

THE IDENTITY OF HEATHCLIFF IN EMILY BRONTË'S *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*: WOOLF OR WAIF?

Background:

The identity of Heathcliff has proved a conundrum for the characters in and critics of Emily Brontë's text, *Wuthering Heights*. "Is [Heathcliff] a ghoulish or vampire?" wonders Nelly the housekeeper, while Catherine describes him as "a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" (98, 273). Shortly after her marriage, Isabella queries "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (124). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar comment that Isabella's questions "summarize the traditional Heathcliff problem succinctly" (273). The challenge for critics has been to identify the seemingly inexplicable nature of Heathcliff. Brontë scholars have attempted to define Heathcliff in a variety of ways including as a demon lover, a capitalist exploiter, a ferocious natural force, a Frankenstein monster and a patriarchal tyrant (Gilbert and Gubar 253, Eagleton 121, Jacobs 79). However, as Tom Winnifreth points out, "Critics have not been able to make up their minds whether Heathcliff is hero or villain, worker or capitalist. . . ." (47). The problem with such labels is that they do not encompass the complex character of Heathcliff. If Heathcliff is merely a diabolical being or a heartless monster, how does one account for his steadfast love for Catherine, or "his rudely confessed regard for Hareton Earnshaw . . . and his half-implied esteem for Nelly Dean" (Charlotte Brontë *Preface* 40). Nelly Dean too observes of him, "Poor wretch . . . you have a heart and nerves the same as your brother-men!" (148). Alternately, to describe Heathcliff as a greedy tyrant or ruthless avenger is also inadequate since he loses interest in material concerns in his "obsessional love for Catherine" and does not follow through completely his plans for revenge (Eagleton 128). Heathcliff himself admits that "now would be the precise time to revenge myself . . . But what is the use? I don't care for the striking" (268). Given these contradictions, one may conclude that the above labels, while they partially reveal some aspect of Heathcliff's character, are not comprehensive in themselves.

In order to circumvent this difficulty, some critics have emphasized the conflicting nature of Heathcliff's character. Terry Eagleton observes that "He is, indeed, contradiction incarnate. . . . Heathcliff is both [a] metaphysical hero . . . and a skilful exploiter who cannily expropriates the wealth of others" (128). Eagleton considers that "Heathcliff can thus be represented only as a conflicting unity of spiritual rejection and social integration; and this, indeed, is his personal tragedy" (128). Making a related point, Frank Kermode stresses the "betweenness" of Heathcliff and mentions that "this betweenness persists . . . [in the way] Heathcliff fluctuates between poverty and riches; also between virility and impotence. He has much force, yet fathers an exceptionally puny child; Domestic yet savage. . . bleak yet full of fire . . . he bestrides the great opposites: love and death, culture and nature. . . ." (43). While such descriptions try to capture the complexity of Heathcliff, they are too inconclusive and vague. Heathcliff is interpreted as a larger than life figure who

embodies extremes, rather than as a human being who may be viewed in ordinary terms. As Q.D.Leavis argues, "by showing always the psychological reasons for certain kinds of behaviour [this novel shows that] there is nothing mysterious or incredible . . . in essentials, about Heathcliff" (119). Leavis herself, however, does not offer any conclusive interpretation of Heathcliff, and instead considers him to "be made up of so many inconsistent parts" (107).

Introduction:

Given this critical background where Heathcliff's character seems to defy precise definition, this paper suggests that his fundamental identity is his lack of it, as a waif. While the Webster's Desk Dictionary defines the word "waif" as: 1) a homeless and helpless person; 2) something found whose owner is not known," this paper uses the term in a broader sense as a unwanted person who does not belong to any family, community or place. Initially, in childhood and adolescence, Heathcliff is a waif due to circumstances beyond his control. Later, as an adult, Heathcliff's behaviour causes him to remain a waif, alienated from other people. Nonetheless, throughout the novel Heathcliff seeks entry into familial circles, and strives to re-create domestic relations (albeit in perverse ways) as compensation for his sense of being a waif.

