy. (Brontë 95)

Consequently, after Catherine's death, Edgar "refrained from going anywhere where he was likely to see or hear of Heathcliff. Grief, and that together, transformed him into a complete hermit ... [as he] spent a life of entire seclusion within the limits of his park and the grounds" (Brontë 162). In addition to this, Heathcliff's cruel treatment of both Edgar's daughter and sister, to be related hereinafter, serve to cause further damage to his character and as Drew makes plain in his article, it is obvious that "[Heathcliff] courts Isabella not so much for her property as for revenge on Edgar" (Drew 369). Heathcliff's inherently bad nature is acknowledged by Edgar, when he refers to his "presence" as "a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous" (Brontë 101). Hence, Edgar's isolation

from society and decline of character stem primarily from Heathcliff but partially from his own self-destructive behaviour in relation to his nursing of Catherine, as mentioned above. Even so, without the villain there would have been no grief, as Catherine would not have gone into a pernicious delirium, and seclusion would be non-existent with no one to avoid.

3.4 Isabella Linton

As opposed to her brother, who suffers indirectly at Heathcliff's hands, Isabella Linton is progressively destroyed and abused by the antihero in a direct manner. Whereas John Hagan mentions in his article that "Heathcliff conceives the idea and method of revenging himself upon the Linton family only after he has been made aware by Catherine that the naive Isabella has fallen in love with him," (Hagan 311) I maintain that this is only partially true. The seed of avenging himself on the Lintons, and Edgar in particular, had already been placed within Heathcliff's mind much earlier, on his first visit to the Grange, where he is mocked in front of the Linton family, and Isabella begs of her father to put that "frightful thing ... in the cellar" (Brontë 43). Further, it is at this time that Heathcliff "vociferated curses enough to annihilate any fiend in Christendom" as he "got a stone and thrust it between ... [the dog's] jaws" (42). The two last referenced sentences do not only invoke the idea of an appalling vengeance, but they also serve as a foreshadowing of it, especially the latter, as the reader discovers in chapter 14 when Heathcliff relates to Nelly his earlier encounter with Isabella, which occurs during their departure from Thruscross Grange. He says: "the first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog, and when she pleaded for it the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her ..." (Brontë 133). Thus, just as Heathcliff hanging

Isabella's dog further reveals the repulsive, cruel nature of his character and a strong desire for ruination, the earlier assault on that same dog serves to illustrate that the idea of vengeance is already there, i.e. he does possess malignant thoughts during his younger years in the novel, albeit the reader may not notice it on first reading, both because of the ill-treatment Heathcliff is receiving and the fact that the current scenario portrays him alone against the rest. However, it is only the means to translate the idea into an organised revenge that has not been realized.

Therefore, when Heathcliff discovers Isabella's affections for him, he becomes absolutely determined to bring about her ruin, as the following remark he makes to the older Catherine exemplifies: "if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary ... thank you for telling me your sister-in-law's secret—I swear I'll make the most of it" (Brontë 99-100). Further, Heathcliff completely dissipates any notion of mutually felt feelings when he says of Isabella, "You'd hear of odd things if I lived alone with that mawkish waxen face. The most ordinary would be painting on its white the colours of the rainbow and turning the blue eyes black, every day or two" (94). Consequently, after her stay at the Heights, it becomes obvious, as Ruth M. Adams argues, how Isabella has been "tainted by the atmosphere [there]" (Adams 61) and this Isabella confirms when relating to Nelly how she experienced herself "seated in [a situation] worse than solitude on that inhospitable hearth" (122) and asks her how she managed to "preserve the common sympathies of human nature" during her residence at Wuthering Heights (120). This clearly illustrates the level of degradation her character has suffered at the hands of Heathcliff. Then, in conclusion to her letter to Nelly, Isabella's dead-stricken fear of her husband serves as another indicator of his destructive influence: "I assure

