

“I HATE IT, BUT I CAN’T STOP”: THE ROMANTICIZATION OF INTIMATE  
PARTNER ABUSE IN YOUNG ADULT RETELLINGS OF *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

BRIANNA R. ZGODINSKI

Bachelor of Arts in English

Cleveland State University

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THIS THESIS IS HEREBY APPROVED FOR

BRIANNA R. ZGODINSKI

candidate for the Master of Arts in English degree

for the department of English

&

CLEVELAND STATE UNIVERSITY'S

College of Graduate Studies

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Dr. Rachel Carnell

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department & date

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Dr. Gary Dyer

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Dr. Frederick Karem

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department & date

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**ABSTRACT**

In recent years, there has been a trend in young adult adaptations of *Wuthering Heights* to amend the plot so that Catherine Earnshaw chooses to have a romantic relationship with Heathcliff, when in Brontë’s novel she decides against it. In the following study, I trace the factors that contribute to Catherine’s rejection of Heathcliff as a romantic partner in the original text. Many critics have argued that her motives are primarily Machiavellian since she chooses a suitor with more wealth and familial connections than Heathcliff. These are indeed factors; however, by engaging with contemporary research on adolescent development, I show that the primary reason she rejects Heathcliff is because he has exhibited a propensity for violence and other abusive behaviors. I also analyze the consequences of reversing her decision in the updated young adult versions, which include the made-for-television film *MTV’S Wuthering Heights* (2003), the Lifetime original film *Wuthering High School* (2012), and the novel *Catherine* (2013). The most significant consequence of this change is that in order to make Heathcliff a “chooseable,” twenty-first century hero, the writers of these works have to romanticize his violent tendencies through the perspectives of their female protagonists. When the young women begin to question how secure they are around their partners, they ultimately decide that fidelity to their “soulmate” relationship is more important than safety or autonomy, with the writers using Catherine Earnshaw’s famous

“I am Heathcliff” speech to support their protagonists’ conclusions. I argue, though, that while Catherine does allude to the type of otherworldly love these young women are venerating, Brontë uses her speech to confront the limitations of that love, not to hold it up as an ideal.

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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION: HEATHCLIFF AND CATHERINE IN**  
**THE YOUNG ADULT IMAGINATION**

However Emily Brontë's critics may differ in their approach to *Wuthering Heights*, there is one point of analysis that garners general agreement: that the unique nature and personality of adolescent readers, even if they do not have a particular predilection for the "classics," predisposes them to turn into impassioned devotees of the "love story" of the two main characters of the first half of Brontë's novel, Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. "The adolescent reader," muses Marianne Thormählen, "is easily swept along by [the] force [of *Wuthering Heights*] and tends to remember Catherine and Heathcliff as the protagonists of *the* grand romantic passion of English fiction" (183). Grace Moore and Susan Pyke echo these sentiments:

*Wuthering Heights* is, for many readers, one of those stories we compulsively return to time and again throughout our lives. While the novel may tell the tale of obsessive love, the text itself attracts, or perhaps creates, obsessive readers, *often drawn in as teenagers* (emphasis added) and hooked by the raw emotion of the first generation of characters. Cathy and Heathcliff become friends to *the teenage reader* (emphasis added) and, although age and experience may change the nature

of our friendship, they are characters to whom we return throughout our lives. Refreshingly free from the guarded, icy independence of Charlotte [Brontë's] heroines, Emily's Heathcliff and Cathy speak across the generations, at that first, early reading tapping into our angst, our infatuations and our deep rooted desire to be able to proclaim, 'I am Heathcliff.' (239)

Patricia Meyer Spacks also comments on how Heathcliff especially "is a projection of adolescent fantasy: give him a black leather jacket and a motorcycle and he'd fit right into many a youthful dream even now" (138).

Given this attraction, perhaps it is not a surprise that a few have attempted to refashion *Wuthering Heights* for contemporary young adult audiences in the form of novels and other media. There have been four notable "retellings" of Brontë's novel published and released in the past two decades that are marketed specifically to teens and preteens: *MTV's Wuthering Heights* (2003), a made-for-television musical film written by Max Enscoe and Annie DeYoung that is set in a secluded lighthouse atop the rocky shores of Northern California; *Eclipse* (2007), the third installment in the popular *Twilight* tetralogy that author Stephenie Meyer claims she based on *Wuthering Heights*<sup>1</sup>; *Wuthering High School* (2012), a Lifetime Original Film written by Delondra Williams in which the primary action takes place within the borders of a wealthy Malibu neighborhood; and *Catherine* (2013), a novel by April Lindner that is set in Manhattan and whose narrative alternates between the points of view of the older and younger Catherine. Although they differ when it comes to character names and also in how

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<sup>1</sup> In a 2008, Meyer's publisher Little, Brown & Company released a video on Meyer's website in which she claims that "all of the books in the *Twilight* saga have a classical inspiration" (Meyer) and that *Eclipse* is her "*Wuthering Heights* homage" (Meyer).



closely they imitate the original novel, all four works are centered around the romantic relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, which the writers and directors try to make appealing and accessible to their target audience by using contemporary language and settings. Catherine's dustjacket, for example, promises readers "a fresh retelling of the Emily Brontë classic," while MTV once claimed on its website that its film "[is not] your English teacher's *Wuthering Heights*" (Pop Matters) when the network was doing marketing for the film back in 2003.

In their pursuit of telling this classic "love story," however, the writers and producers behind these works must have found themselves facing a great challenge when they tried to recreate the famous scene in which Catherine rejects Heathcliff as a romantic partner and opts to marry her neighbor Edgar Linton instead. For, as Thormählen astutely asks, "[w]hat truly infatuated teenage girl tells a confidante that marrying the boy from whom she claims to be inseparable would degrade her?" (183). There have been many theories since the publication of *Wuthering Heights* as to why a young woman would reject someone that she claims she loves and with whom she holds a bond so strong that she describes him as being "more myself than I am" (64). Two predominant theories, however, keep reappearing in Brontë criticism. Bernard J. Paris (1982), Jacqueline Banerjee (1998), Catherine R. Hancock (2006), Ian Ward (2012), and Patrick Morris (2013) all argue that Brontë uses the tempestuous relationship and personalities of her two primary characters to draw our attention to a key social issue that was of importance to all of the Brontë women: the long-term consequences of child abuse and the inability of the law to prevent it from occurring. Beth Newman (2006), Sarah Wakefield (2011), and Hila Shachar (2012) have also noticed that Catherine's choice of the wealthy Edgar

Linton as a marriage partner instead of the impoverished Heathcliff points to the lack of options for British women in the first half of the nineteenth century when it came to education, careers, finances, and marriage.

