

**ANTAGONISTIC CLASSES OF VICTORIAN SOCIETY IN EMILY BRONTË'S
WUTHERING HEIGHTS: FEMALE BOOK KNOWLEDGE AS CULTURAL MEDIATOR**

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Abstract: *This study argues, through a series of close readings, that female book knowledge resists unified interpretation in Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights (1847), contradicting the widely-held Victorian assumption according to which discursive freedom is an exclusively male bastion of privilege. It instead concedes that self-instruction in the novel crosses cultural boundaries and perpetuates an ideological hegemony through the book as an agent of reconciliation. Book-knowledge in the novel is not the exclusive preserve of men, but a source of creativity for both ladies and ladies' maids. Language and narrative technique, the study reveals, serve to unveil contrasts between servant and gentle folk, fashionable and popular manners, enforced and self-propelled reading.*

Keywords: *cultural mediation; class; education; female book knowledge; language; narrative design; reconciliation.*

1. Introduction

There can hardly be any disagreement among critics that Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is an object of anxious inquiry even today, almost two centuries after its publication in 1847. Readers still receive much genuine pleasure from the perusal of what seems to be, without doubt, a classic of literature, penned by a woman writer who consented hesitantly to having her writings published and was equally at home in the private world of imagination and the mundane reality of human behaviour. The four literary Brontë children (Charlotte, Branwell, Emily Jane and Anne, born in 1816, 1817, 1818, and 1820, respectively, to a Cambridge-educated father who had ascended from a poor Irish peasant to a respectable Anglican parson and to a mother whose life was cut short in 1822, leaving six children in mourning, two of which – the elder sisters Maria and Elizabeth – died in early 1825) were avid readers and began a vogue for the writing of fiction which extended well into adulthood: the fabulous Glasstown and Gondal kingdoms inhabited by romance monarchs and historical characters of their early years later translated into mature literary productions and masterpieces of literature under pseudonyms (Currer, Acton, and Ellis Bell) which disguised the three sisters' female identities.

As the narrative begins to lay bare its devices, the reader detects the uncertainty of the relation between the real and the unreal in *Wuthering Heights*. More baffling, still, is how violence, conflict, brutality (both subtle and apparent), off-putting dialect and vengeance are melded together to render a story set back half to three-quarters of a century before the composition of the book. A comparison of several biographies might illuminate the enigmatic novel that *Wuthering Heights* is and throw some light on its authoress, although accounts of Emily Brontë's short life confront one with a tough case – the barest biographical details have only left their trace in biographies of the Brontë family, her Belgian essays, her poems and her only novel. Scarce as they are, biographical keys to *Wuthering Heights* do not permit readers to draw casual inferences about the latent and manifest issues at the heart of the novel. They are by no means the be-all and end-all of literary interpretation, although they do point to a personality – strong-willed, yet loyal, remarkably reserved and self-sufficient; highly intellectual, yet seemingly satisfied with a retired

domestic life – which is not at all easy to define and to the life of a writer who had to deal with solitude, successive bereavements, and excessive domestic responsibilities taken on precociously.

Even if Elizabeth Gaskell focused on Charlotte Brontë's life in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, the reader still owes her Charlotte's accounts of Emily's "love of the moors", where "out of a sullen hollow in a livid hill-side, her mind could make an Eden" (Gaskell 1996: 109) and of her penchant for "sitting on the rug reading, with her arm round her rough bull-dog's neck" (1996: 214). Ellen Nussey, Charlotte's friend, described Emily as "intensely loveable", yet inviting "confidence in her moral power" (Leavis and Leavis 1969: 127). Emily made herself as useful as a housekeeper at Haworth, while still reading her way through her father's library and creating extravagant fantasy worlds in her mind. Her experience outside and inside the Haworth Parsonage was, perhaps, modest and crippled by domesticity. Her imagination, however, was to turn, years after the publication of *Wuthering Heights*, into the opium exhaled by generations of adoring readers.