you,” she says, “a tiger or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens” (128). Isabella’s fear can be related to and near felt when Heathcliff mentions his cruel treatment of her in chapter 14, “I’ve sometimes relented, from pure lack of invention, in my experiments on what she could endure and still creep shamefully cringing back” (Brontë 133). Heathcliff’s inexcusable, demonic conduct towards Edgar’s sister is further demonstrated when the following exclamation is considered, “I have no pity! I have no pity! The worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain” (134). This, as Hagan maintains, clearly demonstrates how deep Heathcliff has sunk (311), and at the same time confirms the validity of Isabella’s letter. Thus, after her escape, her statement revealing that she would “far rather ... be condemned to a perpetual dwelling in the infernal regions, than even for one night abide beneath the roof of Wuthering Heights again” (161), becomes completely understandable. Finally, years later when Isabella dies, a “new victim” is brought to the Heights, the hapless Linton Heathcliff, only to be brought to ruination a little quicker than his predecessor.

3.5 The Younger Catherine and Linton Heathcliff

It is with the older Catherine’s death that her and Edgar’s daughter is born, referred to as young Catherine hereafter, to the immediate observation of Nelly that “its beginning was as friendless as its end is likely to be” (Brontë 145). The implication here is that through Heathcliff’s negative impact on Edgar, the child is born into a secluded, loveless environment. Then, because Heathcliff is still alive at the time of Nelly’s recital, i.e. when she states the above, his destructive influence is still present as young Cathy is held captive by him at Wuthering Heights and as such it is unsurprising that

Nelly foresees a dark future for her former protégé. Further, to strengthen the argument just made, it can be observed that before the introduction of Edgar's daughter to Heathcliff, Nelly remarks that "Wuthering Heights and Mr. Heathcliff did not exist for her; she was a perfect recluse; and, apparently, perfectly contented" (166).

However, after Heathcliff's acquaintance with young Catherine it becomes certain that "he would detest [her], on [Edgar's] account" (196). As Hagan argues, this hatred manifests itself throughout "almost a quarter of the novel [as] we see and hear of Heathcliff practically nothing but his villainy, the climax of which is the outrageous marriage he forces upon Cathy and the dying Linton" (Hagan 321). Not only does he force this marriage upon the cousins, but leading up to it he keeps young Cathy in captivity for four or five days until he has accomplished the deed, despite her father being on his deathbed. To seduce her to his house, Drew explains how "he uses his son, who is close to death, simply as a bait for Catherine, not because she will have money ... but to make her wretched" (370-371). Further demonstrating his baleful nature and the callousness of his character, Heathcliff adds: "Miss Linton, I shall enjoy myself remarkably in thinking your father will be miserable; I shall not sleep for satisfaction" (Brontë 242). Then, in keeping with the recitation of Heathcliff's cruel acts, Nelly relates an incident during young Cathy's imprisonment, when the girl had "applied her teeth pretty sharply" to Heathcliff's flesh:

Heathcliff glanced at me a glance that kept me from interfering a moment. Catherine was too intent on his fingers to notice his face. He opened them, suddenly, and resigned the object of dispute; but, ere she had well secured it, he seized her with the liberated hand, and, pulling her on his knee, administered with

the other a shower of terrific slaps on both sides of the head ...
 At this diabolical violence, I rushed on him furiously. “You villain!” I began to cry, “you villain!” (Brontë 239)

Despite Nelly’s attempt at providing help to Cathy, she is quickly “silenced” by Heathcliff’s violence and he then, unsurprisingly in light of his nature, refers to his villainous act as a means “to chastise children” (239). Although this violent conduct is unsurprising, his idea of equalling an assault with the act of civilising is extremely distasteful and serves as an additional indicator that Heathcliff is a sick, disturbed crook.