At the onset, the young adult versions show potential for engaging with at least some of these issues, especially when it comes to their characterizations of the male and female protagonists. The updated Heathcliffs are shown to share the spirit of the original's mercurial disposition, and their personalities are likewise presented as having developed because of experiencing prolonged trauma and mistreatment during childhood. The female protagonists are also cognizant of the male protagonists' antisocial tendencies, just as Catherine Earnshaw is cognizant of Heathcliff's. However, a key difference occurs when these young women must decide if these tendencies are severe enough to inhibit these young men from being appropriate long-term partners. Brontë's Catherine concludes they *are* severe enough in the case of Heathcliff, causing her to reject him as a husband, whereas in the young adult versions the female protagonists' choices are altered from the source material so that they decide to stay romantically linked with their significant others. Their rationale for doing so is twofold. They conclude that the behaviors they come to find problematic about their partners—like physical aggression, self-imposed isolation, and possessiveness—are ultimately indicators of their partners' high levels of esteem for and devotion to them. The four young women also believe that they and the male protagonists are "soulmates," a factor that ostensibly eradicates any of the reservations that they may have about their relationship.

It is not obvious why this revision was made. However, the implications of this ideological shift are striking. First, it renders the abuse these young men experience

insignificant. When these four works romanticize the male protagonists' most harmful behavior, they obfuscate the relationship that both they and Brontë establish between the ill-treatment Heathcliff experiences as a child and his aggressive tendencies as a young adult. The plot change also implies that a young woman does not need autonomy if she is in a romantic relationship with someone she believes to be her soulmate, even if she has concerns about her safety or her long-term compatibility with her partner. Brontë, on the other hand, emphasizes at several points leading up to, during, and after Catherine's decision that there are consequences to romanticizing men like Heathcliff. Brontë's most memorable warning, though, is issued through the character Isabella Linton, a woman in her late teens who becomes trapped in an abusive marriage with Heathcliff after refusing to heed Catherine's counsel that he does not "conceal depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior" (81). It is surprising that the authors and filmmakers of the more recent versions have obscured these dangers since intimate partner violence is still an ongoing issue for many women in British and American society.

While there has been a lot of critical interest in the process of adapting *Wuthering Heights* into a variety of mediums, including film, fiction, and popular music, few critics have commented on adaptations that are tailored exclusively to young adult audiences. Out of the four young adult works, *Eclipse* has been written about the most. There are countless books and articles on how Meyer's entire series romanticizes abusive behavior in young adult relationships, and a few critics, like Wakefield and Marta Miquel Baldellou, have shown interest in the intertextuality between *Eclipse* and *Wuthering Heights*. There is currently no criticism on either *Wuthering High School* or *Catherine*, with the exception of some film reviews for the former. *MTV's Wuthering Heights* is

featured in Hila Shachar's *Cultural Afterlives and Screen Adaptations of Classic Literature: Wuthering Heights and Company* (2012). In this collection of essays, Shachar "examines what happens to [*Wuthering Heights*] when it becomes a cultural legacy through the process of screen adaptation" (1), concluding that filmmakers have tended to ignore historicity in favor of using Brontë's novel to assert their own contemporary sociopolitical agendas (3-5). In the chapter on the MTV adaptation, Shachar addresses how the filmmakers use Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship to promote "an overarching discourse of anti-feminism and a simplified neo-Victorian domesticity" (115). The film suggests that the relational dysfunction experienced by the fictional Earnshaw family is the result of the mother abandoning her husband and young children to pursue her own artistic and professional goals (116). When her daughter Cate exhibits a similar desire to explore other parts of the world as a young woman, the film shows there are tragic consequences for everyone in her life, consequences that could have been avoided if Cate had remained at home with her partner and family. However, if this representation is supposed to function as the filmmakers' reading of Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship, it is not supported by the text (121).

Shachar's analysis is enlightening. However, she does not consider how young adult viewers specifically might be affected by MTV's misappropriation of Brontë's novel, even though they are the target audience of the film. She also wrote *Cultural Afterlives* before the release and publication of *Catherine* and *Wuthering High School*, so she would not have been able to predict that the 2003 film would become part of a greater trend of young adult rescriptings of *Wuthering Heights* using Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship to justify their characters' abusive and antisocial behaviors. As of 2017, this

pattern is still yet to be identified by anyone. The extraordinary amount of criticism that followed the publication of the *Twilight* series, though, indicates that there is a public interest in exposing works that glorify violence committed against young women by their partners. This exposure is doubly important when these works are based on *Wuthering Heights* because the novel resists such glorification.

Since there is already an extensive body of criticism surrounding *Eclipse* and Meyer's utilization of Brontë's novel, the following study will focus solely on the depiction of Heathcliff and Catherine's bond in *MTV's Wuthering Heights*, *Lifetime's Wuthering High School*, and *Catherine*. I will begin by contextualizing Brontë's depiction of Heathcliff's early life experiences within the first half of the nineteenth century, during which attitudes toward and definitions of child abuse differed from our current ones. Next, I will illustrate how the authors of these three rescriptions initially attempt to stay faithful to Brontë's novel by portraying Heathcliff's antisocial traits as being the result of childhood abuse and neglect, but then ultimately fail in their efforts when they move towards glamorizing these traits instead. Finally, I will provide a close reading of the scene where Catherine presents her choice to Nelly and discuss the larger social discourse the newer works miss by altering her decision.

## CHAPTER II

### HEATHCLIFF: A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

In *Early Victorian Novelists* (1934), David Cecil hypothesizes that when Catherine abandons the ideal bond she has with Heathcliff in favor of pursuing an “unnatural” (165) one with Edgar, she “disturbs the natural harmony of Heathcliff’s nature, and turns him from an alien element in the established order, into a force active for its destruction” (165). These “destructive act[s]” (165) include Heathcliff “driv[ing] Hindley to [his] death” (165), his “‘unnatural’ marriage with Isabella” (165), and “his revenge on the next generation, Hareton Earnshaw, Catherine Linton and Linton Heathcliff” (165). For, he argues, when “a natural force...has been frustrated of its natural outlet...it inevitably becomes destructive; like a mountain torrent diverted from its channel” (165). Many subsequent critics have made comparable assessments concerning the effects of Catherine’s rejection on Heathcliff’s personality. In the 1975 work *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Terry Eagleton claims that when Catherine “enters the civilized world of the Lintons, [she] leaves Heathcliff behind to become a ‘wolfish, pitiless’ man” (101). Margaret Lenta made a similar argument in 1984, affirming that “Heathcliff without his other self can produce nothing which is good and new; [so] he

destroys the old” (73). Finally, in 2006, Carine M. Mardorossian speculated that “[w]ithout Cathy, Heathcliff becomes an abusive husband and father” (49).