Akin to Emily, the novel's Nelly Dean, with her imagination, tools of interpretation, mystifying observations and experience, moves far beyond prescriptive social classifications and points the modern reader towards alternative readings, despite her liminality in the nuclear family structure. Even Emily Brontë's literary pseudonym, Ellis Bell, is highly suggestive of the resemblance between the two – one real, one unreal, again, for *Wuthering Heights* itself refuses to lay its ghosts and allows them to break the boundaries of the conventionally real characters and the familiarly known events. Examining the two names (Ellis Bell, Ellen/Nelly Dean) closely drives readers towards an unexpected acrostic – "bell" rhymes with "knell" and the association of Nelly – knell – Ellis – Ellen becomes readily available (Musselwhite 1987: 107). In fact, Northrop Frye, in his magnum opus, *Anatomy of Criticism*, identifies in *Wuthering Heights* passion and fury (both tragic emotions) and links the novel with "the tale and the ballad" (1957: 304). This piece of information is again relevant for the upcoming discussion since regarding Nelly Dean as merely an unsophisticated folk servant is naïve. Throughout the novel, Nelly is a performer of eerie folk ballads for her own pleasure. The reader first witnesses her singing a ballad to Hareton and being interrupted by Catherine Earnshaw. By her own admission, the second time, she sings 'Fairly Annie's Wedding' (as she tells Joseph, gleefully flouting his call for the Lord to judge her for glorifying Satan). On this second occasion, our folk epithalamium never desirous of celebrity, like Emily herself, is cheerfully waiting for the union of Catherine junior and Hareton, thus she voices her joy at the filling of a crack in the equilibrium of social life, associated with the first generation of lovers. Significant for Nelly's position, however, is the fact that ballads are collective creations with fickle connections to print culture and an ambiguous status within canonical literature.

2. The landed gentry and male readers of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

If in *David Copperfield*, *Great Expectations* or *Jane Eyre*, the first-person narrator recounts the tale of his or her own life, looking back at the events with the sophistication of thought that comes along with maturity, or if in novels by George Eliot or Henry Fielding the teller of the tale confers objectivity on the events, there is no such thing in *Wuthering Heights*, despite the personal pronoun "I" of the paragraph cited below, the ordinary speaking subject of other novels. Uncertainty and confused perplexity pervade the novel as Lockwood becomes involved in a series of interpretative blunders which test his judgement and prove it defective:

While enjoying a month of fine weather at the sea-coast, I was thrown into the company of a most fascinating creature, a real goddess in my eyes, as long as she took no notice of me. I 'never told my love' vocally; still, if looks have language, the merest idiot might have guessed I was over head and ears: she understood me, at last, and looked a return - the sweetest of all imaginable looks - and what did I do? I confess it with shame - shrunk icily into myself, like a snail, at every glance retired colder and farther; till, finally, the poor innocent

was led to doubt her own senses, and, overwhelmed with confusion, *persuaded her mamma to decamp*. (Brontë 1847: 6, emphasis mine).

Critics have shown that Lockwood's language use has a contradictory quality, being both descriptive (transposing readers into a "real" experience) and grandiose at once or, sometimes, consecutively. The following short paragraphs voiced by Lockwood illustrate this contradiction:

On that *bleak* hill-top the earth was hard with a *black* frost, and the air made me *shiver* through every limb. Being unable to remove the chain, I *jumped* over, and, *running* up the flagged causeway bordered with straggling gooseberry bushes, knocked vainly for admittance, till my knuckles *tingled* and the dogs *howled*. 'Wretched inmates!' I *ejaculated*, mentally, 'you deserve *perpetual isolation* from your species for your *churlish inhospitality*. At least, I would not keep my doors barred in the day time - I don't care - I will get in!' (Brontë 1847: 9-10, emphasis mine).