Whereas young Cathy definitely suffers at the hands of Heathcliff as has been shown, her cousin, Linton, has it much worse during the time of his “imprisonment” within the Heights. Along with Hareton, Linton suffers the most devastating consequences of Heathcliff’s abusive, ruinous conduct. A case can be made that he suffers worst of them all, and in that regard it is all but fortunate that his persecutor is also his biological father. Thus, shortly after Nelly has brought young Linton over to Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff expresses his attitude towards his son, whom he refers to as “property,” and immediately denounces him as his heir and blood when he says: “Thou art thy mother’s child, entirely! Where is my share in thee, puling chicken?” (Brontë 182-183). Consequently, the ruinous consequences of verbally attacking Linton are those of destroying any confidence and self regard his son may have held, and as such Heathcliff is more easily capable of rousing terror within him, as the following incident he later relates to Nelly confirms:

I brought him down one evening, the day before yesterday, and just set him in a chair, and never touched him afterwards. I sent

Hareton out, and we had the room to ourselves. In two hours I called Joseph to carry him up again; and, since then, my presence is as potent on his nerves as a ghost; and I fancy he sees me often, though I am not near. Hareton says he wakes and shrieks in the night by the hour together ... (Brontë 254)

Not only does this quote verify that Heathcliff successfully terrorized Linton, but it also implies that during those two hours Heathcliff may have laid hands on Linton. Hence, leniently put, Linton quickly discovers that “Wuthering Heights” is indeed not “as pleasant a place as Thrushcross Grange” proved to be during his short residence there (181).

The degradation of his character remains consistent from thereon out until his death, and the incessantly increasing destructive influence of Heathcliff who goes on to call Linton “a pitiful, shuffling, worthless thing,” (209) is manifested clearly in the boy’s petition to his only true friend, Catherine, for forgiveness:

You are so much happier than I am, you ought to be better. Papa talks enough of my defects, and shows enough scorn of me, to make it natural I should doubt myself—I doubt whether I am not altogether as worthless as he calls me, frequently; and then I feel so cross and bitter, I hate everybody! I am worthless, and bad in temper, and bad in spirit, almost always. (Brontë 223)

Despite Catherine’s eventual forgiveness, it proves to be in vain in terms of improving Linton’s health, since to Heathcliff, his master and provider, “his life” was “not worth a farthing, and ... a farthing” would not be spent “on him” (259). Not only that, Heathcliff also further demonstrates his

relentlessness when he says of his son: “None here cares what becomes of him; if you do, act the nurse; if you do not, lock him up and leave him” (323). Consequently, when young Linton dies, Heathcliff’s tepidity and cold harshness resurfaces in his speech to Catherine and the latter’s mental state reaches a low-point in the novel:

“Now—Catherine,” he said, “how do you feel?” She was dumb. “How do you feel, Catherine?” he repeated. “He’s safe, and I’m free,” she answered, “I should feel well—but,” she continued with a bitterness she couldn’t conceal, “You have left me so long to struggle against death, alone, that I feel and see only death! I feel like death!” (Brontë 260)

Thus, having succeeded in creating a living hell from the day Linton was brought to the Heights and until his demise, as well as accelerating his total ruination, Heathcliff has proven to be devoid of any decent human trait, of any deference or simply of any positive characteristic, and as he questions Catherine, his only goal is seemingly to add insult to injury and inflict further misery on her character. Finally, Nelly’s following remark effectively demonstrates the despicable treatment Linton received at the hands of his father, “I could not picture a father treating a dying child as tyrannically and wickedly as I afterwards learnt Heathcliff had treated him” (229).

3.6 Hareton Earnshaw

As mentioned previously, Hareton is one of two characters to suffer the most brutal treatment by Heathcliff. However, whereas his peer, Linton, is “slowly tortured to death by his father ... Hareton somehow manages to survive” (Thompson 69), and thus it becomes ironic that Heathcliff is the

one who prevents the child's death, in one of a few scenes within the novel which appear to serve the function of illustrating Heathcliff's possession of some decent human traits. However, any positive notion attached to the act of saving Hareton quickly disappears, when it is related that, to Nelly, the deed of catching Hareton in his fall "expressed, plainer than words could do, the intensest anguish at having made himself the instrument of thwarting his own revenge. Had it been dark ... he would have tried to remedy the mistake by smashing Hareton's skull on the steps" (Brontë 66). At the same time as it would probably have been fulfilling, to Heathcliff, to see the son of his arch-enemy die, it has to be noted that his intentions are never to kill Hareton, and if he wanted to, there are plenty of opportunities from this point in the story to achieve that end. Thus, whereas Heathcliff grows more anxious every day to send Hindley to his rest (99), and thereby physically destroy him, he "appeared to have bent his malevolence on making ... [Hareton] a brute..." (174). Consequently, with Hindley's death, Heathcliff instigates a complete deterioration and ruination of the child's mentality, and it becomes transparent, as Vargish claims, that "nature will be denied and perverted in Hareton's as she was in Heathcliff's degradation" (Vargish 13).