It is true that overhearing Catherine say she cannot marry him has a profoundly wounding effect on Heathcliff’s emotional state: it causes him to disappear for three years. It is also correct to say that Heathcliff’s most notably “destructive acts,” such as the abuse of his wife Isabella and his son Linton and his plotting revenge against Edgar and Hindley, are committed after this pivotal incident. However, it is inaccurate to say that up until the moment he is rejected Heathcliff lacks the capacity or compulsion to commit these types of acts. As other critics like Inga-Stina Ewbank, Joyce Carol Oates, and Marianne Thormählen have pointed out, Heathcliff begins showing an aptitude for violence and other antisocial behaviors many years before Catherine’s decision. Oates, for example, postulates that “[Heathcliff] has possessed an implacable will from the very first” (446), citing as proof his lack of appreciation for his foster father, Mr. Earnshaw, “who had not only saved his life in Liverpool but...had loved him above his own children” (446). Oates is probably referring to the scene in which the Earnshaw family’s longtime servant Nelly admits to the visiting Lockwood that she “wondered often what my master saw to admire so much in the sullen boy, who never, to my recollection, repaid his indulgence by any sign of gratitude” (Brontë 31). Moreover, Heathcliff “[knew] perfectly the hold he had on [Earnshaw’s] heart, and [was] conscious he had only to speak and all the house would be obliged to bend to his wishes” (31).

And Heathcliff *does* take advantage of this knowledge in what Thormählen describes as “the gruesome episode of Heathcliff and Hindley fighting over the colts in Chapter IV” (184), an example noted by both Ewbank and Thormählen as evidence of Heathcliff’s

early aggression (Ewbank 97; Thormählen 184). The “episode” to which Thormählen alludes is when Heathcliff and Hindley both receive young horses as gifts from Mr. Earnshaw while they are young boys. Upon determining that his horse is ill and therefore unusable, Heathcliff instructs Hindley to give him *his* horse (Brontë 31). If Hindley will not hand it over, Heathcliff says, he “shall tell [Hindley’s] father of the three thrashings [he’s] given [him] this week, and show him [his] arm, which is black to the shoulder” (Brontë 31). Hindley refuses and strikes Heathcliff’s ears, but Heathcliff persists because he knows he is Mr. Earnshaw’s favorite (31). He informs Hindley that he “will have to” (31) do what he says because “if I speak of these blows, you’ll get them again with interest” (31). Hindley proceeds to “threaten him with an iron weight, used for weight potatoes and hay” (31), which Heathcliff taunts him to throw (31). Unable to control himself any longer, Hindley attacks Heathcliff with the weight, injuring him enough so that Heathcliff can show Mr. Earnshaw the evidence. Knowing the situation cannot be altered to favor him, Hindley gives in and lets Heathcliff have the colt (31).

Ewbank—who, it should be said, addresses Cecil’s reading directly—also refers to the scene in which Heathcliff and Catherine see Edgar and Isabella Linton for the first time (97). It begins with Heathcliff relaying to Nelly his and Catherine’s experience of seeing the two children fighting over a small dog through a window in their large and richly furnished home (Brontë 38). The language he uses to describe the incident is sated with violence. He reports that the event ended with both children crying and the animal nursing its injuries. He and Catherine felt amazed that the Linton children seemed so unhappy despite their obvious wealth. Catherine and Heathcliff felt superior to “the idiots” (38), with Heathcliff concluding that he would never exchange lives with Edgar,



“not [even] if I might have the privilege of flinging Joseph off the highest gable, and painting the house-front with Hindley’s blood!” (38). When Nelly realizes that Heathcliff has returned from the Lintons’ alone, she asks where Catherine is. He explains that they were discovered by the family dog because they were laughing so hard at the children’s folly. The dog proceeded to bite Catherine’s foot multiple times, and Heathcliff tells Nelly he “vociferated curses enough to annihilate any fiend in Christendom, and I got a stone and thrust it between his jaws, and tried with all my might to cram it down his throat” (39). When a servant removes Catherine from the dog’s grasp and carries her into the Lintons’ home, Heathcliff claims he trailed behind them while “grumbling execrations and vengeance” (39).

Heathcliff’s vindictive tendencies only become more fixed as he enters adolescence. When describing this period in Heathcliff’s life to Lockwood, Nelly remarks that “it appeared as if the lad were possessed of something diabolical...[h]e delighted to witness Hindley degrading himself past redemption; and became daily more notable for savage sullenness and ferocity” (Brontë 51). After being treated unjustly at one point, Heathcliff vows he will “pay Hindley back. I don’t care how long I wait, if I can only do it, at last, I hope he will not die before I do” (48). Nelly protests that “[i]t is for God to punish wicked people; we should learn to forgive” (48). Heathcliff is unmoved, retorting, “No, God won’t have the satisfaction that I shall...I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I’ll plan it out; while I’m thinking of that, I don’t feel pain” (48). In a subsequent scene that takes place three years later, he observes to Nelly that “[i]t’s a pity [Hindley] cannot kill himself with drink” (59), and he laments that the doctor predicts

“[Hindley will] outlive any man on this side Gimmerton, and go to the grave a hoary sinner; unless some happy chance out of the common course befall him” (59).

Edgar is another target of Heathcliff’s antipathy, even before he “steals” Catherine in marriage. While on a visit to Wuthering Heights, a young Edgar makes an observation about Heathcliff’s ungroomed hair in which he comments on its resemblance to “a colt’s mane” (46). Although Edgar “ventured this remark without any intention to insult” (46), Heathcliff responds by grabbing “a tureen of hot apple-sauce...and dash[ing] it full against the speaker’s face and neck” (46). Nelly exclaims to Lockwood that “Heathcliff’s *violent nature* was not prepared to endure the appearance of impertinence from one whom he seemed to hate, even then, as a rival” (46; emphasis added). She shows compassion here for Edgar when recalling the incident to Lockwood; however, at the time of its occurrence, she was very irritated with him. She grabs a cloth to clean Edgar’s face, “and, rather spitefully, scrubbed [his] nose and mouth, affirming it served him right for meddling” (46). Catherine, who is also present, is angry with him, too. As Edgar cries and rubs his injured skin, she reprimands him:

You should not have spoken to him!...He was in a bad temper, and you’ve spoilt your visit, and he’ll be flogged—I hate him to be flogged! I can’t eat my dinner.