The style of the paragraphs listed earlier thread their way through the chapters narrated by Lockwood, displaying a subtle contrast between convention and experience, that is, between "literary language" (which concentrates all of the reader's attention outwards, towards the extrinsic world) and "experiential language" (driving the reader's attention inwards and back towards Lockwood, the one who utters the actual words) (Holderness 1985: 45). One paragraph is riddled with conventional, ordinary words and precise details indicating action and movement. The language of the subsequent paragraph, produced by the same Lockwood, is the frivolous language of elaborate, civilized politeness. One paragraph is reasonably accessible, the other dizzyingly abstract, linguistically dense and elusive. Elevated diction and grotesquely clown-like behaviour come from one and the same person.

On a spectrum of language use in *Wuthering Heights*, Joseph's Yorkshire dialect and Lockwood's pretentious speech are two extremes. Joseph and Lockwood are, thus, two "spectral" readers at opposite ends of a continuum. Joseph is, after all, the servant of the "next best [house] in the neighborhood" (Brontë 1847: 219) after Thrushcross Grange, the servant of "an old yeoman settlement" (Eagleton 1975: 112). In providing a transcription of his speech, Emily Brontë acknowledged the regionally differentiated readers of the Victorian audience. By placing Joseph's speech side by side with that of other literate characters, Brontë was also playing off the literate-illiterate dichotomy pervasive in the nineteenth century, when the Victorians, paradoxically, began to increase their interest in folklore. Brontë must have been familiar with the "West Riding Dialect movement" (Newman 2006: 42) of the 1830s, a response to the prevalence of educated, literate classes as larger subdivisions of society. By producing written material partially or entirely in dialect, contributors to the movement manifested a nostalgia for the fading local culture. The following paragraph (taken out of Catherine's diary), however, suggests that Joseph's near-incomprehensible vernacular and Catherine's speech behaviour share a sensory vitality, a physical quality matching the concreteness and roughness of the Heights, which indicates a step towards a Victorian datum needed for grasping the totality of educated, self-educated and uneducated readers in the Victorian era:

'T' maister nobbut just buried, and Sabbath not o'ered, und t' sound o' t' gospel still i' yer lugs, and ye darr be laiking! Shame on ye! sit ye down, ill childer! there's good books enough if ye'll read 'em: sit ye down, and think o' yer sowls!'
'Saying this, he compelled us so to square our positions that we might receive from the far-off fire a dull ray to show us the text of the lumber he thrust upon us.
'I could not bear the employment. I took my dingy volume by the scroop, and hurled it into the dog kennel, vowing I hated a good book. Heathcliff kicked his to the same place. Then there was a hubbub'. (Brontë 1847: 22).

Education is not meant to be taken hold of by a relatively small circle of cognoscenti. Heathcliff's loss of education and self-help attempts, for instance, show the damning effects of denying individuals chances at social improvement. Consumed by unconsummated learning desire

(which comes naturally in a child) and virulent hatred, Heathcliff turns into the outsider wreaking havoc on the community that denies his chances at love and genteel education. Heathcliff is, however, a self-made gentleman. There are, in his victim-turns-into-oppressor process, causes upon causes, and the degree to which readers see Heathcliff as the instigator of violence or the recipient of such violence depends on the assumptions – social, moral, psychological – the extratextual reader brings to the novel and, after all, on the plurality of the text itself.

Right from the start of *Wuthering Heights*, the city-dweller Lockwood takes notice of a social incongruity between his landlord's appearance as opposed to his dress and manners: "a dark-skinned gypsy in aspect" and "in dress and manners a gentleman", yet living in a house befitting "a homely, northern farmer" (Brontë 1847: 5). There is an obvious clash between Lockwood's verbose politeness and elaborate self-presentation and Heathcliff's reticence and gruffness. In Chapter 7, another social incongruity is lying in wait. Nelly Dean comforts Heathcliff with the notion that he perhaps is displaced royalty, which is a very significant detail hitherto not discussed. Even though deeply hurt by Catherine's behaviour upon her return to the Heights from the Grange (the house of the gentry, the home of clearly articulated gender distinctions, where she has been wooed into becoming a lady in dress, manners and social attitudes), Heathcliff decides, for her sake, to take on some of the conventions of civilized life: "Nelly, make me decent, I'm going to be good" (Brontë 1847: 59), he says. His attempt to better himself is soon frustrated. Thus, he decides to be bad, instead. Catherine returns from her stay at the Lintons very much altered, from a "hatless little savage" who would "squeeze [her dear ones] breathless" to "a very dignified person" (1847: 55), showing reserve and fearing the dogs who come to "welcome her" (1847: 55-56) back might dirty her dress.