Heathcliff confirms the success of this intention and at the same time evokes an unpleasant image of himself when he relates:

he'll never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance. I've got him faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me, and lower; for he takes a pride in his brutishness ... and the best of it is, Hareton is damnably fond of me! (Brontë 193)

Thus, to a large extent, but not completely, Heathcliff succeeds in his endeavours, which the following two examples verify. Firstly, Hareton consistently defends and stands up for his master, despite the cruel treatment he receives from him. As such, in chapter 19 he tells young Catherine that “he’d rather she would abuse himself ... than begin on Mr. Heathcliff” (285). This he utters shortly after Heathcliff has threatened to “strike him to Hell” (284). The anger teeming within Heathcliff can be observed further in his following words to Hareton: “It is well you are out of my reach ... what fiend possesses you to stare back at me, continually... don’t remind me of your existence again. I thought I had cured you of laughing!” (283). Secondly, after Heathcliff’s death, Nelly observes how “poor Hareton, the most wronged, was the only one that really suffered much. He sat by the corpse all night, weeping in bitter earnest” (298). As a result, it can be seen how Hareton’s mentality has been shattered by Heathcliff, but fortunately not exhausted, in the sense that he does not even know how Heathcliff has abused him and his “grief” on the latter’s death, was one “which generally springs from a generous heart,” as Nelly adds (299).

However, whereas Nelly’s implication is that Hareton suffered primarily from his ignorance, Drew offers a different viewpoint on the circumstances between Heathcliff and Hareton, in his subsequent observation:

The crucial difference is that Hareton does not allow his ill-treatment to make him bitter; he even acquires a kind of fondness for Heathcliff. But this tells in his favour, not Heathcliff’s, for it shows that Heathcliff was not *necessarily* brutalized by his environment, but rather that Hindley’s ill-

treatment of him encouraged a vindictiveness which he later deliberately fostered. (Drew 376)

Accordingly, despite the damage to his character, Hareton is also the only individual in the novel to most notably recuperate from it. As such, Hareton has no malignancy to “foster” or, in Watson’s words, “Hareton is saved by the absence of hatred in his heart, and the fondness between him and young Cathy blossoms in time to prevent his becoming just an animal” (Watson 94). Hence, despite the fact that Hareton “was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit which did not annoy his keeper; never led a single step towards virtue, or guarded by a single precept against vice” (Brontë 174), it is the absence of rancour and evil intentions in combination with the fact that Heathcliff has “lost the faculty of enjoying” the cousins’ destruction (287), along with Cathy’s good will towards Hareton, that helps him get on the right track to lead a joyful life, after suffering one of impending doom. To define Cathy’s good will, Elliott Gose rightfully explains how she “has tempted Hareton out of a limited, negative and destructive life into a positive attempt to change himself and others” (Gose 18). Additionally, after Heathcliff’s influence is removed, “all his [Hareton’s] rudeness and all his surly harshness had deserted him,” Nelly confirms (Brontë 279). However, it must also be noted that at the novel’s end, there is no one for Hareton to avenge himself upon, even if he wanted to, since at Heathcliff’s death, there is no one alive that would have any particular value to the villain. That is, the assumption is that if someone alive had injured or caused Heathcliff notable harm to the knowledge of Hareton, he might have acted upon it to avenge his master, whom he loved in his subordinate state of mind.

