"To Save the Life of the Novel": Sadomasochism and Representation in *Wuthering Heights*

Robin DeRosa
Tufts University

The Victorian era is famous for its repression. In the landscape of industrialization and quantification, both sexual pleasure and death, two of the more irrational and inexplicable human experiences, were becoming increasingly "unspeakable." In "Sex and Death in *Wuthering Heights*," Maria Koskinen argues that both threatened the rational Victorian palate, and that strict controls of each were implemented to deal with a rising anxiety. A strange etiquette of dying was established, and funerals, both in real life and in artistic representations, grew increasingly more elaborate. In order to regulate sexuality, a rigorous code of "normal" and "perverse" behavior was slowly developed and solidified. The irrationality that both sex and death presented may, as Regina Barreca suggests, have to do with the failure of language to represent the true experience of either. Changes were also occurring in literature and in literary criticism, changes which turn out to be intrinsically related to the anxiety being produced around sex and death. Realistic fiction was growing in popularity, as writers and theorists explored what it meant to get close to the way things "actually" were. Popular conceptions of realist fiction, both then and today, center(ed) on a belief that there is an original, true, non-represented experience which one can approach in representation.

The complex web of competing ideologies that existed in the late nineteenth century over what was "real" and what was, conversely (or not), "romantic" did not, however, fashion a simple binary. Henry James, for instance, posits this definition of "romance": "The only *general* attribute of . . . romance that I can see . . . is the fact of the kind of experience with which it deals--experience liberated . . . disengaged, disembroiled, disencumbered, exempt from the conditions that we usually know to attach to it" (James 33). In his fascinating and foundational study, *The Realistic Imagination*, George Levine posits a compellingly similar definition of "realistic." Realistic fiction, he argues, is the attempt of language to get beyond language. If there is such a thing as the "real," it certainly cannot be a representation, a copy, a knock-off, but Levine calls unmediated reality "unattainable." *Wuthering Heights* intervenes in all of these discourses in exceptionally rich ways. Sex reestablishes boundaries between psyches and sex tears them down; realism attempts to transcend its own roots and romance is both a discourse of *liberation* and a *discourse* of liberation; tension between death and representation mounts, and *Wuthering Heights* plays out these paradoxes and anxieties in a text which is anything but simply repressed.

Contemporary queer theorists such as Leo Bersani and David Halperin have suggested that sadomasochism shatters subjectivity, dissolves selfhood and thrusts the former subject outside of ideology's reach.[1] Freud provides the connection between S/M and an anxiety about subjecthood, and Lacan extends this reading into the realm of the linguistic. In "The Economic Principle of Masochism" published in the early 1920s, Freud cites castration anxiety as one of the foundational mechanisms underlying "masochistic perversions" (38). Lacan's contribution on castration theory

extends Freud's initial comments into a discourse *about* discourse; as the penis becomes the phallus, the castrating act changes from an anatomical one to a symbolic one. From a Lacanian perspective, castration anxiety is primarily about a subject's creation, about the move from a pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic "imaginary" to a symbolic realm of strict distinctions and structures through which language works. The loss is not a part of the body but of a pre-subjective whole, a state of being where a fullness of signification would be possible. The emergence of the subject, of this symbolic agency, occurs at the "mirror stage"; Lacan proposes that the child without language begins its linguistic and libidinal maturation with a gaze--a double gaze--in a mirror. When the infant finally recognizes that the reflection is not another person but another *self*, the infant invests that self with all the psychic and physical autonomy that the young child longs for. Inherent in Lacanian theory, then, is the association of the very young child with a kind of sexual and necessarily language-less innocence.

For Lacan, language and desire are both positioned around loss; representation and the death drive are irrevocably connected. As Sarah Webster Goodwin and Elizabeth Bronfen argue in *Death and Representation*, "Representations are fantasies of wholeness, invented to protect each human being from confronting an initial traumatic experience that installed them in the first place as split-off meanings, as re-presented" (13). Thus, any encounter with the "real" is an encounter with the realm outside of representation; representations and death are always in direct opposition. Emily Brontë, writing well before Freud and Lacan, seems to address the theoretical issues involved in S/M and its relationship both to the death drive and to representation. By beginning with Heathcliff, I hope not only to explore one of the central characters of the novel, but also to discern how he connects with and folds over other characters, most notably Catherine.[2]