Childhood:

In his early life, Heathcliff is clearly presented as a waif. Old Mr. Earnshaw discovers him abandoned in the streets of Liverpool "starving and houseless" (45). The child has no known family connections since "not a soul knew to whom it belonged" (45). He also seems to lack affiliation to any recognisable social group as he "repeated over and over again some mysterious gibberish that nobody could understand" (45). Heathcliff's mysterious origins have intrigued many Bronte scholars. Q. D.Leavis suggests that Bronte originally intended Heathcliff as "the illegitimate son and Catherine's half-brother" (89). Daiches surmises that "the fact that Liverpool is a port maybe significant: was he the offspring of some foreign sailor, did he have some negro blood or did he come from a distant country?" (22). Interesting though such speculations are, they cannot be confirmed. The novel implies, however, that the child has been exposed to deprivation and hardship in his early years. Nelly observes that he was "a sullen, patient child, hardened, perhaps to ill-treatment"(46). His arrival at Wuthering Heights places him in yet another vulnerable position where he is subject to the intolerance of Mrs. Earnshaw who "was ready to fling it [Heathcliff] out of doors," as well as to "Hindley's blows" and Nelly's pinches (45,46). Nelly later admits that "Hindley hated him: and to say the truth I did the same; and we played and went on with him shamefully" (46). Clearly, this new abode does not offer much security or warm acceptance to the helpless child. Eagleton comments that "As a waif and orphan, Heathcliff is inserted into the close-knit family structure as an alien" (120).

Despite the hostility of some of its inmates, the child Heathcliff, nonetheless, briefly experiences familial relations at Wuthering Heights. Nelly reports how old Mr. Earnshaw "took to him strangely" and petted the 'poor fatherless child" and offered

Heathcliff affection and some protection from his antagonists (46). Interestingly, the fact that Heathcliff is named after a son who died in childhood suggests that the old man saw him as a replacement for the dead child. Gilbert and Gubar observe that Heathcliff is perhaps viewed "as if he were a reincarnation of the lost child" (264). Besides the senior Earnshaw, Cathy too offers friendship and affection to Heathcliff, and Nelly describes how the two youngsters were "very thick" (46). Heathcliff seems responsive to the friendly overtures of Earnshaw and his daughter. Their close bonds can be observed in the poignant scene shortly prior to the old man's death when Cathy "leant against her father's knee, and Heathcliff was lying on the floor with his head in her lap" (50).

During these early years, presumably as result of familial affection, Heathcliff displays virtuous qualities such as innocence, goodness and patience. Nelly grudgingly concedes that during a attack of measles "he was the quietest child that ever nurse watched over . . . Cathy and her brother harassed me terribly: *he* was as uncomplaining as a lamb . . ." (47). Another instance when Heathcliff displays a noble aspect is immediately after Mr. Earnshaw's death. Nelly observes that Heathcliff and Cathy "were comforting each other with better thoughts than I could have hit on: no parson in the world ever pictured heaven so beautifully as they did in their innocent talk . . ." (51). Even after old Earnshaw's death, despite Hindley's cruelty, Heathcliff's initial inclination is to lead a virtuous life as revealed by his words, "Nelly, make me decent. I'm going to be good" (59). Undoubtedly, Heathcliff's most genuine feelings are reserved for Cathy. Nelly observes that even as a child "the notion of *envying* Catherine was incomprehensible to him, but the notion of grieving her he understood clearly enough" (60). Cathy, in turn, was "much too fond of him" (49). Clearly then, the young Heathcliff does not lack in humane qualities as he reacts positively to the affection he receives, which in turn helps to diminish his feelings of being a waif.

Unfortunately, this new identity that Heathcliff seems set to forge within the Earnshaw family (as a foster son to old Earnshaw and Cathy's inseparable partner) is threatened by the advent of Hindley as the new master of Wuthering Heights. Hindley begins his destruction of Heathcliff by relegating him to the role of servant and "compelling him to [labour] as hard as any other lad on the farm" (52). Hindley also hinders Heathcliff's education by preventing him from receiving lessons through the curate (52). Eagleton observes that Heathcliff is robbed of liberty in two antithetical ways: "exploited as a servant on the one hand, allowed to run wild on the other" and is thus culturally impoverished (121). Additionally, Hindley subjects Heathcliff to violence and abuse to such an extent that Nelly comments "his treatment of the latter was enough to make a fiend of a saint" (67). Besides Hindley, Joseph too takes advantage of Heathcliff's helplessness to "thrash [him] till his arm ached" (52). Physically and mentally abused, and deprived of opportunities to improve himself culturally and socially, Heathcliff is once again in the position of a waif.