As readers identifying with characters of a higher social class almost involuntarily often do, Heathcliff needs to believe in his (imagined) rise in class as a sign of triumph over Hindley Earnshaw and Edgar Linton. He takes fictional reality – under the harsh conditions of "labour out of doors" (Brontë 1847: 48) – naively, as children mostly do when listening to fairy tales. Compliance soon turns into aggression. Some of it is channelled into cruel plans for revenge, some into self-help. Here comes the inevitable question: were not such fairy-tales perversely created to produce confusion and to render the "brute of a lad" (1847: 62) usually sent into the garret defenceless against an oppressive system? Can this be a reason why, during the nineteenth century, women's reading tastes had to be educated – to produce, in their mind, a fictitious oblivion of what was going on outside their mental space? Catherine's later claim of oneness with Heathcliff can be interpreted along such lines as the female character's recognition that the male outcast denied education is in the same position of powerlessness as she is.

3. Marginal female characters and book-knowledge in *Wuthering Heights*

The narrative voices of Lockwood and Nelly Dean are placed side by side – nested one within the other, with the female narrative voice covering 26 out of 34 chapters, split in half by a 12-year gap and including other secondary narrative interventions and disclosures. Within the novel, female narrative voices operate not simply to uncover the truth, the authentic subtext to the story about the Heights and the Grange itself, but also to impose harmony and substance on otherwise esoteric experiences.

Critics have often suggested that Lockwood and Nelly are twin witnesses and share "a single bland speech" (Krupat 1970: 273). The passage below – among many other pieces of textual evidence uttered by Nelly – functions as a foyer or entryway to her display of education (or, rather, self-education), indistinguishable as it is from Mrs Earnshaw's reported speech, with its own dramatic and colloquial twist:

Nelly and Lockwood are very much alike and speak in remarkably similar fashion. To translate Lockwood into a type called City Man and Nelly into another marked Country Servant, and to see them,

then, as representatives of opposing principles and life-styles is to ignore the evidence of their speech. Any observation we may make about 'Lockwood's diction is almost certainly equally true of 'Nelly's. The differences in their backgrounds and education seem, therefore, quite irrelevant, for those differences have led only to sameness. (Krupat 1970: 273).

Thus, in the novel, language and narrative technique serve to unveil the characters' background and education, as well as contrasts between rural and urban gentry, South and North, servant and gentle folk, and fashionable and popular manners. Nelly Dean's command of language might not be a cardinal issue in *Wuthering Heights*. Still, it does serve to show her as a female sage, a mediator between Wuthering Heights and Lockwood, just as the standardized dialect mediates between different regionally marked English dialects or opposing social classes. Nelly is strongly tied to an oral mode of communication. The need for a written history of the events at the Heights and the Grange is soon acknowledged; Lockwood's position in the novel (as publisher and diary transcriber) is justified – by writing Nelly's story down and re-writing Catherine's marginalia, he is able to reach a wider audience and make effective action possible.

How is Nelly's mediation made possible? In the 18th century, formal education for women in Britain was limited, often focusing on the provision of domestic skills and basic literacy. Extensive, systematic education was not considered crucial for both ladylike homemakers (the ideal of femininity espoused for middle-class women) and good wives (the ideal of femininity for working-class women), whose roles were prevalent within the home, a critical site for enacting the ideology of domesticity for girls and young women. However, efforts to expand women's education gained momentum in the next century. Private seminaries offered education to the daughters of well-off families, zeroing in on the teaching of reading, writing, foreign languages, music, dancing and needlework. However, women were still largely denied the status of university students. While the 19th century did change the status of education overall, women were still fighting a losing battle. It goes without saying that no female character in *Wuthering Heights* enjoys a formal, systematic educational provision.

