

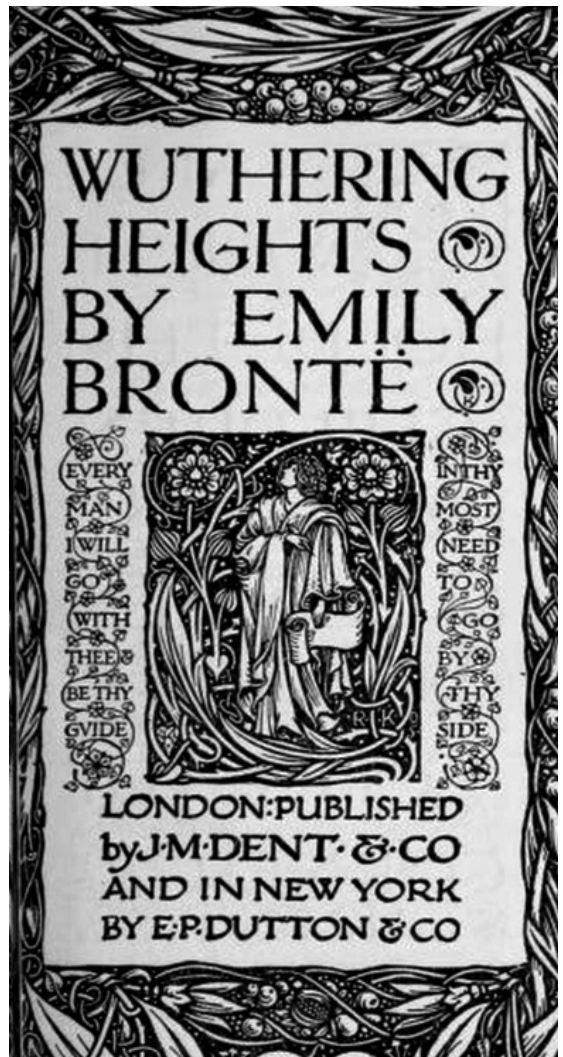
Constructing the Other in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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How do I relate to the one that's different than me? With anger? With hatred? Or, perhaps, with compassion? These are looming questions that seem crucial to our comprehension of one of the most relevant novels written by women in Britain during the XIX century, *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë. We thus ask the question, how is the Other constructed in this novel? Because the differences of class and race result not only in the exclusion or alienation of those who are different than *I*, but in the construction of a whole discourse regarding that identity, which manifests in several ways. Thus, in *Wuthering Heights*, the way both Heathcliff and Hareton are subjects of a discourse of *alterity*, throws them into the process of becoming the Other. Alterity, as we are to understand it in this essay, is the process of the construction of a discourse that alienates these characters throughout the development of the novel.

In *Wuthering Heights*, The Other here is, of course, Heathcliff. He is black, he is savage-like during his childhood, and later on he becomes vindictive. However, he is, of course, not the only Other –the one who is subject of a discourse which results in his alienation. We can also read Hareton as the Other. Hareton, who is almost as much savage-like throughout his life, as Heathcliff was during his childhood. This process of alienation – of separation, of *otherness* and alterity is conducted in three main



Wuthering Heights. [With an introd. by Ernest Rhys]: Brontë, Emily, 1818-1848: Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming: Internet Archive