However, Heathcliff rebels against his circumstances by taking comfort in the kinship he shares with Cathy. Nelly relates that "Heathcliff bore his degradation pretty well at first, because Cathy taught him what she learnt, and worked or played with him

in the fields" (52). Paradoxically, their bond seems to grow stronger in the face of the harassments of Hindley and Joseph. As John T. Matthews observes, "Catherine and Heathcliff are never closer than when one has been temporarily hurt or banished by the family, against which they can maintain their separateness" (60). Lyn Pykett too mentions "the intensely close relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, the children of nature and comrades-in-arms against the adult tyranny of Joseph and later of Hindley, the new owner of the heights" (89). Regardless then of the oppressions imposed on him, Heathcliff still manages at this point to stave off "waifhood" and to gain a sense of belonging through the companionship he enjoys with Cathy.

Adolescence:

This somewhat idyllic state where Heathcliff's deprivations are compensated through Cathy, is disrupted in their adolescent years. Tom Winnifreth points out that "[a] case can be made for saying that Heathcliff and Catherine have in their childish innocence established complete harmony, and that this is broken by a series of intruders" (51). The main intruders who damage the close bond between Heathcliff and Cathy are the Linton family. The Lintons first initiate the separation of the two friends by hosting Cathy for five weeks to recover from an injury, while castigating Heathcliff as a "a little Lascar, an American or Spanish castaway" and chasing him away as "a wicked boy . . . quite unfit for a decent house" (55). Parted from his only companion, this separation heightens Heathcliff's sense of being a waif and elicits a negative reaction from him. Gilbert and Gubar observe that ". . .when Catherine is first withdrawn from the adolescent Heathcliff, the boy becomes increasingly brutish, as if to foreshadow his eventual soullessness" (296). Although Cathy returns and continues to be "his constant companion still at his seasons of respite from labour," their relationship is no longer the same. The Lintons continue to visit and influence Cathy, heightening her awareness of Heathcliff as a "vulgar young ruffian" and "worse than a brute" (68). Nelly points out the "double character" played by Cathy in her attempts to appease both parties (68). Heathcliff too seems sensitized to the growing barrier between Cathy and him, and he "recoil[s] with angry suspicion from her girlish caresses, as if conscious there could be no gratification in lavishing such marks of affection on him" (70). According to Winnifreth, Heathcliff does not want affirmations of love from Cathy since he probably already knows that she loves him, but "what he cares about is marriage" (53). Marriage to Cathy would have provided him with the love, security and family he had lacked throughout his life and given him a sense of rootedness within the Earnshaw clan. However, as Cathy is gradually drawn into the Linton world and confesses to Nelly her intention to marry Linton because he is "handsome and young and cheerful and rich [and loving]," Heathcliff realises that he has lost his kindred spirit (78). Nelly recognises how devastated Heathcliff must feel and warns Cathy that "as soon as you become Mrs. Linton, he loses friend, and love, and all!" (80). Eventually, bereft of familial ties, culture and status at Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff is yet again a waif who has no alternative but to go away and seek out a new identity for himself.

Adulthood:

After a mysterious absence of three years, Heathcliff reappears, apparently transformed into a gentleman. Nelly comments that he "retained no marks of former degradation" and that "his manner was even dignified: quite divested of roughness" (92). Significantly, Nelly begins to change her address of him from "Heathcliff" to "Mr. Heathcliff" thus denoting his new rise in status. Others besides Nelly are struck by the transformation in Heathcliff. Cathy boasts that "Heathcliff was now worthy of any one's regard, and it would honour the first gentleman in the country to be his friend" (94). Linton too, on meeting the new Heathcliff "remained for a minute at a loss how to address the ploughboy, as he had called him" (92). Given his identity as a gentleman, Heathcliff is no longer excluded from the society of the Grange and the Heights. Hindley Earnshaw invites him to lodge at the Heights, while at Thrushcross Grange "he gradually established his right to be expected" (93,96). Heathcliff the waif seems replaced by a socially acceptable gentleman who has "amass[ed] a certain amount of cultural capital . . . [and bought] the expensive commodity of gentility" (Eagleton 121).

