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THE CUCKOO'S HISTORY:
HUMAN NATURE IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

*W*UTHERING *H*EIGHTS OCCUPIES A singular position in the canon of
English fiction. It is widely regarded as a masterpiece of an
imaginative order superior to that of most novels—more powerful,
more in touch with elemental forces of nature and society, and deeper
in symbolic value. Nonetheless, it has proved exceptionally elusive to
interpretation. There are two generations of protagonists, and the dif-
ferent phases of the story take divergent generic forms that subserve
radically incompatible emotional impulses. Humanist readings from the
middle decades of the previous century tended to resolve such conflicts
by subordinating the novel's themes and affects to some superordinate
set of norms, but the norms varied from critic to critic, and each new
interpretive solution left out so much of Brontë's story that subsequent
criticism could gather up the surplus and announce it as the basis for yet
another solution. Postmodern critics have been more receptive to the
idea of unresolved conflicts, but they have tended to translate elemental
passions into semiotic abstractions or have subordinated the concerns
of the novel to current political and social preoccupations. As a result,
they have lost touch with the aesthetic qualities of the novel. Moreover,
the interpretive solutions offered by the postmodern critics have varied
with the idioms of the various schools. Surveying the criticism written
up through the 1960s, Miriam Allott speaks of "the riddle of *Wuthering
Heights*." Taking account both of humanist criticism and of seminal
postmodern readings, Harold Fromm declares that *Wuthering Heights* is
"one of the most inscrutable works in the standard repertoire."[1]

Brontë's novel need not be relegated permanently to the category
of impenetrable mysteries. The critical tradition has produced a good

deal of consensus on the affects and themes in *Wuthering Heights*. Most of the variation in critical response occurs at the level at which affects and themes are organized into a total structure of meaning. In the efforts to conceptualize a total structure, one chief element has been missing—the idea of "human nature." By foregrounding the idea of human nature, Darwinian literary theory provides a framework within which we can assimilate previous insights about *Wuthering Heights*, delineate the norms Brontë shares with her projected audience, analyze her divided impulses, and explain the generic forms in which those impulses manifest themselves. Brontë herself presupposes a folk understanding of human nature in her audience. Evolutionary psychology converges with that folk understanding but provides explanations that are broader and deeper. In addition to its explanatory power, a Darwinian approach has a naturalistic aesthetic dimension that is particularly important for interpreting *Wuthering Heights*. Brontë's emphasis on the primacy of physical bodies in a physical world—what I am calling her naturalism—is a chief source of her imaginative power. By uniting naturalism with supernatural fantasy, she invests her symbolic figurations with strangeness and mystery. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, the supernaturalism can itself be traced to natural sources in Brontë's imagination.

An evolutionary account of human nature locates itself within the wider biological concept of "life history." Species vary in gestation and speed of growth, length of life, forms of mating, number and pacing of offspring, and kind and amount of effort expended on parental care. For any given species, the relations among these basic biological characterics form an integrated structure that biologists designate the "life history" of that species. Human life history, as described by evolutionary biologists, includes mammalian bonding between mothers and offspring, dual-parenting and the concordant pair-bonding between sexually differentiated adults, and extended childhood development. Like their closest primate cousins, humans are highly social and display strong dispositions for building coalitions and organizing social groups hierarchically. All these characteristics are part of "human nature." Humans have also evolved unique representational powers, especially those of language, through which they convey information in non-genetic ways. That kind of informational transmission is what we call "culture": arts, technologies, literature, myths, religions, ideologies, philosophies, and science. From the Darwinian perspective, culture does not stand apart from the genetically transmitted dispositions of human nature. It is, rather, the medium through which we organize those dispositions into

systems that regulate public behavior and inform private thoughts. In writing and reading fabricated accounts of human behavior, novelists and their readers help to produce and sustain cultural norms. Novelists select and organize their material for the purpose of generating emotionally charged evaluative responses, and readers become emotionally involved in stories, participate vicariously in the experiences depicted, and form personal opinions about the characters.[2]

Beneath all variation in the details of organization, the life history of every species forms a reproductive cycle. In the case of Homo sapiens, successful parental care produces children capable, when grown, of forming adult pair bonds, becoming functional members of a community, and caring for children of their own. With respect to its adaptively functional character, human life history has a normative structure. In this context, the word "normative" signifies successful development in becoming a socially and sexually healthy adult. The plot of *Wuthering Heights* indicates that Brontë shares a normative model of human life history with her projected audience, but most readers have felt that the resolution of the plot does not wholly contain the emotional force of the story. Brontë is evidently attracted to the values vested in the normative model, but her figurations also embody impulses of emotional violence that reflect disturbed forms of social and sexual development.