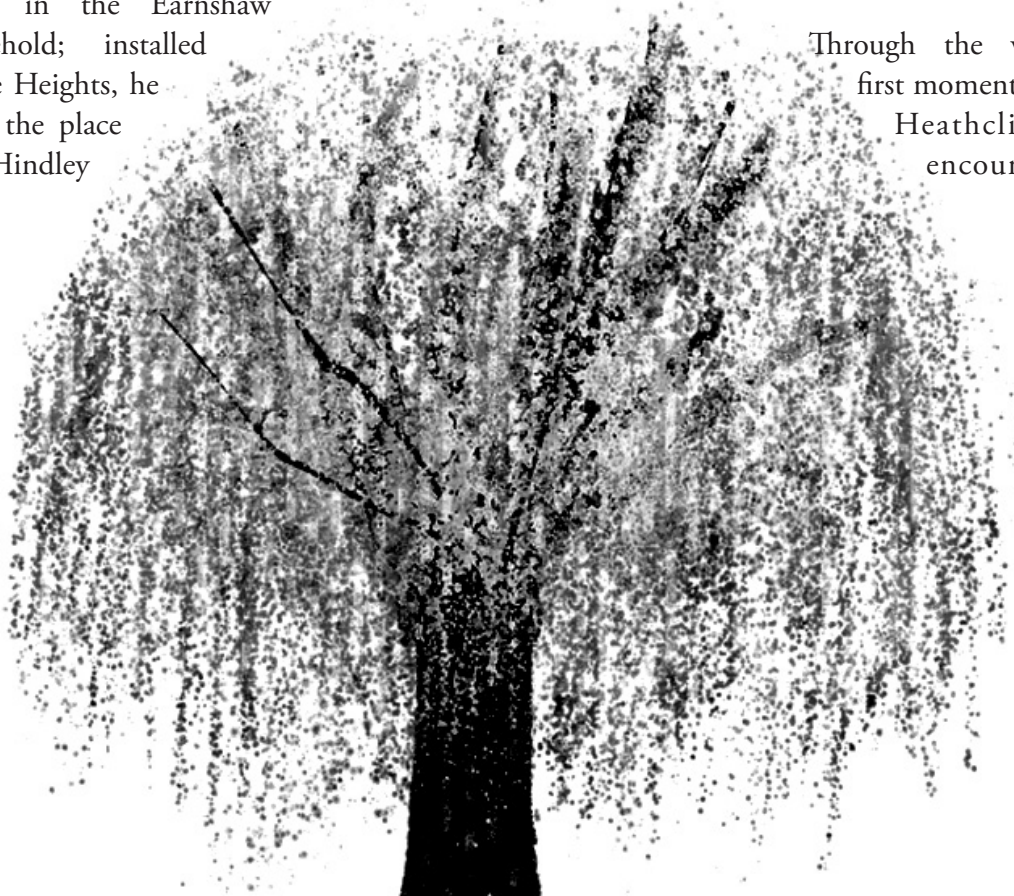
ways. First, during his childhood, Hindley Earnshaw and Nelly Dean (although the latter renounces to her hate later) subject Heathcliff to this alterity through material alienation, which is constant until Heathcliff escapes Wuthering Heights. Then, although this material alienation ends when Heathcliff comes back, he remains as the Other through the discourse enabled by the way other characters represent him through speech. Ultimately, Heathcliff exerts this alterity upon Hareton, by restraining him from the proper use of his language. In these forms of alterity, both Catherines (Earnshaw and Linton) take part in attempting to close the divide of otherness.

The process of material alienation to which Heathcliff is subjected, relates to the way he comes into the Earnshaw family. Terry Eagleton says of Heathcliff's entrance into the Earnshaw family: "Heathcliff is inserted into the close-knit family structure as an alien; he emerges from that ambivalent domain of darkness which is the 'outside' of the tightly defined domestic system" (Eagleton, 102). In this insertion of Heathcliff into the family, he comes to replace Hindley from his place in society. But not only is he rejected, but it would seem that, because of his lack of personal history, he is ontologically fixed as being in "taking the place of others" as Steven Vine puts it, since "A foundling, he is christened "Heathcliff" because it is the name of a son who died in childhood in the Earnshaw household; installed at the Heights, he takes the place of Hindley

in old Earnshaw's affections" (Vine, 342). Therefore, Heathcliff since the beginning is introduced with a lack of identity which, from the very first moment makes him not only an outsider, but an unknown; and it is that point which enables the discourse of alterity that he is a subject of.