Heathcliff's gentlemanly appearance, however, does not mask for long his cruel intentions and actions. Suspicious of Heathcliff's hypocritical behaviour towards Hindley and Isabella, Nelly has "presentiments" of the evil to come and states "his visits were a continual nightmare to me" (93,102,104). She perceives him as an evil beast who was "waiting its time to spring and destroy" (102). Linton also shares her unease and had "the sense to comprehend Heathcliff's disposition: to know that, though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable and unchanged" (96). Heathcliff himself admits his motives of revenge when he says that "the tyrant grinds down his slaves and they . . . crush those beneath them" and also announces: "I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! . . ." (106,137). His unkindness is manifest in his ill-treatment of Isabella who declares that "I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death and gave it back to me" (152). Towards Hindley, too, Heathcliff's behaviour is dishonourable as he encourages Hindley's gaming habits in order to become the mortgagee of Wuthering Heights, and later reduces the true heir, Hareton, to the level of a servant (164). While Heathcliff's vicious behavior seems far from gentlemanly, N. M. Jacobs observes that his actions are in keeping with the notions of masculinity at the time. She comments that "Heathcliff's years away from Cathy make him into a man in the terms of his age: He has gone out into the world, has done battle and conquered, but has also been hardened. He returns violent, ruthlessly exploitative, and dangerous to those around him . . ." (82). According to Jacobs, such violence and abuse is made possible because of the total power vested in the patriarch of the home. She points out that "significantly, Heathcliff never returns Hindley's violence or in fact, perpetrates violence until he himself has gained the legal and economic status of paterfamilias" (79).

Regardless of its legitimacy, Heathcliff's behaviour clearly alienates him and

arouses the hatred of those who come into contact with him. He succeeds in evoking the passionate anger of such temperate characters as Nelly, Linton and Isabella. Reacting to Heathcliff's sneering words, Nelly exclaims "I detested him just then" (105). Isabella expresses that "the single pleasure I can imagine is to die or see him dead" (137). Linton bans Heathcliff from further communication with Thrushcross Grange and calls him "a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous" (107). Hindley too expresses a desire "to strangle him in my last agony" (159). The extreme antagonism Heathcliff excites in his victims is further obvious from Isabella's statement: "It is preferable to be hated than loved by him" (159). Detested and cursed by those who live with him, the adult Heathcliff is once again, essentially, a waif. This time, however, Heathcliff's own behaviour is responsible for his state of being unloved and unwanted.

Amid his alienation, Heathcliff desires the company of his ally, Cathy, who loves him "as [her] own being" in spite of being aware that he is "an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without culture . . . (81, 97). Isabella comments later that "Catherine had an awfully perverted taste to esteem him so dearly, knowing him so well" (152). Despite her love for him, Cathy who is physically fragile and confined to Thrushcross Grange, can no longer provide Heathcliff with the close kinship they once shared. At their final meeting Heathcliff realises their inevitable separation and agonizes over the fact that he has to live on alone while she is dead. "Do I want to live?" he questions. "What kind of living will it be when you . . . [are in the grave?]" (144). Deprived of Cathy's love, Heathcliff accurately foresees a life of loneliness and social isolation.

While Thrushcross Grange remains inaccessible to Heathcliff, he attempts to negate his pariah feelings by installing himself within a domestic context at Wuthering Heights, undeterred by its gloominess. Nelly comments that "there never was such a dreary, dismal scene as the formerly cheerful house presented" (132). Nonetheless, Heathcliff seems to prefer this atmosphere and to live with such disagreeable companions as Joseph and Hindley, instead of finding more suitable accommodations at Gimmerton. One wonders at his decision to live at Wuthering Heights since Heathcliff could still have gained control over the profligate Hindley's property without residing in that miserable setting. A plausible explanation is that Heathcliff, despite the mutual hatred among the inmates of Wuthering Heights, requires the presence of others to counter his sense of being a waif. Furthermore, Wuthering Heights has special familial associations for him since it was his only home and, as Cathy relates, "he has an attachment to the house where we lived together" (95).