The elements of conflict in *Wuthering Heights* localize themselves in the contrast between two houses: on the one side Thrushcross Grange, situated in a pleasant, sheltered valley and inhabited by the Lintons, who are civilized and cultivated but also weak and soft; and on the other side Wuthering Heights, rough and bleak, exposed to violent winds, and inhabited by the Earnshaws, who are harsh and crude but also strong and passionate. Conflict and resolution extend across two generations of marriages between these houses. In the first generation, childhoods are disrupted, families are dysfunctional, and marriages fail. The destructive forces are embodied chiefly in Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, and Brontë depicts their passions with extraordinary empathic power. In the second generation, the surviving children, Catherine Linton and Hareton Earnshaw, bridge the divisions between the two families, and the reader can reasonably anticipate that they will form a successful marital bond. Through this movement toward resolution, Brontë implicitly appeals to a model of human life history in which children develop into socially and sexually healthy adults. Nevertheless, the majority of readers have always been much more strongly impressed by Catherine and Heathcliff than by the younger protagonists.

The differences between the two generations can be formulated in terms of genre, and genre, in turn, can be analyzed in terms of human life history. The species-typical needs of an evolved and adapted human nature center on sexual and familial bonds within a community—bonds that constitute the core elements of romantic comedy and tragedy. Romantic comedy typically concludes in a marriage and thus affirms and celebrates the social organization of reproductive interests within a given culture. In tragedy, sexual and familial bonds become pathological, and social bonds disintegrate. (On the structure of romantic comedy and tragedy, Frye, after more than half a century, remains the most authoritative source.)[3] *Wuthering Heights* contains the seeds of tragedy in the first generation, and the second generation concludes in a romantic comedy, but the potential for tragedy takes an unusual turn. In most romantic comedies, threats to family and community are contained or suppressed within the resolution. In *Wuthering Heights*, the conflicts activated in the first generation are not fully contained within the second. Instead, the passions of Catherine and Heathcliff form themselves into an independent system of emotional fulfillment, and the novel concludes with two separate spheres of existence: the merely human and the mythic. The human sphere, inhabited by Hareton Earnshaw and the younger Cathy, is that of romantic comedy. In the mythic sphere, emotional violence fuses with the elemental forces of nature and transmutes itself into supernatural agency. Romantic comedy and pathological supernaturalism are, however, incompatible forms of emotional organization, and that incompatibility reflects itself in the history of divided and ambivalent responses to the novel.

Brontë would of course have had no access to the concept of adaptation by means of natural selection, but she did have access to a folk concept of human nature.[4] To register this concept's importance as a central point of reference in the story, consider three specific invocations of the term "human nature." The older Catherine reacts with irritated surprise when her commendation of Heathcliff upsets her husband. Nelly Dean explains that enemies do not enjoy hearing one another praised: "It's human nature."[5] Reflecting on the malevolent mood that prevails under Heathcliff's ascendancy at Wuthering Heights, Isabella observes how difficult it is in such an environment "to preserve the common sympathies of human nature" (*WH*, p. 106). The younger Cathy is sheltered and nurtured at the Grange, and when she first learns of Heathcliff's monomaniacal passion for revenge, she is "deeply impressed and shocked at this new view of human nature—excluded from all her

studies and all her ideas till now" (*WH*, p. 172). In Heathcliff, human nature has been stunted and deformed. Apart from his passional bond with Catherine, his relations with other characters are almost exclusively antagonistic. The capacity for hatred is part of human nature, but so is positive sociality. No other character in the novel accepts antagonism as a legitimately predominating principle of social life. Brontë shares with her projected audience a need to affirm the common sympathies that propel the novel toward a resolution in romantic comedy.