Heathcliff has a troubled relationship to language and books, and this seems an obvious place to start in an exploration of his meaning in the novel. When Heathcliff first comes to the Heights with Mr. Earnshaw, he repeats over and over "some gibberish that nobody could understand" (Brontë 39). Heathcliff arrives in a kind of pre-symbolic state; he is not participating in the discourse of the novel. He seems to represent the pre-castrated Lacanian non-subject in some ways. But at the same time, he is a representation. Trapped in the landscape of the novel, caught in the society of others, Heathcliff cannot fully escape meaning-making. Although his beginnings allude to a kind of meta-discourse outside of what is comprehensible, he is quickly assimilated into the story as it unfolds. As he becomes meaningful to other characters, he also begins to communicate in their language. "Did you notice his language, Linton?" (49) Edgar's and Isabella's mother asks later, shocked at Heathcliff's demeanor when he is spotted outside Thrushcross Grange. His violent cursing, while still at odds with the dominant discourse, is understandable enough to be condemned. As Hindley makes his adopted brother's life hell, Heathcliff finally protests: "'I shall not!' replied the boy, finding his tongue at last. 'I shall not stand to be laughed at!'" (52). Heathcliff's early years at the Heights are primarily about the acquisition of language, and the simultaneous acquisition of a spine. As he "finds his tonge," he is able to stand up for himself against the abuse that is heaped upon him. In this way, language directly counters the masochistic tendency to seek out/bear/enjoy pain and degradation. Heathcliff's vocal self-defense opposes the horror of the death drive and allows him to function as a

subject in the text. Interestingly, however, Heathcliff does not merely grow into his language and concurrently into himself. Instead, he shifts back and forth between the uttered and the unutterable, treading the dangerous line between subjectivity and dissolution. Once he is indoctrinated into the language of his new family, Heathcliff begins to grow close to Catherine.[3] In his relationship to her, he begins to revisit his previous, pre-linguistic state.

As he becomes increasingly masochistic, Heathcliff also becomes increasingly removed from speaking, reading, and representation in general. Nelly describes that, as time passed, he ceased "to express his fondness for [Catherine] in words" (63), although it is clear to everyone, Nelly and readers alike, that his fondness was certainly not diminishing. In fact, what is taking place is that Catherine, as sadist, is driving Heathcliff closer to his death; as he approaches the masochistic moments of his degradation and pain, he steps slightly further away from the realm of signification. There is no doubt that Catherine is a sadist through most of their young relationship. Although she was hardly six when her father left for the fateful trip to Liverpool, she "chose a whip" (38) as the gift she most wanted him to bring back for her. The whip is, of course, lost in transit, and Heathcliff is produced instead. Catherine, "when she learnt the master had lost her whip in attending the stranger, showed her humor by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing" (39). What we see here is that Catherine's whip has, in fact, not been lost; she's had it all along, somewhere inside of her. Although this is the first peek we get at both children, it seems plausible that Catherine has not been sadistic up until this point. She relies on Heathcliff's masochism as much as he relies on her sadism. The first glimpse we get of S/M in the novel is one where sadism and masochism are revealed to be completely interconnected. This is reinforced by Mr. Earnshaw's response to his daughter's behavior: he gives Catherine "a sound blow . . . to teach her cleaner manners" (39). But Catherine remains the sadist to her brother's masochist throughout their childhood. "The boy would do her bidding in anything" (43), Nelly claims.[4]

As Heathcliff's distance from language parallels his increasing masochism with Catherine, Catherine's relationship to books and reading reflects her own involvement in S/M. When Lockwood finds her aged collection of books in the paneled closet, he sees that she has inscribed one fly-leaf: "Catherine Earnshaw, her book" (26). In addition, she has covered every blank space with records of her life and other "scrawled," "detached sentences" (26). She is not alienated from language as was Heathcliff originally, nor does she have trouble finding her tongue or exercising decency in her language. Instead, Catherine rewrites the text at hand, imposing her own meaning on the book which at one time must have "meant" something else. Interestingly, Lockwood gives us no information about what the book itself was about. (We know only it is a "Testament," but it seems to be at least as much Catherine's testament as anyone else's.) This suggests, like Catherine's sadism, that she is trying desperately to over-control the production of meaning as it circulates around and through her. Dr. John Ross, a contemporary psychoanalyst, describes sadists in contrast to masochists: "By being angry, aggressive, and sadistic, they try to keep other people away, thus reinforcing their own boundaries" (142). Catherine's control over the text, reflected again in her ability to push the books aside when Lockwood tries to keep her out of his bed, parallels her conception of self as defined against Heathcliff.

But competing with Catherine's hyper-textuality is her self-distancing from books and reading. "I took my dingy volume by the scroop," she writes in the margins of her "diary," "and hurled it into the dog-kennel, vowing I hated a good book" (27). While on the one hand, this gesture represents Catherine's unwillingness to be force-fed books (especially religious, as Joseph's "good book" certainly is), it also represents a kind of aversion to the printed word in general. While she can manage to thrust the books protecting Lockwood aside, thereby demonstrating her control over the texts, she is also in thrusting them aside destroying the barrier that separates her from Lockwood; and Lockwood, as stand-in for Heathcliff, is precisely the "other" to whom Catherine wishes to connect. Thus, Catherine's double relationship to books, represented both by her casting them off and her desire to control them, parallels her complicated relationship to S/M; she is both the sadist fending for her life and the masochist begging for her death.