Although her discourse proceeds in "true gossip's fashion" (Brontë 1847: 66), the literate and thoughtful Nelly is "the wise and canny rustic of the ballad tradition" who, far from having the "Austenian [narrator's] ironies", nevertheless possesses "maxims and adages" which carry "the authority of a specifically feminine wisdom" (Pykett 1989: 100). By its very nature, the fictional text of *Wuthering Heights* promises to make disclosures about the inhabitants of the fictional world. The logic of disclosing secrets, however, first includes the idea that, before the secret is revealed to the outside spectator, the spectator (Lockwood) must first get acquainted with the inhabitants of the Heights. In real life, too, people are not usually interested in the secrets of unfamiliar individuals. Thus, Lockwood's initiation into the world of the Heights follows the techniques of an enigma in literature – narrative data is manipulated in order to create suspense in Lockwood (in us, too!). The hermeneutic code can only be revealed to Lockwood via Nelly, the only insider who, through all sorts of manoeuvres, reveals other, deeper secrets, ranging from the personal to the ideological. If Lockwood is ripe for initiation into Wuthering Heights, Nelly is prepared, too, to reveal the skeleton-in-the-closet secrets that have haunted her youth and maturity, and to do so with a certain didactic-initiatory intention.

Nelly's character is placed, significantly, in a historical context in which "bibliomania (...) markedly advanced in the homes of the propertied classes" (Raven 1996: 176). Circulating libraries could be found in both village- and metropolitan-based areas and often allowed men and women to indulge in untutored, irresponsible reading. By the mid-eighteenth century, domestic libraries (one of which is described at the Grange, the home of Nelly's narration) had become a focal area of interest and entertainment, "the communal centre of the house" (1996: 188) of provincial gentlefolk, a "sanctuary" (1996: 201) open to its residents. Given these improving conditions for learning (masters usually gave servants improving material for them to become able to read aloud newspapers, magazines, and other ephemera, including books), servitude, in Nelly's

case, could have meant a transient stage in her life towards a more dignified social position. Servants interested in print could have also obtained books of their liking from itinerant chapmen.

An interesting connection between Nelly Dean and Philippa Hayes, the housekeeper of Charlcoat Park (Fergus 1996: 215), can certainly be made. Philippa Hayes, like Nelly, enjoys some of the privileges of the gentry (she can read the books in her masters' library), exchanges letters with her masters and acquires the diction of the gentry and professional classes. With her down-to-earth language lacking all pretence of expression and the commonsense perspective of a female who has to tend to others and do work (all the while trying to be an autodidact), Nelly "mediates between two of the novel's formal modes – (...) realism and romance" in her modest attempt to "self-advancement" pursued in "the gaps of the lives of her social superiors and employers" (Pykett 1989: 107). The role of this homely narrator might suggest the role of the growing middle class that, after the events told in the novel, will come to dominate the industrialised world of England, as the aristocracy becomes decadent and the peasantry journeys from rural poverty to an urban working-class status. Nelly's modest attempt at self-culture and self-education, without giving herself airs and graces, seems to be a replica of Emily Brontë's own refusal to dress up according to the fashion of the day when at the Pensionnat Heger in Brussels (herself a well-educated native of Yorkshire, the daughter of a socially mobile Irish parson). Emily "obstinately refused to abandon her old style of dress, persisting in wearing leg-of-mutton sleeves, which had long gone out of fashion and which did not suit her tall, ungainly frame" (Barker 1994: 393), even if her classmates subsequently ridiculed her. Nelly's invisibility within the family structure, banned as she is to the kitchen and having no legitimate place in the library or the general sitting room, gives her, paradoxically, a certain freedom of action and thought. At the price of living in obscurity and being considered a lesser being – a female, a servant – Nelly develops a fine ear for the undertones and nuances in personal relationships at the Heights and the Grange.