Folk appeals to human nature provide a basis for comparing an adaptationist perspective on *Wuthering Heights* with humanist and postmodern perspectives. Humanist critics do not overtly repudiate the idea of human nature, but they do not typically seek explanatory reductions in evolutionary theory, either. Instead, they make appeal to some metaphysical, moral, or formal norm—for instance, cosmic equilibrium, charity, passion, or the integration of form and content—and they typically represent this preferred norm as a culminating extrapolation of the common understanding. Postmodern critics, in contrast, subordinate folk concepts to explicit theoretical formulations—deconstructive, Marxist, Freudian, feminist, and the rest—and they present the characters in the story as allegorical embodiments of the matrix terms within these theories. In their postmodern form, all these component theories emphasize the exclusively cultural character of symbolic constructs. "Nature" and "human nature," in this conception, are themselves cultural artifacts. Because they are contained and produced by culture, they can exercise no constraining force on culture. Hence Fredric Jameson's dictum that "postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good."[6] From the postmodern perspective, any appeal to "human nature" would necessarily appear as a delusory reification of a specific cultural formation. By self-consciously distancing itself from the folk understanding of human nature, postmodern criticism distances itself also from biological reality and from the imaginative structures that Brontë shares with her projected audience. In both the biological and folk understanding, as in the humanist, there is a world outside the text. An adaptationist approach to *Wuthering Heights* shares with the humanist a respect for the common understanding, and it shares with the postmodern a drive to explicit theoretical reduction. From the adaptationist perspective, folk perceptions offer insight into important features of human nature, and evolutionary theory makes it possible to situate those features within the larger theoretical system of human life history analysis.

A Darwinian approach to fiction involves no necessary commitment to a metaphysical ideal or to an ideal of formal aesthetic integration. Identifying human nature as a central point of reference does not require the critic to postulate any ultimate resolution of conflict in a novel. Quite the contrary. Darwinians regard conflicting interests as an endemic and ineradicable feature of human social interaction.[7] Male and female sexual relations have compelling positive affects, but they are also fraught with suspicion and jealousy. Even when they work reasonably well, these relations inevitably involve compromise, and all compromise is inherently unstable. Parents have a reproductive investment in their children, but children have still more of an investment in themselves, and siblings must compete for parental attention and resources. Each human organism is driven by its own particular needs, with the result that all affiliative behavior consists in temporary arrangements of inter-dependent interests. Nelly Dean understands this principle. Reflecting on the ending of the brief period of happiness in the marriage between Catherine Earnshaw and Edward Linton, she explains, "Well, we *must* be for ourselves in the long run; the mild and generous are only more justly selfish than the domineering—and it ended when circumstances caused each to feel that the one's interest was not the chief consideration in the other's thoughts" (*WH*, p. 72). The prospective marriage of Hareton and Cathy invokes a romantic comedy norm in which individual inter-ests fuse into a cooperative and reciprocally advantageous bond, but no such bond is perfect or permanent, and many are radically faulty. The conclusion of *Wuthering Heights* juxtaposes images of domestic harmony with images of emotional violence that reflect deep disruptions in the phases of human life history.

In modern evolutionary theory, the ultimate regulative principle that has shaped all life on earth is the principle of "inclusive fitness"—that is, of kinship, the sharing of genes among reproductively related individuals. Kinship takes different forms in different cultures, but the perception of kinship is not merely an artifact of culture. Kinship is a physical, biological reality that makes itself visible in human bodies. The species-typical human cognitive system contains mechanisms for recognizing and favoring kin, and perceptions of kin relations bulk large in folk psychology.[8] As one might anticipate, then, kinship forms a major theme in the literature of all cultures and all periods. In *Wuthering Heights*, that common theme articulates itself with exceptional force and specificity. Kinship among the characters manifests itself in genetically transmitted features of anatomy, nervous systems, and temperament. The interweav-

ing of those heritable characteristics across the generations forms the main structure in the thematic organization of the plot.

Heathcliff and Catherine are physically strong and robust, active, aggressive, domineering. Edgar Linton is physically weak, pallid and languid, tender but emotionally dependent and lacking in personal force. Even Nelly Dean, fond of him as she is, remarks that "he wanted spirit in general" (*WH*, p. 52). Isabella Linton, in contrast, is vigorous and active. She defends herself physically against Heathcliff, and when she escapes from him she runs four miles over rough ground through deep snow to make her way to the Grange. Her son Linton, weak in both body and character, represents an extreme version of the debility that afflicts his uncle Edgar. Linton Heathcliff is "a pale, delicate, effeminate boy, who might have been taken for my master's younger brother, so strong was the resemblance; but there was a sickly peevishness in his aspect that Edgar Linton never had" (*WH*, p. 155). Isabella's son has "large, languid eyes—his mother's eyes, save that, unless a morbid touchiness kindled them a moment, they had not a vestige of her sparkling spirit" (*WH*, p. 159). Despite his inanition, Linton Heathcliff can be kindled to an impotent rage that recalls his father's viciousness of temper. Witnessing an episode of the boy's "frantic, powerless fury," the old servant Joseph cries in malicious glee, "Thear, that's t' father! . . . That's father! We've allas summut uh orther side in us" (*WH*, p. 192). With respect to Linton Heathcliff, Nelly Dean participates in the brutal physical naturalism of her creator's vision. She observes that Linton is "the worst-tempered bit of a sickly slip that ever struggled into its teens! Happily, as Mr. Heathcliff conjectured, he'll not win twenty!" (*WH*, p. 186). He lives into his mid teens but in manner remains infantile—self-absorbed and querulous. The younger Cathy is as physically robust and active as her mother and her aunt Isabella. She also has her mother's dark eyes and her vivacity, but she has her father's blond hair, delicate features, and tenderness of feeling. "Her spirit was high, though not rough, and qualified by a heart sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. That capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother; still she did not resemble her, for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice, and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender" (*WH*, p. 146). The younger Cathy has not inherited her mother's emotional instability. Nor does she display her mother's antagonistic delight in teasing and tormenting others. Her cousin Hareton Earnshaw is athletically built, has fine, handsome features, and his mind, though untutored, is strong and clear. He has