As Catherine gets closer to her death, she becomes increasingly less sadistic, and increasingly more masochistic. Simultaneously, Heathcliff becomes more and more sadistic. As two sides to the same metaphorical soul, Catherine and Heathcliff can move easily across S/M's separating slash. "I can afford to suffer anything hereafter," Catherine says to Nelly after Edgar and Heathcliff have fought bitterly. "Should the meanest thing alive slap me on the cheek, I'd not only turn the other, but I'd ask pardon for provoking it" (87). After her "conversion," Catherine does begin to seek out and express pain. "A thousand smiths' hammers are beating in my head" (100), she moans to Nelly as Heathcliff and Edgar spar again. "There she lay," Nelly describes, "dashing her head against the arm of the sofa, and grinding her teeth, so that you might fancy she would crash them to splinters!" (102). As Heathcliff tells Edgar that he'd knock him down if he were worthy, Catherine does violence to her own body. They have switched places, in a sense. "You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement," Heathcliff says to her, "Only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style" (97). He seems to suggest that both he and his tormentor can be sadistic *and* masochistic at the same time.

When the moment of her death is upon Catherine, though, there is little sadism left in her. Heathcliff holds her in an "embrace from which [Nelly] thought [her] mistress would never be released alive" (134). As he foams and gnashes out at Nelly, Heathcliff is "so inadequate [in] gentleness to the requirements of [Catherine's] condition, that on his letting go, [Nelly] saw four distinct impressions left blue in the colourless skin" (133). In his rough embracing and violent behavior, Heathcliff pushes Catherine to her limit. She is ready, it seems, to leave all ties to the world behind her. "He would not relent a moment," she says of Heathcliff on her deathbed, "to keep me out of the grave! *That is how I am loved!*" (134). At this point, she seems to be speaking the truth. Heathcliff, in his sadism, is pushing Catherine away, both sadistically separating himself from the terror of dissolving into her, and also assuring her the masochistic jouissance[5] of becoming one with him. And that *is* how she is loved. "That is not *my* Heathcliff," she goes on about her murderer. "I shall love mine yet; and take him with me--he's in my soul." She recognizes that Heathcliff's self-distancing will not allow him to merge with her. He is still separate to himself, but to her, he is one with her own soul. "Will you forget me--will you be happy when I am in the earth?" she asks Heathcliff. "Will you say twenty years from hence, 'That's the grave of Catherine Earnshaw . . . I've

loved many others since--my children are dearer to me than she was, and, at death, I shall not rejoice that I am going to her, I shall be sorry that I must leave them!'" (133). Heathcliff, as she imagines him, is still inextricably tied to society, duty, the world. His death drive has been effectively suppressed by his own sadism.

"The thing that irks me most," Catherine tells Nelly just before she dies, "is this shattered prison, after all." She continues:

I'm tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it. Nelly, you think you are better and more fortunate than I; in full health and strength. You are sorry for me--very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for *you.* I shall be incomparably beyond and above you all. (134)

While the diction here is ostensibly religious, Catherine might also be referring to her death drive, to her desire to attain a kind of fullness outside of the range of discursive signification. She hopes to leave romantic convention--the convention which binds and informs her every feeling--behind, and instead transcend into a realm where she is truly with, indeed even *in,* the feeling itself. This is strikingly similar to Goodwin and Bronfen's assertions about the Lacanian "real": that the death drive is about the desire to connect with the actual signified, with what is behind the unstable set of signs. Catherine's Heathcliff (not the Heathcliff who remains to mourn her loss, but the Heathcliff she carries with her) has become a symbol of this connection. Ironically, as Catherine makes her speech about the escape from the prison of discursivity, she establishes her lover as a symbol, thereby undermining her own attempts to free herself from the chain of signification. What Catherine has proven is that the death drive, in life and, especially, in novels, can never be more than just a *drive.* Death's presentation, as Goodwin and Bronfen assert, "is itself at a remove from what is figured" (7). The novel acts *against* Catherine's death drive. "The novel," writes Henry James in *The Art of the Novel*, "was to achieve, as it went on, no great--certainly no very direct--transfusion of the immense overhanging presence. It had to save as it could its own life, to keep tight hold of the tenuous silver thread, the one hope for which was that it shouldn't be tangled or clipped" (15). Far from being connected to any transcendent realm, the novel as a form is anti-transcendent, produced by its own discursive strategy, and absolutely dependent on the constant communication of its own meaning.

Catherine's death drive involves two foundational desires: the desire to merge with Heathcliff and the desire to return to an innocent state of childhood. In a now-famous speech, Catherine tells Nelly that she could no more separate from Heathcliff than she could from herself. "Nelly," she explains, "I *am* Heathcliff" (74). But while she is alive, this union can only be represented; in the representation, the union is always failed. "My great thought in living is himself," she continues, "If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I would not seem a part of it." Her *thought,* not her *self,* is Heathcliff. Their union is only maintained through Catherine's identity; neither envisioned future makes a space for her dissolution. As it is, then, their love is tied to the

convention which establishes subjectivity, namely language. Though she conceptualizes their merger, her attempts at communication always recategorize the union into a decidedly live--and limited--outcome. When she begins to beg for her death, celebrate its onset, Catherine seems to be recognizing that an intense and masochistic dissolution--death--is the only way truly to merge with Heathcliff.