Though Heathcliff is an arresting figure in his own right, he cannot stand aloof from the elder Catherine. In chapter 3 begins the education of Catherine and Heathcliff into understanding (for Catherine, ambivalently assimilating) what Thrushcross Grange represents – seductive domestic arrangements at the expense of class and gender segregation. Catherine initially exposes the questionable gendered dimensions of domestic realism by rebelling against persecution and repression. Nevertheless, her antidomestic gestures will be demolished later on by her entrance into the glamorous, happy middle-class family of the Lintons. In her childhood diary (an old Bible used for its blank spaces), Catherine describes the nature of her early relationship with Heathcliff. When the "awful Sunday" (Brontë 1847: 21) that Catherine describes occurs, Mr Earnshaw is dead, and Hindley is master of the Heights. Catherine and Heathcliff are persecuted together and forced to sit shivering in a garret, listening to Joseph's sermon, while the master and the mistress of the house "basked downstairs before a comfortable fire" (1847: 22). The response to the practice of enforced, shared, religious reading is rebellion. Writing becomes, not surprisingly, a reaction to persecutory affairs. Catherine feels called upon to submit an old text cherished by countless generations of readers to tough questioning. However, the Bible, The Book of Books, refuses to collapse as a supremely readable and re-readable text would. Women's revenge, the reader notices, takes the form of written or spoken missiles. Female anger is, throughout the novel, limited by gender and turned inward in acts of self-directed violence (which, in Catherine's case, prove fatal). Men, however, use physical, psychological and financial abuse to perpetuate their campaign of revenge against inveterate enemies.

One cannot actually observe Catherine Earnshaw reading *per se* throughout the novel, but rather stumble upon her book repository through the narrator Lockwood, who, by force of circumstances, must spend the night in Heathcliff's unfriendly home. In his bed-chamber, having trouble sleeping, he discovers a few dusty old books with Catherine Earnshaw's name on them and signs a new "tenancy" agreement with their authoress:

Catherine's library was select and its state of dilapidation proved it to have been well used, though not altogether for a legitimate purpose; scarcely one chapter has escaped a pen-and-ink commentary – at least, the appearance of one – covering every morsel of blank that the printer had left. Some were detached sentences; other parts took the form of a regular diary, scrawled in an unformed, childish hand. At the top of an extra page, quite a treasure, probably, when first lighted on, I was greatly amused to behold an excellent caricature of my friend Joseph, - rudely yet powerfully sketched. (Brontë 1847: 21)

Catherine Earnshaw's vandalism of the "good book" by writing on its margins can be seen both as an act of insubordination and as a radical measure of posthumous self-assertion. The image of the book represents, paradoxically, both "a civilizing force" and a "bulwark of that convention which seeks to cover naked experience" (McKibben 1960: 162). Vandalism takes other troublesome forms in the novel. Readers notice how the apparently archaic "Hareton Earnshaw" (Brontë 1847: 4) of the Heights' official threshold, as noted by Lockwood, turns out to name an up-to-date, physical (and acrimonious) human presence, as the clandestinely carved variations "Catherine Earnshaw", "Catherine Heathcliff", "Catherine Linton" (1847: 21) label a more private threshold. This gives rise to a moment in which "the air swarm[s] with different surnames spelt out in a "glare of white letters" as "vivid as spectres" (1847: 21) and then to Lockwood's second dream, which will be approached as follows. In the third chapter, the worldly, well-educated frame narrator becomes a mere transcriber of a female-authored text as he nearly burns Catherine's musty-smelling Testament.