evidently not inherited the fatal addictive weakness in his father's character. The inscription over the door at Wuthering Heights bears his own name, Hareton Earnshaw, and the date 1500. In his person, the finest innate qualities in the Earnshaw lineage come into flower.

The interweaving of heritable characteristics across the generations progresses with an almost mechanical regularity, but the meaning invested in that progression ultimately resolves itself into no single dominant perspective. The narrative is all delivered in the first person; it is spoken by participant narrators who say "I saw" and "I said" and "I felt." Through these first-person narrators, Brontë positions her prospective audience in relation to the story while she herself remains at one remove. The story is told chiefly by two narrators—Lockwood and Nelly Dean. Lockwood, a cultivated but vain and affected young man, holds the place of a conventional common reader who is shocked at the brutal manners of the world depicted in the novel. Nelly is closer to the scene, sympathetic to the inhabitants, and tolerant of the manners of the place—characteristics that enable her to mediate between Lockwood and the primary actors in the story. She provides a perspective from which the local cultural peculiarities can be seen as particular manifestations of human universals. When Lockwood exclaims that people in Yorkshire "*do* live more in earnest," she responds, "Oh! here we are the same as anywhere else, when you get to know us" (*WH*, p. 49). Both Nelly and Lockwood express opinions and make judgments, but neither achieves an authoritative command over the meaning of the story. Nelly is lucid, sensible, humane, and moderate, and she sees more deeply than Lockwood, but her perspective is still partial and limited. She has her likes and dislikes—she particularly dislikes Catherine Earnshaw and Linton Heathcliff—and some of her most comprehensive interpretive reflections fade into conventional Christian pieties that are patently inadequate to the forces unleashed in the story she tells. She holds the place of a reader for whom the impending romantic comedy conclusion offers the most complete satisfaction.

Behind the first-person narrators, the implied author, Emily Brontë herself, remains suspended over the divergent forces at play in the two generations of protagonists. The resolution devised for the plot is presented in an intentionally equivocal way. In its moment of resolution, the novel functions like an ordinary romantic comedy, but the pathological passions in the earlier generation are too powerful to be set at rest within a romantic comedy resolution. The narrative offers evidence that the earth containing the bodies of Catherine and Heath-

cliff is still troubled, and always will be, by their demonic spirits. In the last sentence of the novel, Lockwood wonders "how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth." But it is Lockwood himself, during the night he spends at Wuthering Heights, to whom the ghost of Cathy appears in a dream, crying at the window. Nelly Dean deprecates the rumor that the spirits of Catherine and Heathcliff walk the moors, but she also reports that the sheep will not pass where the boy saw the ghosts of Heathcliff and Catherine, and she herself is afraid to walk abroad at night.

Nelly introduces her story of Heathcliff by saying it is a "cuckoo's" history (*WH*, p. 28). It is, in other words, a story about a parasitic appropriation of resources that belong to the offspring of another organism. That appropriation is the central source of conflict in the novel. The biological metaphor incisively identifies a fundamental disruption in the reproductive cycle based on the family. Heathcliff is an ethnically alien child plucked off the streets of Liverpool by the father of Catherine and Hindley, and then, almost unaccountably, cherished and favored over his own son Hindley. When the father dies, Hindley takes his revenge by degrading and abusing Heathcliff. When Heathcliff returns from his travels, he gains possession of Hindley's property by gambling, and after Isabella's death, he uses torture and terror to acquire possession of the Grange. He abducts the younger Cathy, physically abuses her, and compels her to marry his terrorized son Linton Heathcliff. From the normative perspective implied in the romantic comedy conclusion of the novel, Heathcliff is an alien force who has entered into a domestic world of family and property, disrupted it with criminal violence, usurped its authority, and destroyed its civil comity. In the romantic comedy resolution, historical continuity is restored, property reverts to inherited ownership, and family is re-established as the main organizing principle of social life. The inheritance of landed property is a specific form of socio-economic organization, but that specific form is only the local cultural currency that mediates a biologically grounded relationship between parents and children. The preferential distribution of resources to one's own offspring is not a local cultural phenomenon. It is not even an exclusively human phenomenon. It is a condition of life that humans share with all other species in which parents invest heavily in offspring.[9] The cuckoo's history is a history in which a fundamental biological relationship has been radically disrupted.