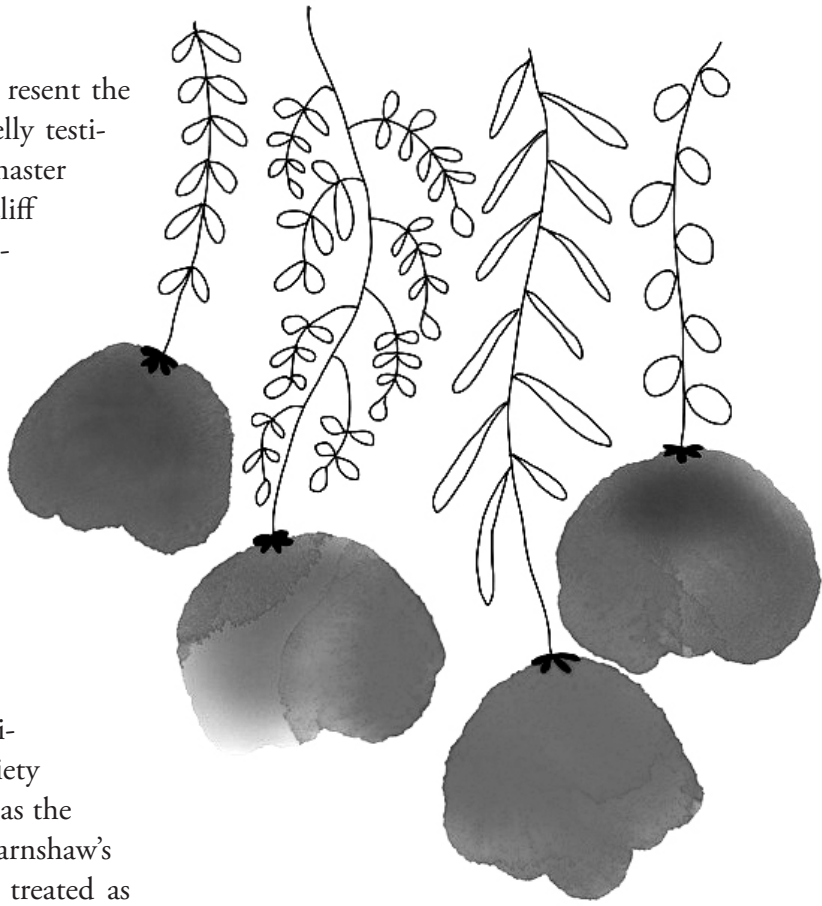
Not only is Heathcliff an individual 'thrown into' the family, but also he is black, as expressed by Mr. Earnshaw: "it's as dark almost as if it came from the devil" (Brontë, 45). And although the first one to love him is Mr. Earnshaw, also, the first one to fear him is Mrs. Earnshaw, who through indirect speech says: "how he could fashion to bring that gipsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for?" (45). Here we see how Heathcliff begins to be depicted as the *Other*, through this rhetorical identification of Heathcliff with such words as *devil* and *gypsy* will be constant in the novel, and this issue will be treated later on. Even the Earnshaw children, and Nelly Dean herself, refuse to give him a place amongst them: "They entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room; and I had no more sense, so I put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow" (45). As we can notice in both these quotes, it is because of the *materiality* of the color of his skin, and the *material* way he is alienated from the spaces shared by the other children that he is thrown into, and subjected to, this alterity.

Through the very first moments of Heathcliff's encounter



with Hindley, the later begins to resent the child his father was fostering. Nelly testifies this by saying: “the young master had learned to regard (...) Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent’s affections and his privileges; and he grew bitter with brooding over these injuries” (46). Out of this resentment, and before old Earnshaw’s death, Hindley is constantly beating Heathcliff; however, it is after his father’s death and Hindley becomes master of Thruscross Grange that he can exert material alienation onto Heathcliff. He degrades Heathcliff from the former privileges he held as a member of society amongst Hindley and Catherine, as the masters of the Grange. After old Earnshaw’s death, Heathcliff was now to be treated as a servant, as Nelly narrates: “He [Hindley] drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labor out of doors instead, compelling him to do so as hard as any other lad on the farm” (52). Here, Hindley chastises Heathcliff by undermining his class status and ordering him to work as a servant. It is here that he is made a subaltern, and as much the Other as any of the workers of the Grange: equally as dispossessed, equally lower in class status, but with hate as the motive has subjected him to this material alienation.