After she begins her conversion to masochism with the self-pummeling on the sofa, Catherine retreats to her room in the Heights. She is distressed at Edgar's lack of concern, and appalled to find out that he's reading his way through her suicidal depression. "Among his books!" she cries. "And I dying! I on the brink of the grave! . . . What, in the name of all that feels, has he to do with *books,* when I am dying!" (104). She sets herself up against the textualized world of her husband, distancing herself from representation and aligning herself instead with the world of "feeling." She then drifts off in a delusional reverie, and prophesizes about Nelly as an aged woman. "I'm not wandering," she asserts; "you're mistaken . . . I'm conscious it's night, and there are two candles on the table making the black press shine like jet" (105). Although Nelly tells her there is no press in the room, Catherine continues, convinced: "Don't you see that face?" Looking in the mirror, which she mistakes for a press, Catherine fantasizes that she is "at home . . . lying in [her] chamber at Wuthering Heights" (106). In considering this scene piece by piece, we must first start with the phantom press. As Nelly understood her, and since Catherine recollected her childhood room, the "press" was most likely a closet for holding clothes or books (in itself an interesting choice of furniture). But could Catherine have also imagined a *printing* press? Given her very vexed relationship to textuality and representation, it seems entirely possible that Catherine imagined the foreboding, black printing press. Looking at her own face reflected in it, she imagines her childhood, herself as a young girl. "The whole last seven years of my life grew a blank," she exclaims to Nelly, who calls her a "wailing child" (106); "I did not recall that they had been at all. I was a child" (107). The printing press, then, is both the mechanism that reminds Catherine of her girlhood, and the mechanism which separates her from it irrevocably. Like the Lacanian mirror, the press reveals Catherine as "other" from her own self, establishes reality from mad fantasy, and invests in the reflected image everything that Catherine desires again: "I wish I were a girl again, half savage, and hardy, and free. . . . Why am I so changed?" (107). The press is the symbolic order that both allows Catherine access to the death drive and which simultaneously allows her to mourn the loss of her childhood innocence.

After Catherine dies, Heathcliff quickly shifts again to masochist to set himself up for the death which he so longs for. Establishing Catherine as his tormentor, accusing her of haunting him still, Heathcliff "dash[es] his head against the knotted trunk [of a tree]" (139). Nelly notices that both he and the tree are covered in blood, and she surmises that he's been repeating the self-destructive acts throughout the night. "Drive me mad," he wails to his dead love, "Only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable!" (139). In his openness to masochism, Heathcliff sinks into an abyss, a space where language fails him as it did when he was a young child and when he was a young man in love with his torturer. But because he is still alive ("I *cannot* live without my life!" he shouts), he still fears such meaningless spaces. But he anticipates the death drive,

the desire to get beyond his romantic grief to some kind of "real," pre- (or post-) linguistic connection with Catherine. She continues haunting him. Since her death, he says, "I've been the sport of that intolerable torture" (230). Nelly notes that the look on his face as he, in the midst of self-starvation, describes his torture had the "painful appearance of mental tension towards one absorbing subject" (230). In fact, Heathcliff is "mentally tense," unable fully to let go of the cognitive ties which bind him to the world, to his house, to his grief. As Catherine absorbs him, though, he slips outside of himself further and further. But as Nelly describes this process, he is still being absorbed into a "subject"; the diction is not coincidental. In Nelly's narrative, Heathcliff as "hero" and Catherine as "heroine," words which Lockwood actually uses to describe the characters whom she creates, can never escape their subjectivity. Once again, the novel "saves its own life" and the lives of those characters desperately trying to die within it.

"I have a single wish," (256) Heathcliff tells Nelly, as he is getting ready to die. Heathcliff's death wish begins to take over as both he and the novel approach their ends. Nelly describes an invisible object that the dying man seems to stare at: "Whatever it was, it communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes; at least, the anguished, yet raptured expression of his countenance suggested that idea" (261). The pleasure/pain extremes suggest the sweetness of the ultimate masochistic desire: to die. As he draws nearer to his own non-being, Nelly, of course, regathers him into an autonomous subject. Heathcliff does not speak to Nelly; instead, Nelly translates his paradoxical looks into an "idea," once again proving that the novel cannot fully contain the implications of its gestures. Heathcliff begins to mutter "detached words" (261) similar to the "detached sentences" in Catherine's diary. He also speaks Catherine's name, further miming her actions in the bed-closet so many years ago. Catherine vacillated between a hyper-textuality and a mortal repulsion from the word; Heathcliff is trapped between the abyss and the story. Though he wants to merge with his love, thereby dissolving his own identity, he is caught in Nelly's narrative, fated to communicate, even if only in the most fragmentary way. "It's unutterably too much for flesh and blood to bear," Heathcliff utters, contradicting himself. When Heathcliff actually dies, he remains trapped in this liminal state. He has a look of "exaltation" upon his face, Nelly tells us, and his lips are "parted" (264). He seems to have attained the kind of transcendent bliss he hoped for, but at the same time, his mouth remains open, as if to symbolize that his escape from language, from meaning-making, can never be complete as long as Nelly persists.