Brontë assigns to the second generation the thematic task of restoring the genealogical and social order that has been disrupted in the previous

generation. The younger Cathy serves as the chief protagonist for this phase of the story. During the brief period of her relations with Linton Heathcliff and Hareton Earnshaw, she meets moral challenges through which she symbolically redeems the failures of her elders. Despite the ill usage she has received from Heathcliff's son, she nurses and comforts him in his final illness, and after his death, she establishes a wholesome bond with Hareton Earnshaw. Linton Heathcliff is wretched and repugnant in his self-absorbed physical misery, and by nursing him in his final illness, the younger Cathy introduces a new element into the emotional economy of the novel—an element of redemptive charity. Her attitude to Hareton, at first, reflects the class snobbery that had distorted her mother's marital history. Cathy feels degraded by her cousinage with Hareton, and she mocks him as a lout and a boor. By rising above that snobbery and forming a beneficent bond with him, she resolves the conflict between social ambition and personal attachment that had riven the previous generation. Linton Heathcliff had embodied the worst personal qualities of the older generation—the viciousness of Heathcliff and the weakness of the Lintons—and Hareton and the younger Cathy together embody the best qualities: generosity and strength combined with fineness and delicacy. Even Heathcliff participates in the romantic comedy resolution, though in a merely negative way. The eyes of both Hareton and the younger Cathy closely resemble the eyes of Catherine Earnshaw. Seeing them suddenly look up from a book, side by side, Heathcliff is startled by this visible sign of their kinship with Catherine, and his perception of that kinship dissipates his lust for revenge. By dying when he does, he leaves the young people free to achieve their own resolution.

It seems likely that one of the strongest feelings most readers have when Heathcliff dies is a feeling of sheer relief. In this respect, both Lockwood and Nelly Dean serve a perspectival function as common readers. Lockwood leaves the Grange just before the final crisis in the story. All around him, he sees nothing except boorish behavior, sneering brutality, and vindictive spite. The mood is pervasively sullen, angry, bitter, contemptuous, and resentful. The physical condition of the house at Wuthering Heights, where Heathcliff, Hareton, and the younger Cathy are living, is sordid and neglected. When Lockwood returns, Heathcliff is dead; there are flowers growing in the yard; the two attractive young people are happy and in love; and Nelly Dean is contented. Very few readers can feel that all of this is a change for the worse. It is something like the clearing of weather after a storm, but it

is even more like returning to a prison for the criminally insane and finding it transformed into a pleasant home.[10]

Readers have often expressed feelings of pity for Catherine and Heathcliff, but few readers have liked them or found them morally attractive. The history of readers' responses to the two characters nonetheless gives incontrovertible evidence that they exercise a fascination peculiar to themselves. In the mode of commonplace realism, they are characters animated by the ordinary motives of romantic attraction and social ambition, and in the mode of supernatural fantasy, they are demonic spirits, but neither of these designations fully captures their symbolic force. At the core of their relationship, a Romantic identification with the elemental forces of nature serves as the medium for an intense and abnormal psychological bond between two children. Describing her connection with the earth, Catherine tells Nelly that she once dreamed she was in heaven, but "heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy" (*WH*, p. 63). Catherine plans to marry Edgar Linton because he is of a higher class than Heathcliff, but she herself recognizes that class is for her a relatively superficial distinction of personal identity. "My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees—my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff" (*WH*, p. 64). As children, Heathcliff and Catherine have entered into a passional identification in which each is a visible manifestation of the personal identity of the other. Each identifies the other as his or her own "soul." Each is a living embodiment of the sense of the other's self. This is a very peculiar kind of bond—a bond that paradoxically combines attachment to another with the narcissistic love of one's self. Self-love and affiliative sociality have fused into a single motive that transforms the unique integrity of the individual identity into a dyadic relation. Dorothy Van Ghent astutely characterizes the sexually dysfunctional character of this dyadic bond. The relationship is not one of "sexual love, naturalistically considered," for "one does not 'mate' with one's self."[11] In normally developing human organisms, a true fusion between two individual human identities occurs not at the level of the separate organisms but only at the genetic level, in the fertilized egg and the consequent creation of a new organism that shares the genes of both its parents.