Heathcliff's need for the presence of others to negate his isolation may also be evinced in his desire to "try [his] hand at rearing a young one," and his decision to bring up Hareton following Hindley's death (164). Heathcliff warns Nelly that "I don't engage to let Hareton go undisputed" (164). While this decision is clearly part of his plan of revenge against Hindley, one questions whether vengeance is Heathcliff's sole motive in raising Hareton. Surprisingly, Heathcliff's behaviour towards Hareton is much kinder than the inhuman treatment to which Hindley subjected the adolescent

Heathcliff. Although Hareton is culturally deprived by Heathcliff, Nelly acknowledges that "Mr. Heathcliff, I believe, had not treated him physically ill" (171). Heathcliff also seems to have earned the boy's gratitude for protecting him from Hindley's bullying, as when the child Hareton informs Nelly that he likes Heathcliff because "he pays dad back what he gies to me. . ." (104). The child's affection for Heathcliff is also obvious from the way he "played with Heathcliff's whiskers and stroked his cheek" at Hindley's funeral (164). Given Hareton's fondness for him, Heathcliff may have sought to raise the child partly because he recognises in the trusting, friendless Hareton another waif like himself, who would help alleviate his loneliness.

Heathcliff After Catherine's Death:

In the years following Cathy's death, despite his attempts to lead a settled life at Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff further alienates himself from society. While Heathcliff's behaviour arouses the ire and hatred of his associates even prior to Cathy's demise, it deteriorates to an intolerable degree following the loss of his beloved. Tom Winnifreth states that after Catherine's death "Heathcliff really comes into his own. . . [While] Heathcliff's brooding presence is felt at a distance throughout the first half of the novel. . . he fully lives up to expectations when he finally emerges onto the centre of the stage" (58). Moreover, he comments, "Heathcliff's malignity, difficult to explain before Catherine's death, seems almost pointless after she has died" (58). His brutality towards the sickly Linton (jr) is particularly appalling. Nelly declares that "I could not picture a father treating a dying child as tyrannically and wickedly as I afterwards learned Heathcliff had treated him . . ." (219). Similarly, Q. D. Leavis observes, "Heathcliff's brutal callousness is as unpardonable as possible since the dying lad is his own son" (122). Heathcliff's viciousness also extends towards Catherine (jr) as he holds her hostage, forces her into a doomed marriage, and violates her physically on several occasions. Hareton too is victimised by Heathcliff since he is "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 towards against vice" (171). Heathcliff's increasing malevolence clearly stems from his intense feelings of desolation following the death of the one person who identified with him completely. Heathcliff's words "I *cannot* live without my soul!" implies the oneness of the relationship he shared with Cathy (148). Gilbert and Gubar observe that to be a soulless body "is to be a sort of monster, a fleshly thing, an object of pure animal materiality, like the abortive being Victor Frankenstein created. And such a monster indeed is what Heathcliff becomes" (293).

Understandably, Heathcliff's monstrosity provokes the abhorrence of his companions. Recalling his attack on Catherine (jr) Nelly states that "at this diabolical violence I rushed on him furiously. 'You villain!' I began to cry, 'you villain!'" (227). Heathcliff also antagonises Lockwood who initially seeks out his landlord's company but soon realises his mistake and vacates his rented residence. Q.D. Leavis comments that "Lockwood [is] dismay[ed] at finding that what he had first put down to a refined misanthropy in Heathcliff, such as he affects himself, is a genuine savagery and malevolence" (124). Catherine (jr) is probably the most outspoken in her

condemnation of Heathcliff. She daringly points out to him the consequences of his cruelty:

Mr. Heathcliff, *you have nobody* to love you; and however, miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of thinking that your cruelty arises from your greater misery. You *are* miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? *Nobody* loves you --*nobody* will cry for you when you die! I wouldn't be you! (240)

The truth of her words probably strikes Heathcliff as he orders her to "Begone, witch . . ." (240). Although he has power to command Catherine (jr), Heathcliff is powerless to silence the obvious fact that he is a thoroughly unpopular and unwanted man.