During the time of Heathcliff’s infancy, then, Catherine serves as means to close the alterity that separates him from, although she will ultimately fail. The first instance that this otherness seems to close is when they become friends. Nelly describes their rumbling around the moors: “But it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at” (52). Here, it seems that, although Hindley materially alienates Heathcliff, Catherine still recognizes him as her equal through children’s play. However, this child’s play results not only in equating Heathcliff and Catherine, but also in extracting Catherine from the social system. As Terry Eagleton puts it:



As the eternal rocks beneath the woods, Heathcliff is both lowly and natural, enjoying the partial freedom from social pressures appropriate to those at the bottom of the class-structure. In loving Heathcliff, Catherine is taken outside the family and society into an opposing realm which can be adequately imaged only as ‘Nature’ (103).

Thus, although Catherine is not subject to a discourse that constructs her as the Other, she accompanies Heathcliff into the realm of Nature, which is separated from the social circuit of the Grange and of her brother. It is through this companionship that the gap between Heathcliff and Catherine, which until now has perpetuated the construction of a discourse of alterity, seems to close between them –it does not close, however, with the upper class status represented by the Grange or by the Heights, and, still, Heathcliff remains as the Other.

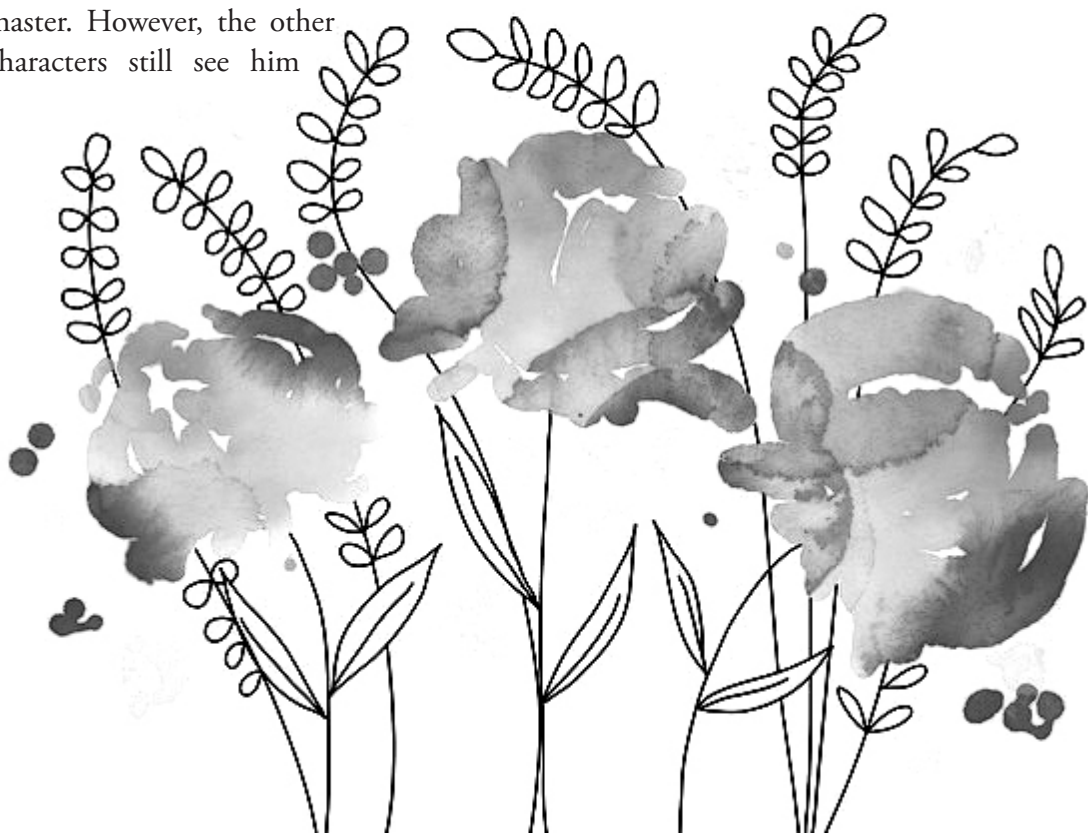
Nevertheless, after one of these escapes, they have an accident at the Grange, and it is decided that Catherine should stay for five weeks at the Grange for her recovery, after which she returns to the Heights as a “very dignified person” (57). From this point, the dichotomy between the *nature* of the Heights, and the *culture* from the Grange