In this context, the novel's closing words might then suggest an alternate reading. As Lockwood walks home, he detours through the local cemetery. He notes that Catherine's headstone is "half-buried in heath" and Edgar's is "only harmonized by the turf." Heathcliff's, however, is "still bare" (266). The "heath" that buries Catherine's stone suggests that the merger with *Heath*cliff is finally complete and successful. Edgar's "harmony" (and the "only" seems to be important here) suggests a complementary process; Edgar is balanced by something outside himself (the earth), and has not shattered or merged in any way. But Heathcliff's bare headstone is perhaps the most telling. Though we are told earlier that his name and date of death will appear on his stone when he dies, and although the surface meaning of "bare" most likely refers to the new grave, as yet uncovered by vegetation, a "bare headstone" undeniably refers to a stone that is not written upon. Could it be that,

in some symbolic way, Heathcliff has finally escaped representation, escaped from the text that has been writing his life for so many chapters? As Heathcliff and Catherine seem to transcend their own genesis at the end of *Wuthering Heights,* so too does the novel contradict their escape, fixing Catherine safely into a metaphor about the heath and her lover, and inviting the reader to imagine just what should be written upon the bare tablet. As much as the novel gestures towards and even succeeds at implying an extra-discursive realm where identity is replaced by a fullness of meaning (non-meaning), it must always account for its own form, its own tools, and ultimately side with the symbolic.

Of course, one of the most discussed aspects of *Wuthering Heights* is its many narrators, and the framing devices of the novel have been important to many arguments launched about the text. Nelly and Lockwood, as the major story-telling forces, are undeniably central to the way that meaning is produced and communicated in the text. When Lockwood has just met Heathcliff for the first time, the eager narrator describes his complex host: "He . . . relaxed a little, in the laconic style of chipping off his pronouns and auxiliary verbs, and introduced what he supposed would be a subject of interest to me, a discourse on the advantages and disadvantages of my present place of retirement" (17). Lockwood, though we haven't been informed that he's a linguist, has a curious hyperawareness of the grammar of his situation. By calling attention to Heathcliff's style, pronouns, verbs, subjects, and discourses, Lockwood reminds his readers of the tools of his trade, resituates the story that is about to be told into the context of rhetoric. When he spots "Catherine" written and rewritten on the sill, he, in "vapid listlessness," "continued spelling" (25) over the name. Although he will dream of the meaning behind the name, in his waking state Lockwood dispenses with signification in favor of the rudiments of grammar--namely, spelling. But dreams are not merely to be cast aside in this text. Lockwood's dream of the sermon reveals his innermost anxieties: both that he will lose control of his text and that he will be murdered as he tries to regain it. As Jabes progresses through his "four hundred and ninety parts" (29), Lockwood writhes and yawns, nudging Joseph to find out when he will be released. Finally, he can stand it no longer; Lockwood invites the congregation, whom he calls "fellow martyrs," to drag Jabes down and make the "place which knows him . . . know him no more!" (29). But Jabes turns the congregation on Lockwood instead, and with a "concluding word," sets them upon his body. Lockwood's dream reveals how powerless our narrator feels in the face of textuality. Condemned to listen to the sermon seemingly forever, Lockwood revolts and tries to halt the chain of signification by killing the producer of the discourse. Of course, what he finds is that the producer turns around and kills him instead. Lockwood learns that the power of the text manipulates him; he may be the narrator, but he is a slave to the narrative. Carol Jacobs has convincingly argued that it is ultimately the endless text which has the power to destroy Lockwood (103). But we might go further; while Heathcliff and Catherine struggle to release themselves from the symbolic order, Lockwood envisions the discursive realm as inescapable. Although Catherine, Heathcliff, and Lockwood all see death as the only alternative to textuality, Lockwood is utterly afraid and repulsed by the alternative; Catherine and Heathcliff embrace it.

When Lockwood awakes from his dream, he realizes that "Jabes' part in the show" had been played by "the branch of a fir tree that touched [his] lattice" (29). This branch eventually morphs into the

lost Catherine, struggling to get back into Wuthering Heights. In one of the most sadistic episodes in the books, Catherine "Linton" grabs Lockwood's hand when he thrusts it outside the window to quiet the branch. He narrates:

Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes: still it wailed . . . and maintained its tenacious gripe. . . . [Finally,] the fingers relaxed. . . . I . . . hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it. . . . Thereat began a feeble scratching outside, and the pile of books moved as if thrust forward. (30)

Lockwood's sadism, as I argued above about Heathcliff's and Catherine's, is meant to stave off a connection. Literally, he wants to keep Catherine out, away from him. Catherine does not let go; instead she maintains her "gripe." The diction here suggests a link between her "grip" and her "gripe"; she holds on and keeps wailing. Here, Catherine's language is inseparable from her physically connective hold on Lockwood. Once again, Lockwood demonstrates his anxiety that the text has a hold on him, not the other way around. When he tries to maintain separation using the books as a barrier, they are thrust *forward* at him (away from Catherine), reminding him that he cannot get away. Lockwood's sadism, then, is a desperate attempt to separate himself from the discursivity that has created and that maintains him. In some ways, Lockwood is not so far from Heathcliff and Catherine. He struggles, as they do, with his place in a society of symbols, with his place in the story he himself can't help telling.