Despite the revulsion and fear displayed towards him by Catherine (jr) and some of the other inmates at Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff still seems to require their presence. As Heathcliff tells Nelly ". . . I want my children about me" (240). Nelly herself realises the futility of her secret desire to raise Catherine (jr) on her private savings for "Heathcliff would as soon as permit that as he would set up Hareton in an independent house;" (248). While this perverse attitude may be interpreted as Heathcliff's vengeance against the Lintons and Earnshaws, one must remember that by this stage Heathcliff has already achieved his target. Having secured Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, and having degraded Catherine (jr) and Hareton to the level of paupers, Heathcliff's plans are already fulfilled. Therefore, his desire to incorporate Catherine (jr) and later Nelly into the household at Wuthering Heights may be viewed not as revenge, but as a warped wish to re-construct a familial setting in order to reduce his sense of being a waif. Stevie Davies observes that "the familial world is controlled at best by a foster-mother (Nelly) . . . at worst by 'Devil Daddy' (172). This idea finds support in Heathcliff's several references to his parental role as when he tells Catherine (jr) "I hope you'll be a dutiful daughter" and "I shall be your father . . ." (228,239). Gilbert and Gubar comment that Heathcliff "impersonates a 'devil daddy,' stealing children like Catherine II and Linton from their rightful homes. . ." (297).

However immoral his actions are, Heathcliff clearly attempts to establish a domestic atmosphere at Wuthering Heights. Unlike in Hindley's time, Nelly observes that "the house, inside, had regained its ancient aspect of comfort under female management" (172). Contrary to Hindley's policy of excluding the servants from the main house, Heathcliff requires everyone's attendance at the dining table. Nelly describes that "We always ate our meals with Mr. Heathcliff. I held the mistress's post in making tea and carving; so I was indispensable at table (263)." When Catherine (jr) once fails to arrive at table for dinner Heathcliff "perceived her vacant seat and sent [Nelly] to call her." (266). Heathcliff's insistence on maintaining routine domestic relations appears incongruous, given his rude and violent manners. David Daiches states that "the cold inhospitality of [Heathcliff's] demeanour is at variance with the blazing warmth which Lockwood finds at the domestic centre of the house" (21). Nonetheless, these domestic relations are far from harmonious as Lockwood himself

observes: "How dreary life gets over in that house" (253). Gilbert and Gubar comment that "Lockwood is right to expect some familial relationships among his tea-table companions, and right too to be daunted by the hellish lack of relationships among them" (261). Presumably then, Heathcliff cares not so much for the niceties of human relations at Wuthering Heights, but rather requires people gathered around him in order to decrease his feelings of being an outcast.

Heathcliff's Death and Beyond:

Eventually, Heathcliff's despotic actions result in his complete isolation from others as well as from himself. According to Eagleton, "In oppressing others, the exploiter imprisons himself; the adult Heathcliff's systematic tormenting is fed by his victims' pain but also drains him of blood, impels and possesses him as an external force Heathcliff moves from being Hindley's victim to becoming . . . his own executor" (121). Undoubtedly, one can see a connection between Heathcliff's impending death and his increasing withdrawal from himself and others. Nelly observes how Heathcliff gradually grew "more and more disinclined to society" and that his "mind was occupied on other subjects than his company" (259, 264). Heathcliff himself admits to Nelly that "I take so little interest in my daily life that I hardly remember to eat and drink" (268). While his alienation is largely self-imposed, Heathcliff's condition may have been further aggravated by the friendship developing between Hareton and Catherine (jr). Clearly, Heathcliff has some empathic feelings towards Hareton whose loyalty and love for his "foster-father" is unshakeable (266). Heathcliff confides in Nelly that "Hareton seemed a personification of my youth . . . I felt to him in such a variety of ways that it would have been impossible to have accosted him rationally. . . . his startling likeness to Catherine connected him fearfully with her" (268). Gilbert and Gubar state that Heathcliff sees the boy ". . . as metaphorically the true son of his own true union with Catherine" and wants him as his "one strong natural descendant" (301). This reason may explain why Heathcliff responds so furiously with the words "Damnable witch! dare you pretend to rouse [Hareton] against me? . . ." when Catherine (jr) threatens to cause a rift between him and Hareton (265). Presumably, Heathcliff considers that in being displaced from Hareton's affections, he may lose his only remaining friend.

During the last days prior to his death, Heathcliff seems to experience acute desolation as indicated by his attempts to seek the company of others. He requests Nelly to come in to the house since "he wanted somebody with him" (276). Michael Macovski notes that "Even Heathcliff displays the need to express his inmost feeling before another, to break his solitude, at least momentarily" (102). When Nelly declines through fear, he turns to Catherine (jr) in a almost pathetic appeal: "will *you* come, chuck? I'll not hurt you" (277). Catherine's and Nelly's instinctive recoiling leaves Heathcliff in no doubt that he is unloved and rejected by both as a result of his previous cruelty. He comments with tragic irony that "I believe you think me a fiend . . . something too horrible to live under a decent roof . . . to you I've made myself worse than the devil" (277). Through these words Heathcliff appears to acknowledge

that he alone is responsible for his state of being a waif in adulthood.