will restrain her from closing the alterity that separates her from Heathcliff. This is shown at her return from the Grange. At first, she recognizes him and shows again her affection towards him. However, he sees how dirty he is, as compared to the people at the Grange, as she says: “Why, how very black and cross you look! And how –how funny and grim! But that’s because I’m used to Edgar and Isabella Linton” (58). Through this dialogue, she sets the barrier between herself, now subject to social standards and expectations, and Heathcliff who, for now, is neither subject to, nor interested in, any social standards. This dichotomy will make Catherine fail to close the alterity that separates her from with Heathcliff although she does acknowledge herself *ontologically* equal to Heathcliff, when she says, “I am Heathcliff”. But, for however the identity issues that this provokes amongst them, she fails to *materially* fulfill the closing of this alterity, when she accepts Linton as her husband, over Heathcliff. This impedes Heathcliff from being accepted in the Grange-Heights social class of masters, whose members will continue to see him as the *Other*. Upon the marriage between Linton and Catherine, Heathcliff flees.

When Heathcliff returns, we see a possibility for Heathcliff to be seen as an equal by the other characters. Upon his arrival at the Heights, as Nelly states that Heathcliff: “looked intelligent and retained no marks of former degradation” (92). Now, materially an equal, he settles his abode at Wuthering Heights, with Hindley as master. However, the other characters still see him

as the *Other*, as undesirable as he ever was. This is because he starts plotting his revenge against Heathcliff, which sets the other characters against him. There is reason of course, for Linton to see Heathcliff as evil, and therefore not wanting to see him married to Isabella by formulating a discourse about Heathcliff that would make Isabella repulse and reject him. Nelly describes this attempt of provoking in Isabella’s repulsion towards Heathcliff like this: “Mr. Linton (...) tried to elicit from her some sentiment of proper horror for Heathcliff advances” (111). Even Catherine herself speaks horribly of Heathcliff to Isabella, describing him as “an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone” (98). This, and much else, says Catherine against her friend, showing restraint from neither Edgar nor Catherine to see him as an equal and thus maintaining his alterity.

However, although upon his arrival he has elevated himself through the strengthening of his economic status, the other characters still try to maintain his alterity, and his difference to themselves. Perhaps the most effective way that the rest of the characters have, to keep him in his alterity, is through their speech and constructing him, rhetorically, as a monster. We can see at least one instance for each character in which they call him as a monstrous individual. In the cites above, we can already see the moments when old Earnshaw says Heathcliff looks “as if it



came from the devil”; Catherine, also cited above, calls him an “unreclaimed creature”. Isabella is convinced that “he is not a human being” (152) and that “he is only half man” (155); Hindley, who seldom appears after Heathcliff’s return, refers to him as a “hellish villain” (126); Edgar Linton says to his daughter that Heathcliff is a “most diabolical man” (191). Even Nelly seems to participate in this portrait of Heathcliff as an evil Other, when she sees him suffering beside Catherine’s death bed, she says: “I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species” (143). All the quotes above help to demonstrate how a certain discourse that circulates between the characters enables the representation of Heathcliff as a monster, as the other, through speech.