The presence of the Bible in Catherine's old room comes as no surprise: it merely echoes the societal demand that every child – girls in particular – be trained to read the Bible. The fear that female writing might push the patriarchal order over the edge – or, rather, to the margins – might have catalyzed Brontë's own commentary on the relationship between literacy, social status and gender:

I reached this book, and a pot of ink from the shelf, and pushed the house-door ajar to give me light, and I have got the time on with writing for twenty minutes; but my companion is impatient and proposes that we should appropriate the dairy woman's cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter. (Brontë 1847: 23)

Catherine's diary is, implicitly, a form of literary criticism, an experimental game of meta-reading – reading against reading. Catherine is, *avant la lettre*, Baudelaire's *hypocritical lecteur* – the reader who is or becomes hooked on reading, rereading and, inevitably, re-writing. In reality, every reader is, symbolically, a mental rewriter. Russian formalists have associated re-writing with norm deviation, while structuralists and post-structuralists have placed it in the context of intertextuality. Gérard Genette, too, has dealt with the issue of re-writing in his 1982 *Palimpsestes*, where he approaches the notion of "literature in the second degree" or literature that has been subjected to a process of "transtextualization" through earlier literature. Catherine's diary is a deliberate transposition – her marginal notes on the Bible are part of the "paratext" (Genette 1982: 3), as do prefaces, postfaces, book covers, and illustrations, all considered secondary signals, be they allographic or autographic. According to Genette, "transposition" is "without doubt the most important of the hypertextual practices" (1982: 212), as exemplified by *Faust* and *Ulysses*, serious cases of parody. Can we see, in Catherine's transformation of the Bible into her own diary, a fully self-conscious ludic process? Sure enough. Transforming an old and famous text into a new one is often a ludic game, as in writings that extend on calembours, palindromes and the like.

Married to Edgar, Catherine sees the implications of the move from the Heights to the Grange, but it is too late. Nelly Dean repeatedly tells Lockwood that the finely civilized Edgar Linton is "too soft" (Brontë 1847: 119), which would seem to be a gender cliché if the narrator of the private life did not also confess that "he possessed the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half killed, or a bird half eaten" (1847: 76). Edgar is not compared to a bird or a mouse – he is put side by side with the cat, which haunts both mice and

birds for pleasure. This is, in Leavis & Leavis words, “a double shock” for the reader, and so is the realization of a newly found truth, for “a cat is really a victim of drives it can’t resist too” (1969: 117-118). Patterns of probability and consequence can never be stable in gender and class delineations. In actual truth, “all readers are a part of the Grange world, are Lockwoods and Edgars who take refuge in books” (Qualls 2006: 58). The cosy Grange is “also a bondage”, in the words of Leo Bersani, “it encloses [Catherine] in the oppressive security of the family, where she would be doomed to see herself reflected and reproduced in her children” (Bersani 1976: 212). To escape from such a repetition and the symmetries of the novel, Catherine must die. Catherine junior and Hareton, however, will survive the requirements of Nelly Dean’s conduct books and domestic fiction writings of the period, restoring hierarchical order to both the Heights and the Grange. Socially separated from each other, Catherine and Heathcliff can no longer function as transgressors of norms (even in writing conventions). Death restores to them the restless immortality of unconventionality. While Catherine senior cannot ever be the Victorian “angel in the house”, Catherine junior can.

As critics have suggested, Catherine Earnshaw’s death is paired with the birth of her daughter, who takes her place in the narrative structure of *Wuthering Heights* and takes the journey backwards, from Linton to Heathcliff and then, finally, Earnshaw, her mother’s maiden name. Catherine’s daughter is “culture’s child, a born lady”, as Gilbert and Gubar (1979: 299) argue. She belongs to a strikingly different generation of readers, surmounting her deprivation of rights by polishing Hareton’s literacy skills. Upon Lockwood’s return to the moors, he finds Catherine and Hareton as reading fellows and lovers no longer carried out in secrecy from the other household members. Towards the denouement, Heathcliff is a supplementary executioner of reading and readers in a novel where texts have always been pushed to the periphery. However, this time, his struggles incite no subversive action, for the second Catherine has incorporated her mother’s anathematized text – the Bible – within herself.