If Lockwood manifests an anxiety about the death drive, and fear of and simultaneous attraction to a meta-discursivity, Nelly Dean stands a staunch symbol of the solidity of the symbolic realm itself. "I have read more than you would fancy," she tells Lockwood with pride; "you could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into, and got something out of also" (59). Unlike Lockwood who is paralyzed by the mechanics of language, by the process which keeps him away from the "real," Nelly revels in her interpretive powers; for her, language, stories, metaphors: these are the "real." She does not envision herself as limited or trapped. In some ways, she is the most empowered figure in the text; since the only way to have power in the landscape of any novel (especially this one) is to wield signifying power, Nelly winds up alive, satisfied, autonomous, and authorial. She is removed from the tension caused the other characters by issues of self-dissolution and murderous textuality. Likewise, she is the only major character who is decidedly uninvolved with the sadomasochism that is so rampant in the novel. Catherine, she tells Lockwood, liked to act the mistress and command her companions. "She did so to me," Nelly says, "But I would not bear slapping and ordering; so I let her know" (43). When Catherine secretly pinches her in Edgar's presence, Nelly says out loud to her, "You have no right to nip me" (65). Catherine slaps her on the cheek for her insolence, which, as Nelly seems aware it will, leads to Edgar's unabashed repulsion. Nelly describes him as "greatly shocked at the double fault of falsehood and violence which his idol had committed" (65). Nelly refuses to play masochist to Catherine's sadism, and instead reveals her mistress' violence to be ridiculous, immature, and evil. In Nelly's world, sadism has nothing to do with the anxiety produced by the death drive; for her, it is merely the bad which the good in life must oppose. "We *must* be for ourselves in the long run," she concludes later; "The mild and

generous are only more justly selfish than the domineering" (81). Nelly cannot conceive of a world where identity would be dissolved, where selfishness would be replaced by an end to the mechanisms that produce subjects themselves. Both the masochists and the sadists are, for Nelly, only different degrees of selfhood. Nelly and Lockwood, then, stand as more than frames for the story of *Wuthering Heights.* Nelly is the firm, reliable terrain of the self-perpetuating novel form, and Lockwood is a more haunted and afraid depiction of the human subject's relationship to language.

The narrative manifests many of the characteristics of its story-tellers. The second generation of characters, who provide the resolution to the plot, act out issues larger than themselves, issues which Nelly and Lockwood have raised since the outset of the novel. Cathy, unlike her dead mother, has an uncomplicated relationship to reading and books. "May I not write a note to tell him why I cannot come?" she implores Nelly about Linton, "And just send those books I promised to lend him? His books are not as nice as mine" (181). Cathy and Linton fall in love through letters, and theirs is a profoundly literary relationship. Nelly describes Linton's letters to Cathy: "Some of them struck me as singularly odd compounds of ardour and flatness; commencing in strong feeling, and concluding in the affected, wordy way that a schoolboy might use to a fancied, incorporeal sweetheart" (182). While critics such as Regina Barreca have suggested that Linton is demonstrating a decidedly male inarticulateness (as opposed to the articulate and moving epistles that Barreca imagines Cathy as sending),[6] I would argue that he is demonstrating the novel's restrengthening of the literary and linguistic system. Linton's (and probably Cathy's) letters are wordy, affected, romantic, and flat. There seems to be no "real" body to whom the missives are addressed; language has made any such corporeal "real" entirely suspect. Even bodies, even Linton and Cathy themselves, are constructed by their letters to each other.[7]

Heathcliff, on his way to an early grave, is constantly trying to separate Cathy from her many texts. "Put your trash away and find something to do!" (34) he shouts at her as she reads. "I'll put my trash away, because you can make me, if I refuse," she counters, closing her book and throwing it on a chair. "But I'll not do anything," she concludes, "Except what I please!" Heathcliff then moves to strike her, but she runs away before he can. Cathy, like Nelly Dean, refuses the masochist's role. She sets aside her text only as long as is necessary to prevent her injury. Heathcliff is not the only one who initially exhibits hostility towards her proficiency in reading and writing. "I had brought some of my nicest books for him," says Cathy of her trip to visit Linton; "He asked me to read a little of one, and I was about to comply, when Earnshaw burst the door open. . . . 'Get to thy own room!' he said in a voice almost inarticulate with passion. . . . 'Thou shalln't keep me out of this'" (201). Hareton is upset with the readers because pages earlier he had been chided by them for his illiteracy, which Cathy calls his "failure" (200). Hareton reflects his caretaker's attitude about reading, and uses his brute strength to try to terrorize Cathy and Linton. This is, as we have been told, Heathcliff's design. "He has satisfied my expectations," Heathcliff says of Hareton, "He'll never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance" (178). Hareton's illiteracy is forced upon him in order to punish the snobbish--and now dead--Hindley. "And the best of it," says Heathcliff, "is, Hareton is damnably fond of me!" (178). Hareton takes pleasure in the "pain" that he is caused, fulfilling Heathcliff's sadistic fantasy by playing masochist. Heathcliff's revenge tethers him to