The unique integrity of the individual identity is a psychological phenomenon grounded in biological reality. Individual human beings are bodies wrapped in skin with nervous systems sending signals to brains that are soaked in blood and encased in bone. Individual bodies engage in perpetual chemical interchange with the substances of the environment—air, water, and food—but they nonetheless constitute self-perpetuating physiological systems that can be radically disrupted only by death. Brontë's imagination dwells insistently on the reality and primacy of bodies, and that naturalistic physicality extends into the depiction of the peculiar psychological fusion of individual identity in Heathcliff and Catherine. At the time of Edgar Linton's funeral, eighteen years after that of Catherine, Heathcliff describes to Nelly his necrophiliac excursion to Catherine's grave. He has the sexton uncover her coffin, knocks out the side next to his own anticipated grave, and bribes the sexton to remove that side of his own coffin when he is buried. Catherine and Heathcliff achieve consummation not in a reproductively successful sexual union but in the commingling of rotted flesh. If necrophilia can reasonably be characterized as a pathological disposition, the empathetic emotional force that Brontë invests in the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff can also reasonably be characterized as pathological.

The pathology that culminates in necrophilia disrupts the reproductive cycle, and it arises from disruptions in an earlier phase in that cycle—in childhood development. After Catherine has had the first attack of the hysterical passion that ultimately leads to her death, she tells Nelly that she came out of a trance-like condition, and "most strangely, the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank! I did not recall that they had been at all. I was a child" (*WH*, p. 98). She feels she is "the wife of a stranger," and she yearns passionately to return to her childhood. "I wish I were a girl again, half savage, and hardy, and free." The fixation on childhood has a seductive romantic appeal, but the passion behind the romance derives much of its psychological force from the traumatic disruptions in the family relations of the two children. Heathcliff is an orphan or an abandoned child. Catherine's mother—like Emily Brontë's own mother—dies when she is a child, and her father is emotionally estranged from her. Both children display a hypertrophic need for personal dominance, and their capacity for affectional bonding channels itself exclusively into their relation with one another. Neither Heathcliff nor Catherine ever becomes a socially and sexually healthy adult. Heathcliff's social relations, including his relation to his own son, are all destructive, and he finally also destroys

himself. Catherine is torn apart by the unresolvable conflict between her childhood fixation and her adult marital relation. She remains estranged from her husband until her death, and she dies two hours after giving birth. The violence of feeling through which she destroys herself is a symptom of a psychological stress sufficiently strong to shatter a robust physical constitution.[12]

In the folk understanding of human nature, the needs for self-preservation and for preserving one's kin have a primal urgency. From a Darwinian perspective, those needs are basic adaptive constraints through which inclusive fitness has shaped the species-typical human motivational system. In *Wuthering Heights*, the movement of the plot toward the resolution of the second generation demonstrates that Brontë herself feels the powerful gravitational force of that system. Her empathic evocation of the feelings of Heathcliff and Catherine nonetheless indicates that her own emotional energies, like theirs, seek a release from the constraints of human life history. Some of the most intense moments of imaginative realization in the novel are those in which violent emotions assert themselves as autonomous and transcendent forms of force—moments like that in which Catherine's ghost cries to be let in at the window and like that in which she haunts Heathcliff and lures him into the other world. For both Catherine and Heathcliff, dying is a form of spiritual triumph. The transmutation of violent passion into supernatural agency enables them to escape from the world of social interaction and sexual reproduction. In the sphere occupied by Hareton and the younger Cathy, males and females successfully negotiate their competing interests, form a dyadic sexual bond, and take their place within the reproductive cycle. In the separate sphere occupied by Heathcliff and Catherine, the difference of sex dissolves into a single individual identity, and that individual identity is absorbed into an animistic natural world.[13]

The fascination Heathcliff and Catherine exercise over readers has multiple sources: a nostalgia for childhood, sympathy with the anguish of childhood griefs, a heightened sensation of the bonding specific to siblings, the attraction of an exclusive passional bond that doubles as a narcissistic fixation on the self, an appetite for violent self-assertion, the lust of domination, the gratification of impulses of vindictive hatred and revenge, the sense of release from conventional social constraints, the pleasure of naturalistic physicality, the animistic excitement of an identification with nature, and the appeal of supernatural fantasies of survival after death. All these elements combined produce sensations of passional force and personal power. In the prospective marriage of the

second generation, those sensations subside into the ordinary satisfactions of romantic comedy, but Brontë's own emotional investments are not fully contained in that resolution. The ghosts that walk the heath are manifestations of impulses that have never been fully subdued. In becoming absorbed in the figurations of Catherine and Heathcliff, readers follow Brontë in the seductions of an emotional intensity that derives much of its force from deep disturbances in sexual and social development. They thus follow her also into a restless discontent with the common satisfactions available to ordinary human life.