4. Heathcliff's Self-Ruination and the Decline of the Reader's Compassion

It is after Heathcliff's return to the land in a state of complete vindictiveness as he is set to cause trouble, that his life becomes "one of continual torment" (Drew 377). Thus, Isabella's observation that "Treachery and violence are spears pointed at both ends. They wound those who resort to them worse than their enemies" (Brontë 155), fits perfectly with the progress of Heathcliff's character, the novel's perpetrator and an emblem of destructive behaviour; thus his actions cause more harm to himself than his victims, or as Drew suitably puts it: "each act of wanton brutality is a further maiming of himself" (380). As such, when Drew's comment that Heathcliff's "whole career from the time of his return (September, 1783) to his death (May, 1802) is one of calculated malice: during this time he does not perform one single good or kindly action" (Drew 371) is taken into consideration, the sheer force of Heathcliff's self-destruction is better realized. Despite this robust self-ruinous behaviour, any commiserative feelings for Heathcliff are absent. Generally it appears that the notion of self-destruction elicits empathetic feelings from others, but in Heathcliff's case, the opposite could not be truer. This is because his process of self-inflicted pain is within the realm of his violent behaviour and results from it, but not in spite of it, which serves to nearly nullify the reader's compassion for him.

In this context, it is relevant to bring in different viewpoints from scholars concerning sympathy in relation to Heathcliff's conduct. Thus, like Philip Drew maintains, Heathcliff's "sufferings engage the reader's natural sympathies, the more so as he suffers in a particular way, and one that accounts for, even if it cannot excuse, his wickedness" (Drew 377).

Furthermore, John Hagan seems to be looking for an excuse for Heathcliff's vindictiveness when he says, "the essential point is that his violence has been building up only gradually and under the stress of provocation. For this reason, though we may deplore his subsequent actions, he never entirely forfeits our sympathy" (Hagan 312). Earlier in his article, Hagan refers to Heathcliff as Emily Brontë's "hero" whom she "never allows ... to forfeit our compassion" (Hagan 305). Additionally, Edgar Shannon sympathises unpleasantly and surprisingly much with Heathcliff as he strives to excuse his conduct:

Heathcliff's cruelty ... stems from isolation and misery. Heathcliff is the victim instead of the originator of evil ... His whole life has been a struggle against inimical forces to maintain identity and to achieve his overwhelming human need for fulfillment in love. (Shannon 103)

Thus, whereas Drew justly observes that Heathcliff's appalling behaviour cannot be excused, it seems as if Hagan and Shannon want to excuse it, and Hagan's choice of the words "deplore," "may" and "hero," and Shannon's method of posing Heathcliff as a victim in need of passion, appear to confirm this fact. A more rational explanation of Heathcliff's character is offered by Emily Brontë's sister, Charlotte:

[Heathcliff] exemplified the effects which a life of continued injustice and hard usage may produce on a naturally perverse, vindictive and inexorable disposition. Carefully trained and kindly treated, the black gipsy-cub might possibly have been reared into a human being, but tyranny and ignorance made of him a mere demon. (Charlotte Brontë, cited by Drew 376)

Thus, she alleges that Heathcliff's nature is inherently corrupt, that is, it is almost subhuman but she is also cautious when she claims that with proper treatment, Heathcliff "*might possibly*" (my italics), and hence not definitely, lead a decent life.

Another example where Hagan tries to excuse Heathcliff's conduct is in his claim that Heathcliff is "destructive" because of his "eminently human frustration" (Hagan 317), implying that it is in the nature of human beings to act upon their frustration via destructive methods, which it might very well be, but the extremity to which Heathcliff goes can simply not be attributed to and excused by "human frustration." However, in this same article Hagan also says of Heathcliff: "No casuistry can in the least win our moral approval of his brutality, especially toward Isabella and the three members of the second generation, including his own son Linton" (Hagan 311). In relation to this, Drew's observation is appropriate, as it claims that "our attitude to the main character of a work of fiction need not be one of moral approval ... but he must in some way act with the reader's understanding and sympathies" (Drew 376). Hence, the sympathy attributed to Heathcliff in the latter part of the novel, i.e. after his arrival, is much different from that which he received before, and has previously been discussed. Shortly after his return, then, the sympathy he receives from the reader

is more nearly akin to the compassion we feel for those who are fated to work out their doom in torment and despair, characters such as Satan himself, Marlowe's Faustus and Mephistopheles ... It does not lead us to approve of Heathcliff's actions or even to condone them. Emily Brontë's

achievement is to arouse sympathy for a lost soul while making it quite clear that his actions are damnable. (Drew 380)