society, linking him to a chain of events that are solidly discursive. Hareton's masochism, however, positions him against discourse. Of course, by the end of the novel, Heathcliff is dead and Hareton is reading. How does the reversal transpire?

Even as Hareton is hostile towards Linton and Cathy for their skills with the printed word, he still seems to be envious of their gift. His insistence, "Thou shalln't keep me out of this," suggests that his hostility is motivated not by his status as rebel, but by his status as outsider who desperately wants in. When Cathy is sitting in the kitchen reading one day, Hareton reaches out to touch her hair. She recoils. Hareton whispers to Zillah, "Will you ask her to read to us?" (235). Little by little, he begins to express interest in books. This occurs at the same time as he begins to express interest in Cathy romantically and sexually. For Hareton, the act of reading is a metaphor for the sex act. This metaphor gathers steam and gently explodes during one of the most oddly memorable scenes in the book:

"Con-*trary!*" said a voice, as sweet as a silver bell--"That for the third time, you dunce! I'm not going to tell you, again--Recollect, or I pull your hair!"
"Contrary, then," answered another, in deep, but softened tones. "And now, kiss me, for minding so well."
"No, read it over first correctly, without a single mistake."
The male speaker began to read. (243)

This scene is replete with significance. First, the word in question is "contrary." Above all else, the word implies a binary, a relational situation where one element is invested with meaning by being opposed to another element. This is, in fact, a microcosmic, dictional representation of the symbolic order in total. Second, the sadomasochism of the scene--the loving hair-pulling, willing love-slave behavior, etc.--is a parody of episodes that have come before it. Consider, for example, Lockwood's encounter with Catherine's grip. The sexual nature of the diction which describes his rubbing of the arm and the blood on the bed-sheets is so much more deadly, destructive, uncontained, and dangerous than the playful tugging and pecking of this scene.[8] Lockwood's sadism and Catherine's refusal to let go to avoid the pain seem to be the "real" stuff that Cathy and Hareton can only play with. And Lockwood's dream sermon, Catherine's scrawled name, and the books on the sill seem to drag Lockwood closer to a kind of fateful hyper-discursivity, a symbolic order which both sustains and horrifies him. Here, Cathy and Hareton ask no questions about the nature of their relationship to what they are reading. Indeed, they seem to be enacting romantic literary convention as they teach and learn. Cathy's voice is sweet like a "silver bell," and Hareton's is deep and soft like a good romantic hero's. The attention paid to the sound of their voices emphasizes the comfort, rather than the horror, which is created by their relationship to language. Cathy and Hareton enact the kind of romance that Nelly has been trying to write all along.

Heathcliff is thwarted by Hareton's conversion, no longer able to maintain the sadistic distance between himself and his past. He is reminded of his Catherine as Hareton's senses are made alert and his "faculties wakened" (254). Nelly supposes that the resemblance "disarmed Mr. Heathcliff," but the disarming quickly shifted to an alteration in character. "[Heathcliff] took the book from

[Hareton's] hand," Nelly says, "and glanced at the open page, then returned it without any observation, merely signing Catherine away" (254). Heathcliff realizes that he is powerless to stop the Hareton's education, and powerless, too, to establish boundaries between himself and his own past. "Five minutes ago," he tells Nelly, "Hareton seemed a personification of my own youth, not a human being" (255). As Heathcliff slips away into his boyhood, he gets closer to the pre-linguistic phase that he was in at the beginning of the novel. "I don't care for striking," Heathcliff concludes; "That sounds as if I had been labouring the whole time, only to exhibit a fine trait of magnanimity. It is far from being the case--I have lost the faculty to enjoy their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing" (255). Sadism, primarily a way for Heathcliff to stave off the death that he will soon yearn for and a way for him to maintain the boundaries that fashion his identity, is no longer meaningful. Or rather, it has too much meaning. He is ready to initiate the death drive in earnest, and make his way towards Catherine. But Hareton, though he has been the foil for Heathcliff's rising masochism, is also directly oppositional to it. The earthly marriage that is effected between Hareton and Cathy is the discursive parody of the unspeakable merger that Heathcliff and Catherine experience outside the scope of the novel. Hareton and Cathy are the closest to--and also the farthest away from--any representation of Catherine and Heathcliff's union that we, as readers, can get.