Wuthering Heights operates at a high level of tension between the motives that organize human life into an adaptively functional system and impulses of revolt against that system. In Brontë's imagination, revolt flames out with the greater intensity and leaves the more vivid impression. Even so, by allowing the norms of romantic comedy to shape her plot, she tacitly acknowledges her own dependence on the structure of human life history. She envisions her characters in the trajectory of their whole lives. The characters are passionate and highly individualized, but life passes quickly, death is frequent, and individuals are rapidly re-absorbed within the reproductive cycle. Catherine and Heathcliff seem to break out of that cycle, but in the end, they are only ghosts—elegiac shadows cast by pain and grief. Investing those shadows with autonomous life enables Brontë to gratify the impulse of revolt while also satisfying a need to sacralize the objects of elegy. That improvised resolution points toward no ultimate metaphysical reconciliation, no ethical norm, no transcendent aesthetic integration, and no utopian ideal. Brontë's figurations resonate with readers because she so powerfully evokes unresolved discords within the adaptively functional system in which we live.

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1.   Miriam Allott, introduction to *Emily Brontë:* Wuthering Heights: *A Casebook*, ed. Miriam Allott (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1970), p. 12; Harold Fromm, *Academic Capitalism and Literary Value* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), p. 128. For more recent surveys of postmodern criticism on *Wuthering Heights*, see *Emily Brontë:* Wuthering Heights, ed. Patsy Stoneman (Cambridge: Icon, 2000); and Gillian Frith, "Decoding *Wuthering Heights*," in *Critical Essays on* Wuthering Heights, ed. Thomas John Winnifrith (New York: Hall-Simon and Schuster, 1997), pp. 243–61.

2. For more extensive accounts of the model of human nature sketched out here, see *The Evolution of Mind: Fundamental Questions and Controversies*, ed. Steven W. Gangestad, and Jeffry A. Simpson (New York: Guilford Press, 2007); *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. David M. Buss (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2005); and *Oxford Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. Robin Dunbar and Louise Barrett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For introductory accounts of literary Darwinism, see Brian Boyd, "Literature and Evolution: A Bio-Cultural Approach," *Philosophy and Literature* 29 (2005): 1–23; Joseph Carroll, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Joseph Carroll, "An Evolutionary Paradigm for Literary Study," *Style*, forthcoming; and *Literature and the Human Animal: Evolution and the Nature of Narrative*, ed. Jonathan Gottschall and David Sloan Wilson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005); Denis Dutton, *The Art Instinct* (Bloomsbury, 2009).

3. Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

4. On Brontë's familiarity with pre-Darwinian knowledge of animal husbandry and natural history, see Barbara Munson Goff, "Between Natural Theology and Natural Selection: Breeding the Human Animal in *Wuthering Heights*," *Victorian Studies* 27 (1984): 477–508.

5. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights: The 1847 Text, Backgrounds and Criticism*, ed. Richard J. Dunn, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 2003), p. 77; hereafter abbreviated *WH*.

6. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), p. ix. For prominent instances of humanist criticism of *Wuthering Heights*, see Miriam Allott, "The Rejection of Heathcliff?" *Essays in Criticism* 8 (1958): 27–47; Lord David Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists: Essays in Revaluation* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1935); Q. D. Leavis, "A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*," in *Lectures in America*, by F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis (New York: Pantheon-Random, 1969), pp. 85–138; John K. Mathison, "Nelly Dean and the Power of *Wuthering Heights*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 11 (1956): 106–29; Martha Nussbaum, "*Wuthering Heights*: The Romantic Ascent," *Philosophy and Literature* 20 (1996): 362–82; and Dorothy Van Ghent, *The English Novel: Form and Function*, 1953 (New York: Harper Torchbooks-Harper, 1961). For prominent instances of postmodern criticism, see Nancy Armstrong, "Emily Brontë In and Out of Her Time," *Genre* 15 (1982): 243–64; Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, 1975 (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2005); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Margaret Homans, "The Name of the Mother in *Wuthering Heights*," in *Wuthering Heights: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*, ed. Linda H. Peterson (Boston: Bedford-St. Martin's, 1992), pp. 341–58; Carol Jacobs, *Uncontainable Romanticism: Shelley, Brontë, Kleist* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); and J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

7. On the fitness conflicts integral to all sexual and kinship relations, see David F. Bjorklund and Anthony D. Pellegrini, *The Origins of Human Nature: Evolutionary Developmental Psychology* (Washington: American Psychological Association, 2002); David C. Geary, "Evolution of Paternal Investment," in *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, ed.