Thus, whereas the reader can genuinely relate to Heathcliff's ill-treatment and feel for him before his departure from the Heights, it becomes increasingly difficult after his return and until the novel's end. Then any compassion that the reader has must spring from a different source, such as the fact that Heathcliff's life was completely wasted, that his soul could have been put to better use. As Nelly says, "we do sometimes pity creatures that have none of the feeling either for themselves or others" (Brontë 146).

In addition, the removal of the natural sympathies that were felt for Heathcliff before his departure can clearly be observed at two different points nearing the novel's end. First, he elicits a disgusting and disturbing image when he says of Linton and young Cathy: "It's odd what a savage feeling I have to anything that seems afraid of me. Had I been born where laws are less strict and tastes less dainty, I should treat myself to a slow vivisection of these two as an evening's amusement" (Brontë 238). No one but an insane, wicked person would conceive of such an odious, filthy idea, and the fact that Heathcliff's ruinous behaviour in the novel is convincingly demonstrated, the reader can more easily connect the actuality of that idea with him, which in turn mitigates his sympathetic aspect even more. Then, on his deathbed he makes it absolutely clear that he is regretful of nothing but instead deems his conduct just: "As to repenting of my injustices, I have done no injustice, and I repent of nothing" (296). Therefore, the fact that Heathcliff avows his innocence serves as another indication of his diseased and degraded mental state. Combined with his cruel and damaging conduct towards other characters, as discussed above, the two instances outlined here should ensure the reader's dislike of Heathcliff and

significantly reduce any genuine compassionate feelings which may previously have been felt.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, there is no doubt that Heathcliff is the arch-villain of *Wuthering Heights*. He is brought as an orphan to Wuthering Heights, a boy who is fully entitled to the reader's genuine sympathy, which decreases drastically as Heathcliff's character converts from sympathetic to repulsive, partly due to the harsh treatment and humiliation he receives from his neighbours but mostly because of his inherently cruel nature. Then, after his return in a state of complete vindictiveness, his inhuman actions towards his neighbours at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange intensify the villainous aspect of his character. As has been demonstrated in this dissertation, Heathcliff devastates different characters in various ways. Hence, whereas he never lays hands on the older Catherine but mentally brings destruction to her character, he violently abuses her brother, Hindley. Much the same is the case with Edgar and Isabella: whereas Heathcliff does not physically brutalize Edgar but brings him to the brink of destruction through the ruination of his sister, wife and daughter, he absolutely devastates Isabella, in addition to implying his desire to torture her. Further, in contrast to Hareton who is bereft of humane treatment and rendered absolutely ignorant, Heathcliff bullies his son, Linton, and consistently instils terror within him. Finally, young Catherine is kidnapped and violently beaten by Heathcliff. Accordingly, after having brought misery and ruination to those nearest to him, Heathcliff gradually loses his sympathetic aspect to give way to a more repellent demeanour, through which he progressively destroys himself. As has been outlined, whereas Drew and Charlotte Brontë acknowledge the fact that Heathcliff's deeds

are inexcusable, Hagan and Shannon seek to provide explanations for his conduct, in an attempt to excuse it. Hence, they have been shown to belong to Drew's category of "modern critics, [who] usually choose to minimize or justify Heathcliff's consistent delight in malice in order to elevate him to the status of hero," an assessment which opposes that of Charlotte Brontë, but her evaluation "depends on a recognition of [Heathcliff's] superhuman villainy" (cited by Drew 368). Lastly, as the objective of this thesis has been to manifest the validity of the initial statement that Heathcliff is the prime evil of *Wuthering Heights*, that he is the bringer of destruction and misery, it is befitting to conclude it with Charlotte Brontë's contemplation concerning the legitimacy of his character: "Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is" (Brontë 310).

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