Why did you speak to him, Edgar? (46)

By blaming Edgar for an injury Heathcliff inflicts upon him, Nelly and Catherine reveal that they have learned through their own experience that Heathcliff’s fury is an assumed reality that can not be changed, only avoided.

After analyzing Heathcliff’s language and behavior in some of these passages, Ewbank aptly concludes that “[t]hese are hardly the terms of ‘a mountain torrent directed

from its channel'; clearly we are meant to see the destructiveness in Heathcliff here...*before* Catherine chooses Edgar" (97; emphasis added). The reason, Ewbank surmises, it is important that we see that Heathcliff is capable of this type of conduct early in the novel is because Brontë is showing that it is the result of something that happens long before—and that is of much greater consequence than—romantic rejection: abuse (97). A handful of other critics agree. In a different essay than the one cited earlier, Thormählen writes,

Heathcliff's revenge project is rooted in his own misery under Hindley's regime... The memory of a few years of brutal, and brutalizing oppression may seem somewhat inadequate as the basis for a life dominated by revenge; but this circumstance serves as a reminder of the importance of childhood and adolescence in *Wuthering Heights*. As any adult victim of childhood bullying is aware, such experiences are particularly difficult to forgive, occasionally remaining as a latent lifelong trauma. (644)

Jacqueline Banerjee, Andrea Dworkin, Patrick Morris, and Bernard J. Paris all draw similar conclusions about Brontë's intent. Banerjee finds the violent adult Heathcliff to be "the product of a particularly stressful adolescence" (16). Dworkin believes that Brontë illustrates "how sadism is created in men through physical and psychological abuse and humiliation by other men" (69) and "how men learn hate as an ethic" (69) from their abusers. Morris, who is a clinical and forensic psychiatrist that specializes "in the assessment and treatment of trauma survivors" (168), sets apart *Wuthering Heights* as being exceptional for its accurate portrayal "of child abuse and domestic violence and the link between them through its exploration of the experiences and behavior of the pivotal

character, Heathcliff” (162). Lastly, Paris claims “the author keeps reminding us that [Heathcliff] is a villain only because he was first a victim and that his cruelty arises from his misery” (102).

According to Paris, the proof we have that Brontë is showcasing this critical connection “is the fact that several characters articulate the principle that bad treatment leads to vindictiveness” (102). For example, when Lockwood discovers Nelly has known Heathcliff since he was a child, he postulates, ““He must have had some ups and downs in life to make him such a churl”” (Brontë 28). As Nelly begins to divulge Heathcliff’s tragic history, Lockwood’s hypothesis proves to be correct. When Nelly meets Heathcliff for the first time as a young boy, she can tell immediately that he has experienced a life of deprivation. Mr. Earnshaw, Nelly’s former employer, tells his family he found the “starving” Heathcliff abandoned “in the streets of Liverpool” (29). As Nelly becomes more familiar with Heathcliff, she finds him to be “a sullen, patient child” (30) and wonders if it is the result of him having been “hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment” (30). It baffles her how “he would stand Hindley’s blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath, and open his eyes as if he had hurt himself by accident, and nobody was to blame” (30). Then, after the physical confrontations that follow the exchange of colts, Nelly marvels at how unfazed Heathcliff is by his injuries and how quickly he saddles up his new horse, as if nothing had happened (32). His indifference toward injury to himself suggests that he is already fluent with violence and blackmail as forms of social currency (Paris 103; Banerjee 20).

Nelly claims that it is the prolonged misuse Heathcliff experiences from his foster brother, though, that has had the greatest impact on his personality (53). Hindley’s open

abhorrence of Heathcliff begins when Mr. Earnshaw betrays a preference for the foundling over his biological son not long after he brings Heathcliff into their home. When they are children, Hindley acts out his feelings of rejection by striking and insulting Heathcliff, as he does in the colt incident. Mr. Earnshaw is always “furious when he discover[s] his son persecuting the poor, fatherless child” (30), and he protects Heathcliff from Hindley whenever it is in his power to do so (30). Heathcliff’s safety is compromised, however, when Mr. Earnshaw dies and Hindley becomes Heathcliff’s primary guardian. Nelly claims that “Hindley became tyrannical” (36) after this shift in power dynamics occurs. Catherine also notes the change in her diary. “I wish my father were back again,” she writes. “Hindley is a detestable substitute—his conduct to Heathcliff is atrocious” (16). Some of Hindley’s most “atrocious conduct” includes insulting Heathcliff in front of other people (37), isolating him from the rest of the family for extended periods of time (42), threatening his dismissal from the house (46), neglecting to provide him with access to clean clothing, and holding him captive in his room without food or water (47). Hindley’s physical assaults against Heathcliff also continue. After Heathcliff throws the hot applesauce at Edgar, for example, Hindley “conveyed [Heathcliff] to his chamber, where, doubtless, he administered a rough remedy to cool the fit of passion, for he reappeared red and breathless” (46).

Heathcliff suffers at the hands of other family and household members as well. Mr. Earnshaw’s wife, before she dies, is openly disturbed by Heathcliff’s first appearance in the house and “was ready to fling [him] out of doors” (29). Even Catherine and Nelly initially treat him very poorly. Catherine spits on Heathcliff when she realizes he is the reason her father has forgotten the gift he promised to purchase for her on his travels, and

the entire family refers to him as “it” before he is christened Heathcliff by Mr. Earnshaw (30). During Heathcliff’s first night in their home, Nelly recalls, Catherine and Edgar “entirely refused to have *it* in bed with them, or even in their room” (30), and Nelly, who admits she “had no more sense,...put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping *it* might be gone on the morrow” (30; emphasis added). Some years later, Hindley’s wife also shows an aversion to Heathcliff’s presence, and is happy to administer any injury to Heathcliff that her husband requests of her. Hindley instructs her to “pull [Heathcliff’s] hair” (17) as she walks by him, a task that she completes “heartily” (17). There are also multiple instances where Hindley delegates the task of disciplining Heathcliff to the family’s scripture-quoting manservant, Joseph, whom Nelly describes as “the wearisomest, self-righteous Pharisee that ever ransacked a Bible to rake the promises to himself, and fling the curses on his neighbors” (33). If Hindley “order[ed] Heathcliff a flogging” (36), Joseph would “thrash [him] till his arm ached” (37). Being on the receiving end of this type of treatment for many years, Nelly opines to Lockwood, “was enough to make a fiend of a saint” (51).