David M. Buss (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2005), pp. 483–505; and David C. Geary and Mark V. Flinn "Evolution of Human Parental Behavior and the Human Family," *Parenting: Science and Practice* 1 (2001): 5–61.

8.   For overviews of research on kin relations, see Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar, and John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 45–66; and Jeffrey A. Kurland and Steven J. C. Gaulin, "Cooperation and Conflict among Kin," in *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology*, ed. David M. Buss (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley), pp. 447–82.

9.   On the scope and significance of parental investment theory, see Aurelio José Figueredo et al., "The K-Factor, Covitality, and Personality: A Psychometric Test of Life History Theory," *Human Nature* 18 (2007): 47–73; and Robert Trivers, "Parental Investment and Sexual Selection," in *Sexual Selection and the Descent of Man 1871–1971*, ed. Bernard Campbell (Chicago: Aldine, 1972), pp. 136–79.

10.   In one of the best and most influential humanist interpretations of the novel, Cecil identifies the imagery of storm and calm as symbols for an ultimate metaphysical equilibrium—"a cosmic harmony" (*Early Victorian Novelists*, p. 174).

11.   *Form and Function*, p. 158.

12.   On the juvenile character of the adult romantic relation between Catherine and Heathcliff, see Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists*, p. 167; Edward Mendelson, *The Things That Matter: What Seven Classic Novels Have to Say about the Stages of Life* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), pp. 47–55; Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Knopf, 1975), p. 138; Patsy Stoneman, "The Brontë Myth," in *Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 234–35; and Van Ghent, *Form and Function*, pp. 158–59, 169. Gilbert and Gubar observe that "all the Brontë novels betray intense feelings of motherlessness, orphanhood, destitution" (*Madwoman*, p. 251). In *A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), Leo Bersani notes that "the emotional register of the novel is that of hysterical children" (p. 203). For a Darwinian perspective on the lasting traumatic effects of maternal separation, see John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*, 3 vols, 2nd ed. (London: Hogarth, 1982). On Brontë's own traumatized response to motherlessness, see Edward Chitham, *A Life of Emily Brontë* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 205, 210, 213–14. In *Narcissism and the Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), Jeffrey Berman reads the novel psycho-biographically in the light of Bowlby's concepts (pp. 78–112). Wion, using a psychoanalytic framework, characterizes Heathcliff as a maternal surrogate for Catherine Earnshaw. See Philip K. Wion, "The Absent Mother in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*," *American Imago* 42 (1985): 146. Massé gives a Freudian account of Catherine's narcissism. See Michelle A. Massé, "'He's More Myself than I Am': Narcissism and Gender in *Wuthering Heights*," in *Psychoanalyses/Feminisms*, ed. Peter L. Rudnytsky and Andrew M. Gordon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 135–53. Moglen and Schapiro both contrast the narcissistic disorders of the first generation with the norm of maturity in the second. See Helene Moglen, "The Double Vision of *Wuthering Heights*: A Clarifying View of Female Development," *Centennial Review* 15 (1971): 398; and Barbara Ann Schapiro, *Literature and the Relational Self* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), p. 49. Bersani, in contrast, though using a similar Freudian vocabulary, valorizes the disintegrative emotional violence of the older generation (*Astyanax*, pp. 214–15, 221–22).

13.   On the supernatural and animistic aspects of Brontë's imagination, see Cecil, *Early Victorian Novelists*, pp. 162–70; Ingrid Geerken, "'The Dead Are Not Annihilated': Mortal Regret in *Wuthering Heights*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 34 (2004): 374–76, 385–86; John Maynard, "The Brontës and Religion," in *Cambridge Companion to the Brontës*, ed. Heather Glen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 204–09; Derek Traversi, "*Wuthering Heights* after a Hundred Years," *Dublin Review* 202 (Spring 1949): 154–68; reprinted in *Emily Brontë*: Wuthering Heights: *A Casebook*, ed. Miriam Allott (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 157–76; and Van Ghent, *Form and Function*, pp. 164–65. On the problematic divisions between the natural and social worlds in *Wuthering Heights*, see Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, pp. 97–111. Despite seeking resolution in a utopian social norm alien to Brontë's own perspective, Eagleton's critique powerfully register's psycho-social stress in the novel.