4. Conclusions

It is a measure of the novel’s timeless appeal that can be understood, examined and savoured in the context of yet another interpretative key that underscores hermeneutics and leads the twenty-first-century reader into more troubled waters – female book knowledge or female self-education in the Victorian era. The act of shaping history is done through the existence of a cultural mediator – the woman – the savvier and more sympathetic narrator. Simone de Beauvoir coins the term “mediatrix” in *The Second Sex* (translated in English from the French original *Le Deuxième Sexe*), a seminal work in feminist literature. De Beauvoir introduces the concept of “the other” to describe how women have been historically defined strictly in relation to men, often as the “other” sex. This portrayal has resulted, throughout history, in women being seen as feather-brained, second-class citizens. De Beauvoir also argues that this intermediary role has historically kept the woman – “the wise mediator between auspicious Nature and man” (de Beauvoir 1949: 219) – in a position of dependence, preventing her from fully realizing her own identity. Through women’s epistemological-hermeneutic interventions – be they oral or written – we become sympathetic to otherwise unsympathetic characters and come to terms with the novel’s strangely symmetrical design and ambiguous concluding tableau.

Some questions are still left unanswered. It is fitting that I should end with questions, since the novel itself does so. Is the second generation a re-writing of the first? Is the second generation meant to show that similar conditions (social segregation, parental abuse, forced separation from parental home) can produce entirely different results? On the contrary, are Catherine and Hareton anaemic, more ordinary versions of their spectral parents? This is one of the favourite conundrums of past and present critics discussing the novel, for they are usually divided on the issue. Some favour the view that the sequel is a welcome, almost therapeutic tool to conclude the novel; others see in it a severe diminishing of relevance and forcefulness. The “corrective case history of the

second part” (Leavis and Leavis 1969: 128) is not simply a matter of reverting the inheritance to their dynastic owners, but a way of allowing Catherine’s daughter to right the wrong. Inga-Stina Ewbank, on the other hand, adds to Leavis’ commentary on the aftermath of *paideia*: the wooing is done, this time around, as in Charlotte Brontë’s novels, “in terms of the school-room” (1966: 126), in a domesticated and domesticating context. The last pages of the book are, indeed, puzzling and troubled.

There can be no doubt that literature plays a significant role in maintaining the *status quo* in a society by taking hold of that society’s discrepancies and settling them into myths of reconciliation. A novel may grapple imaginatively with discrimination, social injustice, lack of educational provision for all its members, poverty and tyranny. Its real purpose, however, is not to castigate such evils and banish them altogether (this is, at its core, a political activity), but to give the *lector* (Catherine senior, Catherine junior, Nelly Dean) an imagined experience of social resolution (making, for instance, gentility and social segregation, seem tolerable and perhaps unavoidable). To see what *Wuthering Heights* has to say about reality, one should not look for its symmetries, but its breaches and discrepancies, its rough edges and glitches, where it has not succeeded in transforming the objectionable into the ‘unobjectionable’ harmony of literature. Such a breach is offered to the audience, for instance, in the third chapter of Emily Brontë’s novel, when Lockwood finds Catherine’s worn-out Bible. Still, instead of reading the text itself, he proceeds to read what is written on the margins, which essentially demolishes the main text itself. When the spectral Catherine tries to break through the window at the Heights, Lockwood again, as the rationalist that he is, decides to protect himself against the creature by erecting a pile of books in a pyramid and thrusting it forward. Books work to substitute women in men’s lives (for Edgar Linton), as a mark of manners (for Nelly Dean), but also as objects to kick and enforce learning deprivation (for Hareton and Heathcliff). If this is not the real tragedy of the novel, what is? The second generation of lovers, however, are united in the act of re-writing, in a symbolic gesture, the tragic story of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, separated because of book knowledge (allowed to Catherine, denied to Heathcliff). Reconciliation as a mode of cultural and ideological resolution occurs yet again in the binomial pair Lockwood-Nelly Dean – the constant battle between oral and written literature, romance and realism, formal education and self-instruction is drawn to an end, without the novel ceasing to be literature in its own right.

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