The connection Nelly makes between abuse experienced during childhood and the manifestation of destructive behavior in adulthood might seem obvious to the contemporary reader, who has the benefit of access to many decades’ worth of psychological and medical insight on human development. Much of this insight has led to the implementation of laws and social programs that aim to protect children from violent or neglectful parents and other caretakers. However, as Banerjee points out, when Brontë was writing *Wuthering Heights* in the first half of the nineteenth century, the concept of “child abuse” was not understood or defined in the same manner it is today (17).

According to James Walvin in *A Child's World: A Social History of English Childhood, 1800-1914*, the prevailing view at the time among the middle and upper classes was that children who misbehaved did so because they were tainted by Original Sin, and the corporeal discipline of children was widely accepted as the most effective way of both ridding children of these sinful urges and thwarting future sinful activity (58).

Consequently, “beatings, whippings, floggings, and physical assaults were fully sanctioned” (Walvin 59-60). These methods were not considered abusive as long as they were administered with the intent to edify (45).

There was a widely-held stereotype that only parents in the lower classes, whose tendency toward drunkenness and poor impulse control made them more likely to be violent, were truly capable of harming their children (Pike 372; Walven 53). Therefore, any laws that were made to curb the mistreatment of children were primarily aimed at this group of the population (Walvin 52). However, Brontë uses the actions of Hindley—a member of the landed gentry—to illustrate that the poor are not the only ones capable of brutality and that the children of the poor are not the only ones in need of legal protection. Hindley’s conduct towards Heathcliff was considered cruel even by the novel’s earliest reviewers (Ward 49); yet, there were no external forces in place to impede such behavior when they actually occurred in daily life (Pike 348; Ward 50). It is not a coincidence that Hindley often refers to having the law on his side when he is administering “discipline” to Heathcliff. When Hindley encourages Edgar to “take the law into your own hands” (Brontë 46) after he is burned by hot applesauce and when Hindley exclaims that “[n]o law in England can hinder a man from keeping his house

decent, and mine's abominable" (58), we are reminded that everything he is doing is completely legal if it is done under the pretense of "keeping his house decent" (58).

Ian Ward aptly explains in *Law and the Brontës* that "[t]he jurisprudential metaphors and allusions to legal instruments that make intermittent appearances in [*Wuthering Heights*] belie a...pervasive concern with the limits of law and justice" (50). Brontë uses Heathcliff's traumatic experience under the care of Hindley to expose these limits, for his aptitude for violence is shown to be a consequence of the inability of the law to protect him. Furthermore, by using language that clearly establishes a cause-and-effect relationship between the abuse Heathcliff experiences and the abuse he dispenses towards others, Brontë underscores how a tendency towards violence is not inherited from Original Sin, but is acquired by experiencing it firsthand and then passing it on to others (Dworkin 73; Hancock 61). As Heathcliff says when he informs Catherine of his plans to get revenge against the Lintons, who have not wronged him, "The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them" (88). Since the tyrant in this metaphor is clearly Hindley and Heathcliff is one of his slaves, it is odd that anyone could ever think to blame Catherine when Heathcliff decides to "crush those beneath" him.



### CHAPTER III

#### **“IF HE’D HURT YOU, I’D HAVE KILLED HIM”: HEATHCLIFF AS TEENAGE HERO**

While the entirety of Heathcliff’s adolescent period is covered in only a couple chapters of *Wuthering Heights*, the Heathcliffs of *MTV’s Wuthering Heights*, *Catherine*, and Lifetime’s *Wuthering High School* are all in their late teens for most of the two films and novel. They are introduced in the same manner as their predecessor, however: as outsiders of mysterious background. The characters standing in for Hindley also retain his role as the primary antagonist. Heath is first seen in *Wuthering High School* spray-painting “I quit” onto the bathroom mirror of his employer. He appears to be in his late teens and of Hispanic origin. The camera follows his movements in close-up so that his large neck scar and multiple arm tattoos are conspicuously visible. In the next scene, Heath watches from behind a row of bushes as a woman is getting deported back to Mexico. They make eye contact, thereby suggesting that the woman is his mother. She shakes her head at him subtly so that he, too, will not be caught by the deportation officers. The mother’s employer, Mr. Earnshaw, offers to take in the now homeless young man as his foster son until he can determine how to get his mother back from Mexico. Heath gets along well with Mr. Earnshaw, but he does not have the same luck with Mr. Earnshaw’s son, Lee. When they meet, Lee shows obvious distrust towards his

new housemate and directs racially-charged comments towards him (the Earnshaws are Caucasian). Heath sets up to strike Lee, but Mr. Earnshaw's daughter, Cathy, holds him back and admonishes her brother.

Hence, of April Lindner's novel *Catherine*, is a high-school dropout—also in his late teens—whom the eponymous protagonist meets for the first time when she finds him “camped out on [her] front stoop next to a guitar case and a big duffel bag” (Lindner 20). The stoop he is camped out on belongs to The Underground, a “legendary” music venue in Manhattan that Catherine's father, Jim Eversole, owns (20). Hence begrudgingly tells Catherine that he is there to look for work. At first Catherine intends to turn him away since so many young men have tried to “use” her to get to her famous father, but she hesitates after examining him more closely. He looks like he “hadn't eaten in days” (20) and like “he needed someone to be kind to him” (20). When Catherine speaks to him, he is defensive and “avert[s] his glance as though he'd been kicked hard by someone he trusted and didn't dare let his guard down” (28). Behind his aloofness, however, she senses a genuine passion for music, so she agrees to introduce him to her father, who ends up offering him a position and a place to live. Hence and Mr. Eversole bond over their shared interest in music performance. Their developing relationship quickly becomes a source of unrest between Hence and Mr. Eversole's son, Quentin, who is not musically inclined.

MTV's version is the only one to introduce the Heathcliff figure as a child. At the opening of the film, Earnshaw finds a young boy of about seven or eight taking cover behind some broken tree branches during a heavy rainstorm. Once he realizes the boy is not with an adult, Earnshaw takes him home to meet his son and daughter, Hendrix and

Cate. He tells them he has a surprise for them and pulls the foundling out of his truck. The boy gazes at the two other children without speaking, his hair and face visibly dirty. “That’s your surprise?” Hendrix scoffs through clenched teeth. Earnshaw tries to elicit sympathy in his son by explaining the boy was found abandoned. This only makes Hendrix sneer again. He compares the newcomer to “a stray dog.” Cate takes a liking to the boy, however, and gently asks his name. He hesitantly says it is Heath. She invites him inside their home and attempts to lift his spirits by showing him her favorite room, which features an elaborately painted ceiling that Mrs. Earnshaw was working on before she abandoned the family. Cate then takes Heath into her room to get some sleep. Instead of sleeping on the bed with her, though, Heath sits in a chair in the middle of the room and wordlessly pulls up his knees to his face as if he has been made to feel bad about taking up space before. While they try to fall asleep, Cate asks where he is from. He tells a story about a woman with long blonde hair who marries an Indian chief who can “stop time and ride on the wind.” Cate smiles and tells him it is a lovely story.