However, this representation of Heathcliff as a monster is not constant in Nelly. Although as quoted before, she can see him as a creature from a different species, she can also see him as an equal. Because of Nelly Dean, Heathcliff seems not to be in absolute alienation. She says of Heathcliff, to Isabella: “He is a human being (...) there are worse men that he is yet” (152). She even describes him quite kindly to his son Linton, when he asks how does his father look like: “he’s as young (...) but he has black hair and eyes; he is taller and bigger altogether. He’ll not seem to you so gentle and kind at first, perhaps, because it’s not his way” (178). Thus, the rhetoric around Heathcliff seems to occasionally pose him in the realm of otherness, and sometimes it makes him seem familiar and equal. Therefore, because he was initially dispossessed –but not forever–; because he was rejected by Catherine based on his social class –but recognized to be part of her identity–; and because he is portrayed as a devil –but not entirely–, Heathcliff seems to remain in the middle between alterity and familiarity, and the divide between him and the rest of the characters is yet not so clear. However, it is from this middle ground that he makes Hareton the absolute Other in this novel.

The main characteristic that makes Hareton the Other is his inability to fully access his own language. Heathcliff, using his power over him, is decided to make Hareton as alienated as he possibly can. Heathcliff says

of the process of alienation he is putting Hareton through: “I’ve got him faster than his scoundrel of a father got me, and lower; for he takes a pride in his brutishness” (188). Here, Heathcliff is proving that, although he is himself in some level of alterity, he will push Hareton further into it. Lockwood sees his alienation, when he is escorted by Hareton in entering the Heights, and he says: “[Hareton] accompanied me, in the office of watchdog, not as substitute for the host” (249), thus participating unknowingly in the kind of representation through speech that Heathcliff was subjected to earlier in his life. Other characters, like Catherine, express how Hareton’s incapability of communication poses him in an incomprehensible distance to them. She says: “He’s just like a dog, is he not, Ellen? (...) Do you ever dream, Hareton? And, if you do, what is it about? But you can’t speak to me!” (258). She cannot possibly understand him because there is no capacity of speech and discourse that could communicate them through their differences. He is the most Other to his most Equal, since him and Catherine have been living together at the Heights for some years before Edgar Linton died and she started noticing Hareton.

However, Cathy teaches him to read, and starts thus closing the divide between them. Simultaneous in the narrative to Heathcliff’s ultimate sinking, she starts to upraise Hareton. At first, she fails to convince him to be taught how to read, because she has mocked his attempts of literacy in the past. But when Hareton finally accepts to be taught by Cathy, Nelly witnesses how they begin to be equal to each other. Nelly says of Hareton, as he sees him learning to read: “His honest, warm, and intelligent nature shook off rapidly the clouds of ignorance and degradation in which it had been bred” (267). And, in the same paragraph, as Heathcliff enters the room, she sees Heathcliff quite different than before: “Well, I reflected, there was never a pleasanter, or more harmless sight” (267). Just then, Heathcliff confesses to Nelly how he has given up his anger and his will of revenge. And so, as much as Heathcliff renounces to his power over Hareton, the alterity starts to effectively close between Hareton and Cathy.



Bibliography

Evidently, both Heathcliff and Hareton are forced into alienation and alterity. And it is their affective relationships with either Catherine what seems to close this divide. However, Catherine Earnshaw fails at her attempt, and thus Heathcliff means to obtain his revenge by passing down this alienation to his nemesis' son. And yet, it is the Catherine from the next generation who can ultimately close the divide since she is not forced to choose between anyone. She can give herself entirely to Hareton, and this affective relationship ultimately closes the cycle of hate that was started by Hindley. It is compassion, not anger or revenge, which ultimately saves the Heights and its legacy.

One cannot help but wonder, thus, how much hate do we harvest against those different than us? How much compassion are we lacking? How much time will it need to pass for ourselves, our families and our societies, to choose empathy over anger? Because, as in the Heights, beauty, compassion and understanding that will ultimately save us from the horrible anger of our past – and of those who came before us.

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