In his alienation, Heathcliff is increasingly obsessed with the idea of being united with the dead Cathy. Macovski comments that Heathcliff "spends the final days of his life endeavouring to address her beyond the grave and thus transcend both his rhetorical and social isolation" (102). Heathcliff realises that in his outcast condition only Cathy would accept him. As he tells Nelly, "Well, there is *one* who won't shrink from my company! By God, she's relentless" (277). One may suggest that by this final stage of the novel, Heathcliff and Cathy are ready to be re-united since they are both on equal terms as outcasts. Gilbert and Gubar observe that Cathy is "not only a dead failure, but a wailing outcast ghost" (292). This fact is confirmed by the phantom Cathy's cry in Lockwood's nightmare: "Let me in -- Let me in! . . . I've been a waif for twenty years" (37). Heathcliff's own position is not dissimilar to that of Cathy's ghost. For most of his lifetime he is not "let in" to the social circles of the Lintons and the Earnshaws, and never finds permanent acceptance among them. Both Cathy and Heathcliff realise that only by being re-united in death can they overcome their alienation and find happiness together. During her final illness, Cathy declares her determination to be united with Heathcliff beyond the grave and says that "I won't rest till you are with me. I never will" (117). Heathcliff himself anticipates this reunion when he states: "I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it" and "I tell you I have nearly attained *my* heaven" (269, 276).

Whether the two outcasts find fulfilment through each other in death, this novel does not explicitly state. As Winnifreth observes "we can[not] be sure whether Heathcliff is finally reunited to walk the moors with Catherine, as a little boy blubbers, or whether we should, like Lockwood gazing at the graves of Catherine, Heathcliff, and Edgar, wonder 'how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth'" (64). Nonetheless, the novel implies that whether they are at rest or haunting the moors, Cathy and Heathcliff remain side by side, inseparable as they once were as children. For Heathcliff, who has unsuccessfully sought a sense of belonging and acceptance all his life, death satisfies this need. With the moors as a dwelling, and Cathy as his companion, one can assume that Heathcliff, in death, finally escapes his identity of being a waif. As Stevie Davies states, "Burying their individual identities in itself, the moor takes its children home" (173).

Having resolved to some extent the issue of Heathcliff's identity, one needs to consider the social factors which led to its formation. Bronte clearly implies that society played a vital role in determining the character of Heathcliff. When he first arrives at the Heights, Heathcliff is but a child, vulnerable and open to the influence of others. Eagleton observes that "Heathcliff's circumstances are so obscure he is available to be accepted or rejected simply for himself, laying claim to no status other than a human one" (120). Realising this fact, old Earnshaw advises that "you must e'en take [Heathcliff] as a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil" (45). These words may be seen as a caution to society to draw out a blessing rather than a curse from the child. As Eagleton states, "[Heathcliff's] arrival at the Heights offers its inhabitants a choice to transcend the constrictions of their self-

enclosed social structure and gather him in" (120). Unfortunately, instead of appreciating the presence of Heathcliff as a means of potential liberation from their narrow-minded existence, the residents at the Heights and Grange reject Heathcliff as an unwelcome intruder and waif. Their hostile reactions prove Nelly's words to Lockwood: "we don't in general take to foreigners here . . ." (51). The brutality of Hindley and Joseph, the snobbery and insults of the Lintons, the rejection of Cathy, all suffice to pervert and harden the character of Heathcliff, thus bringing vengeance upon themselves. As Heathcliff tells Cathy "I know you have treated me infernally - infernally! . . . and if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary" (105). While Heathcliff's vindictive actions are clearly not justifiable, Q. D. Leavis points out that by exposing the hypocrisies of other characters, the novel prevents "an easily self-righteous condemnation of Heathcliff" (123). Ultimately, *Wuthering Heights* calls into question the nature of a society which can transform a potentially virtuous child into a brutal adult. One wonders whether a society that responds to a waif with unwarranted violence, can expect any better than to be challenged on its own terms?

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