It is evident that the creative forces behind these works are trying to honor Brontë’s intentions when it comes to the source of their protagonists’ attitudes and behaviors, for—like Brontë does with Heathcliff—all three establish early on that these young men act the way they do because they are the victims of human or systemic mistreatment. The Catherine characters are also shown as understanding this connection. Initially, their response to this knowledge is one of compassion and friendship. Cathy Earnshaw rebukes her brother when he makes inflammatory comments about their guest, even though the guest is the one who almost becomes violent. Catherine Eversole invites a stranger to live with her family and helps him get a job because she can see he has lived a life of neglect

and abuse. Cate Earnshaw shows a homeless boy hospitality and does not cast judgment when he invents stories about his past. Viewers and readers are led to share this consideration as the plots unfold and the young men start to exhibit other “problematic” behaviors, just like readers are encouraged to do when reading Brontë’s novel. However, an ideological shift soon occurs in all three works that contradicts Brontë’s cautionary depiction of Heathcliff’s experiences, where viewers and readers are expected to see the male protagonists’ behaviors as their most attractive qualities, instead of their most pitiable.

There is an occurrence in *Catherine*, for example, in which the protagonist is sexually assaulted by a patron in her father’s club. Hence overhears her struggle with “the rapist” (63) and arrives with a crowbar, which he uses to threaten the assailant’s life (63).

Catherine notes that “his voice and face were so full of rage they scared me” (64). After the perpetrator flees, Hence tells Catherine that “if he’d hurt you, I’d have killed him” (64). She is surprised by his words and describes the change in character and appearance that had come over him:

Hence’s voice was quiet, with an edge to it I’d never heard before. His dark eyes had iced over, and I realized with a shock that he meant it literally. If things had gone any further, Hence would have willingly killed my assailant [...] Later, when the shock wore off, I would tell myself I must have imagined Hence’s rage. Quiet, solemn Hence couldn’t be capable of real violence. (65)

Yet, he is capable, as are the Heathcliff characters in *MTV’s Wuthering Heights* and *Lifetime’s Wuthering High School*. They, too, are provoked to aggression when they believe their partners’ honor has been violated. In these cases, the offenders are Hendrix

and Lee, the brothers of the Cate and Cathy, respectively. Hendrix and Lee make repeated unsolicited commentary about their sisters' sexual histories, because they know that this will get a strong emotional response from their sisters' partners. Both brothers find success at least once. Heath from *Wuthering High School* strikes Lee in the face when Lee jokes about Cathy "sleeping with the help." Similarly, Heath from *MTV's Wuthering Heights* knocks Hendrix unconscious after Hendrix jokes about some buddies of his "who'd kill for a taste of Cate."

These three males react to these events in a similar manner to how Brontë's Heathcliff reacts when a servant carries Catherine into the Lintons' home after she is injured by the family's dog. Their servant tries to help Catherine, but Heathcliff assumes his motives are malevolent and as a result makes pledges of retribution (39). While his disproportionate response to Catherine's predicament is drawn in a slightly comical manner, it still nonetheless has tragic undertones. As in other instances where he acts violently or has the intention to do so, Heathcliff's behavior here points to his own status as a victim of violence (Paris 102; Ward 55). In the two films, however, there are further implications that when Heathcliff commits violence on the female protagonist's behalf, his actions are admirable—even if they are the result of past abuse—for they underscore his devotion to his partner and reflect his capabilities as a defender of her interests. "Don't let nobody push you around," Heath urges Cathy after he has frightened her brother away. "Nobody!" Cathy smiles at his words, and the audience is expected to do the same. These same expectations are embedded in *Catherine*. After reflecting on Hince's outburst, Catherine feels confident that he "would do anything to protect me" (65) and becomes sexually attracted to him (65). The unintended consequence of this idealization, however,

is that the severity of the trauma these young men once experienced gets obscured. Moreover, the cause-and-effect relationship between trauma and antisocial behavior that both Brontë's novel and these three contemporary works delineate becomes more difficult to discern.

The three Heathcliffs display other antisocial traits that also get romanticized, and the outcomes are the same. Take, for instance, Heath's strong aversion to education in *Wuthering High School*. While living with the Earnshaw family, Heath asks Mr. Earnshaw if he can have a job at the Earnshaw family business, but Mr. Earnshaw insists the young man attend the local high school with his children instead. This decision leaves Heath unhappy and restless. He argues with the teachers, vandalizes school property, and cuts class. Cathy is drawn to his rebellion, viewing it as an exciting deviation from what she considers to be a monotonous existence. Soon into their relationship, she begins joining him in these same behaviors. Near the middle of the film there is a scene that takes place "in" a health class where Heath and Cathy are reprimanded by the teacher for talking. The teacher discovers that Cathy has been drawing caricatures of his lectures in her textbook. To distract the teacher, Heath starts tearing pages out of his own textbook. Cathy gleefully joins him, as does the rest of the class. A slow-motion sequence commences where the students are standing on their desks with the pages of the books flying into the air and raining down on them. When the teacher leaves the room for assistance, Heath and Cathy run out of the room and leave school for the rest of the day. In a voiceover she says, "I wished I could keep Heath in a bubble away from the others. He's so real to me. So much more than anyone else."

Brontë's Heathcliff also displays a complicated relationship with structured learning. Nelly claims that when she first makes Heathcliff's acquaintance he was "as good as dumb... repeat[ing] over and over again some gibberish that nobody could understand" (29), despite being "big enough both to walk and talk" (29). Paris remarks that there has been something in his past that has led him "to have lost, or never fully acquired, the art of communication" (103). And Mr. Earnshaw, despite his fondness for Heathcliff, does little to remedy these initial deficiencies as Heathcliff grows older. The small amount of instruction he does receive is inconsistent and usually religious in nature. When Mr. Earnshaw dies, Hindley works actively to keep Heathcliff in this depraved state, forcing him into hard, unpaid labor instead of getting him a tutor or sending him to school (36). Nelly describes in detail the debilitating effect this has had on Heathcliff by the time he is sixteen:

In the first place, he had, by that time, lost the benefit of his early education: continual hard work, begun soon and concluded late, had extinguished any curiosity he once possessed in pursuit of knowledge, and any love for books or learning. His childhood's sense of superiority, instilled in him by the favours of old Mr. Earnshaw, was faded away. He struggled to keep up an equality with Catherine in her studies and yielded with poignant though silent regret: but he yielded completely; and there was no prevailing on him to take a step in the way of moving upward...(53)

In other words, Nelly believes Heathcliff has developed an apathy towards learning and self-improvement as the result of being denied educational opportunities as a child and adolescent.