And this leads to a central question, one which this essay clearly--necessarily--talks around and around. How are we, as readers, as interpreters, related to *Wuthering Heights*? Like the villagers at the end of the novel who keep seeing ghosts about town, we feel reluctant to let go of the story. As critics, we visit and revisit every quotation, every described action, hoping to crack the code of symbols and persuade our colleagues that our reading is viable, valid, "true." We revive Heathcliff and Catherine at every turn; even in quoting from the text to make our arguments, we re-represent what was, upon first delivery, already a representation. Like Nelly, we revel in our interpretive powers. An essay like this one, though, is ironically Lockwoodian. In some ways a grand celebration of the guts of Heathcliff and Catherine, an argument such as this is in "utter" awe of death. Unable myself to break free of the signifying chain, I am doomed to repeat and repeat this critical story. As it was for Lockwood, my only way out of such a bind (and I pun intentionally, reveling in my rhetorical acrobatics) is to be murdered by my own text. When I stop writing, I will, in effect, kill off my authorial identity; though less rough than Lockwood's near-death at the hands of the congregation, the end of every text necessarily effects a death of its own author. Can I achieve the kind of transcendence that (an unnamable) Heathcliff and Catherine seem to have achieved? Or, like Lockwood's, is my contribution to discourse likely to circulate, be commented upon, read? It seems as if the goals of any critical project are in striking contrast to any kind of death wish. Like Lockwood, I must awaken from my dream of violent escape, and instead find contentment in a slow and steady story-telling, an unwelcome handshake with a phantom corpse.

Notes

[1] Both Halperin and Bersani are interested in the ways in which S/M functions not to define a subcultural community, but to dissolve the mechanisms of human identity and connections

altogether. I would argue, however, that both critics ultimately demonstrate the impossibility of representing such dissolved spaces. See, for example, Bersani equating the "defeat" of power with its "modulation" (83), implying that S/M's pleasure principle revises power dynamics even as he admits that it cannot shatter such dynamics. Halperin celebrates Gayle Rubin's deliberate description of the S/M club as an example of team-work and superior community involvement (103). As Lee Edelman has noted: "Transgression here sounds like a Tupperware party!" Both Halperin and Bersani (unintentionally) avoid the abyss of non-meaning in favor of a politics of revolution and healthy transgression.

[2] See Deleuze on the "plane of immanence on which all minds, all bodies, and all individuals are situated" (122).

[3] I use "Catherine" to refer to Catherine Earnshaw, and "Cathy" to refer to her daughter.

[4] While most of this article discusses Heathcliff, Catherine, Nelly, and Lockwood, other characters certainly figure into the sadomasochistic themes of the novel. Consider, for example, the way Edgar is initially repelled by getting his ear boxed by Catherine, and yet he returns to her, assured at last--by their very quarrel--that they are lovers. And Isabella's violent relationship to Heathcliff, which eventually has her turning tail: "I've recovered from my desire to be killed by him," she tells Nelly. "Catherine had an awfully perverted taste to esteem him so dearly, knowing him so well" (143). From the moment Edgar and Isabella try to pull apart their dog, they figure as parodies--literal discursive copies of the original--of a more dealy sadomasochism exhibited by Catherine and Heathcliff.

[5] This is a term that Bersani uses to describe a decidedly sexual (orgasmic) moment when identity and its accompanying structures are dissolved.

[6] See Chapter 13 of Barreca's *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*.

[7] For more on Cathy's revision of her mother's refusal to enter the symbolic order, see Margaret Homans' "The Name of the Mother in *Wuthering Heights*."

[8] For an interesting psychoanalytic perspective on the relationship of the death drive to sexuality, see Sadger's *Heinrich von Kleist. Eine pathographisch-psychologische Studie* (1910) or Ernest Jones' English commentary on this work.

Works Cited

Barreca, Regina, ed. *Sex and Death in Victorian Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. 1847. NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1972.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Trans. Robert Hurley. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988.

Freud, Sigmund. "The economic principle in masochism." *Collected Papers, 2*. London: Hogarth, 1924. 255-268.

Goodwin, Sarah Webster and Elizabeth Bronfen, eds. *Death and Representation*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993.

Halperin, David. *Saint Foucault*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Homans, Margaret. "The Name of the Mother in *Wuthering Heights*." *Bearing the Word: Language and Female Experience in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing*. London Press, 1986.

Jacobs, Carol. "*Wuthering Heights*: At the Threshold of Interpretation." *Emily Brontë's* Wuthering Heights." Ed. Harold Bloom. NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987. 99-118.

James, Henry. *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces*. NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.

Jones, Ernest. "On Dying Together." *Essential Papers on Suicide*. Eds. John T. Maltsberger and Mark J. Goldblatt. NY: New York University Press, 1996. 9-19.

Koskinen, Maria. "Sex and Death in *Wuthering Heights*." *English Studies and History*. Ed. David Robertson. Tampere, Finland: University of Tampere, 1994. 207-222.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968.

Levine, George. *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Ross, John Munder. *The Sadomasochism of Everyday Life*. NY: Simon and Schuster, 1997.