A lack of opportunities is also shown as being an issue for Heath in *Wuthering High School*. The film visually suggests in certain scenes that Heath has had to work for most of his life to support himself and his single mother. It is revealed that he makes money through petty theft and by working low-skill jobs. The film opens with him angrily quitting one of these jobs, so it can be assumed that his undocumented status makes him an easy target for exploitation by his employers. Because of these experiences, he sees no practical use for school, where he not only misses out on money-making opportunities, but trails behind his peers academically. His experience is not purely fictional speculation. California, where the film is set, is currently home to more undocumented youths than any other state (UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education). Someone in Heath's position would be at a severe disadvantage when it comes to being able to complete secondary schooling or find legal employment. Although the filmmakers took special care to acknowledge this aspect of Heath's background, *Wuthering High School* still ultimately holds up his rejection of school as an indicator of authenticity and personal liberty.

The portrait Brontë draws of Heathcliff's neglected education, on the other hand, is decidedly grimmer. Because his schooling was ignored, Heathcliff possesses neither employable skills nor the desire to acquire them, making it difficult for him escape the abusive environment at Wuthering Heights. Ward believes that Heathcliff's lack of mobility showcases the vulnerable position of orphans and illegitimate children in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century (52). At the time, compulsory primary education was not legally mandated (Thormählen 11). Many middle and upper-class families provided tutors for their children or sent them to privately-funded schools, but neither



social mores nor the law dictated the same be done for a child in Heathcliff's position (Walvin 112; Ward 54). Ward further explains how there was a trend in contemporary literature throughout the nineteenth century to feature a "commercially-attuned orphan who overcame the disadvantages of unfortunate birth to make his fortune" (61), but he thinks Brontë is showing an alternative—and more realistic—outcome of what would happen to someone who is deprived of self-improvement opportunities (61).

Ward makes an excellent point. Heathcliff *is* eventually able to "make his fortune" like so many other fictional orphans; however, the high level of skill he displays at cards (Brontë 78) and his refusal to disclose how he acquired his wealth (229) suggest he had to earn his fortune through illegal or dishonorable means and not the plucky self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship displayed by other fictional orphans. Furthermore, because Heathcliff experienced such severe trauma, his only desire is to use his wealth to bring pain to others. It is notable that one of the ways Heathcliff gets revenge on Hindley is by refusing to teach his son Hareton how to read and write when the boy becomes Heathcliff's responsibility upon Hindley's death (Brontë 152; Hancock 62; Langland 299). He also destroys all of the younger Catherine's books when she is his prisoner (Brontë 229). Both incidents intimate that Heathcliff is cognizant of how his own life has been impacted by illiteracy and that he has found it at least as debilitating as the physical abuse he experienced, and it confidentially concluded that "there is nothing romantic about [his] illegitimacy or its consequences" (Ward 54).

Heathcliff's hostile reticence is also set apart in recent young adult versions as being highly desirable, particularly in *Catherine*. "I knew he must have stories to tell about the past he was fleeing" (28), the protagonist discloses to the readers soon after meeting

Hence. “I’ve always liked mysteries, and now one had landed on my doorstep, just begging to be solved” (28). Yet, even after he has lived a few weeks with the Eversoles, she “still hadn’t begun to unravel the mystery” (37) because Hence still barely speaks to anyone; he just works hard at her father’s business (37). Catherine admits to her best friend Jackie that his silence only makes him more intriguing (39). Jackie is concerned about her friend’s growing infatuation with someone they know nothing about, so she tries to get some background information out of Hence. He scowls and mutters, ““No place you’ve heard of”” (42). Then says he leaves without further explanation (42). Catherine remains undeterred, wondering “how could I break past that guardedness...and what would I find when I got there?” (52) However, even when Catherine and Hence eventually become romantically involved, she still does not discover anything new about his past. If she asks, Hence moodily shakes his head and says nothing. She writes in her journal, “All I could piece together from his stories was that he hadn’t had a lot of money, and that music had meant more to him than school, or his friends, or even his family” (100). She decides she is ultimately not bothered by this, though, for “the silences that sometimes fell between us never felt uncomfortable” (102).

In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff is described in similar terms by multiple characters throughout the novel. As was formerly noted, Heathcliff usually remains silent when being hurt or taunted by the other children in his home. Nelly also recalls another childhood episode when she cared for a sick Heathcliff, who “was the quietest child that ever nursed watched over” (31). Three years later, the twelve-year-old Catherine is disappointed to find Heathcliff so “grim” (42) and “sulky” (42) upon her return from a long stay at the Lintons’. And Lockwood’s first impression of the adult Heathcliff is that

he is “exaggeratedly reserved” (3), “morose” (5), and “avers[e] to showy displays of feeling” (5). Banerjee theorizes that Heathcliff’s “absence of feeling” (20) in passages like these “might be recognized as a self-defensive ploy, symptomatic of vulnerability” (20). Dworkin and Paris make similar assessments, with Dworkin writing that Heathcliff has “learn[ed] to take refuge in a numb orthodox dominance, insular, hermetically sealed against vulnerability and invasion” (74) and Paris postulating that Heathcliff utilizes “extreme forms of withdrawal” (105) in order to “remove him[self] from the power of other people” (105). This shared interpretation is supported by observations Nelly makes in the text. She clarifies that it was “hardness, not gentleness, [that] made him give little trouble” (31) when being abused as a child, and she says it is “pride” (42) that keeps Heathcliff speechless when Catherine tries to greet her friend after she has been away from him for many weeks (42). Then, when he becomes an adult, Nelly notes that his “reserve...served to repress all startling demonstrations of feeling” (79).

Some critics have postulated that Heathcliff’s fear of showing vulnerability has developed due to his isolated position in the household and a lack of experiencing stable, positive relationships, especially with adults (Banerjee 19; Morris 164; Paris 105; Burgan 400). When comparing how child abuse is handled in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, Morris astutely notes that “Heathcliff has no significant supportive figure he can relate to, as Miss Temple was for Jane Eyre” (164). Hence’s emotional inhibition in *Catherine* also points to a lack of trust in others due to adverse early life experiences. Where the presentation of Hence’s experience differs from Heathcliff’s is that *Catherine* also paradoxically frames his silence as an indicator of self-control and generosity. The primary reason Hence does not discuss his painful past with his partner is not because of

the discomfort this would cause him, but because of the emotional burden it might place on her. Catherine finds his “sacrifice” appealing; yet, in doing so, she undervalues the importance for victims of abuse to vent their histories as part of the healing process (Banerjee 19). Brontë exposes the costs of this emotional “sealing” (74), as Dworkin labels it, through the evolution of Heathcliff’s personality. Morris observes that he begins as a quiet, uncomplaining child and end ups “a bitter, violent, [and] truly psychopathic man” (162) who articulates the pain he feels by passing it on to others instead of seeking counsel or building new, healthy relationships.

Heathcliff does have one significant relationship, and that is the friendship he shares with Catherine. Once Catherine gets over her anger that her father brought home a foundling instead of the gift he promised her, Catherine and Heathcliff quickly become “very thick” (30). They comfort one another when Mr. Earnshaw dies, with both children vowing that they would “grow up as rude as savages” (35) while in Hindley’s care (35-6). If the threat of maltreatment looms over them—which it does often—they find courage by mocking it together:

...[I]t 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. The curate might set as many chapters as he pleased for Catherine to get by heart, and Joseph might thrash Heathcliff til his arm ached; they forgot everything the minute they were together again... (37)

Nelly muses on the fact that “[t]he greatest punishment we could invent for [Catherine] was to keep her separate from Heathcliff” (33), and she was willing to get “chided more than any of us on his account” (33). And Heathcliff is equally devoted to her. “[H]er

pretended insolence” (34), Nelly remembers, “had more power over Heathcliff than [Mr. Earnshaw’s] kindness...[T]he boy would do her bidding, and his only when it suited his own inclination” (34). He also believes her superior to everyone he knows, including himself. When he recounts how Catherine behaved during the ordeal with the Lintons’ dog, he makes multiple comments about how much more brave, athletic, level-headed, intelligent, and attractive Catherine is than himself and the Linton children (38-41).

Out of the three young adult retellings of *Wuthering Heights*, MTV’s version comes closest to recreating Heathcliff and Catherine’s insulated bond. Heath first develops an intense emotional attachment to Cate when she shows compassion to him at their first meeting. As the opening credits are displayed, there is a montage of the two children doing things together, with both getting progressively older to imply the passage of time. This sequence, which is only about a minute in length, ends when they are in their late teens. While we are only given brief glimpses of what transpired before adolescence, we can still draw conclusions about the nature of their childhood relationship. For example, because no one else makes an appearance during the sequence besides Heath and Cate, it can be assumed that, like the first Heathcliff and Catherine, they have never had any other friends besides one another and that they prefer each other’s company to that of anyone in the family. Banerjee explains that it is common for siblings in “adverse family circumstances” (20) to form deep and exclusive bonds with one another, and she believes Brontë was mindful of this connection (20). Paris also cites adversity as the source of Heathcliff and Catherine’s alliance:

Heathcliff’s needs for love, warmth, and companionship have been repressed because it has seemed impossible that they would ever be satisfied. They emerge,

however, in the presence of Cathy, and he becomes completely dependent upon her. She is his first and only friend, his sole companion, the only person to whom he risks exposing himself emotionally... They compensate for being outcasts by belonging to each other... Whereas each would feel helpless alone, together they have a feeling of solidarity... (106).

Although Banerjee and Paris are referring to Brontë's novel, their insight also applies to *MTV's Wuthering Heights*, in which an intimate attachment develops between two foster siblings as a result of their shared experiences of abandonment.

Banerjee further clarifies, however, that while these types of relationships might be comforting to the individuals in them, they "may be too symbiotic to allow for ultimately healthy individuation" (20). Paris makes a similar diagnosis:

Cathy and Heathcliff are embattled children who become ontologically dependent upon one another and who find in their alliance a mutual support that gives meaning to their lives, and that saves them from feeling alone in the world. They become embedded in this relationship, as in a womb, and are unable to grow beyond it or to feel themselves whole beings with separate identities. (109)

Paris believes that after Heathcliff and Catherine come together, the rest of the novel "explores what happens when people who are so bound to each other are torn apart" (109). In both works, this separation begins when Catherine and Cate show interest in exploring possibilities outside of their primary relationships. The novel and film are very different, however, in how much they endorse these desires. Fifteen minutes into *MTV's Wuthering Heights*, Cate and Heath overhear Hendrix venting his frustration over having to help his father with home renovations instead of being able to go to a concert. After

Hendrix angrily leaves in his car, Cate whispers to Heath, “I know how he feels— we’ve never been anywhere else.” Heath scowls and mutters, “Yeah, well I’ve been somewhere else and trust me, it’s better here.” Cate rolls her eyes, but her tone stays friendly. “That’s what I’ve heard my whole life....” she trails off for a second before continuing.

“Earnshaw has this philosophy that everything you’ll ever need will just come to you.”

Heath grabs hold of her hand as she looks towards the ocean. “I came to you,” he says.

She laughs and retorts, “Oh wow! And what if I want to go somewhere else?” Heath shakes his head. “I won’t let you.” She gives him a friendly shoulder jab in response.

“Wrong answer, buddy.” He looks into her eyes to show he is earnest. “I’m serious, Cate,” he pleads. “You have this place here where you belong. And I never had that. Don’t take it for granted.” The scene ends with them kissing.

Heath again reminds us that his isolation has been forced upon him by unfortunate circumstances outside his control. Nevertheless, he finds satisfaction in this isolation because he shares it with Cate, with whom he believes he has an otherworldly bond that can not be supplanted by any other person or experience. Although Cate playfully disagrees, their kiss at the end of the scene ultimately signifies her agreement. In Brontë’s novel, Heathcliff also wants to be Catherine’s only significant relationship, a desire that Catherine initially meets. He is kind and deferential to his companion as long as she remains fully his (Paris 107). When the Linton siblings threaten that position, he becomes critical and domineering towards her. Unlike Cate, Catherine resents Heathcliff’s attempts to control her, especially because she tries to maintain their friendship with him amidst the development of her new ones. The best illustration of the change that occurs in their relationship appears in a scene from Chapter VIII, during which Heathcliff decides

he wants to spend time with Catherine after discovering that Hindley will be away from home for the day. When he finds her, he notices that she is wearing one of her best garments, which he hopes does not signify that she is expecting visitors (54). It is true that she has invited Edgar over for the afternoon since her brother is not home; however, the tone in which Heathcliff inquires after her plans agitates Catherine, so at first she denies anyone is coming (54). She also asks Heathcliff to leave the room, but he refuses (54). After a quick moment of contemplation, she finally admits that she expects Edgar and his sister, Isabella. Since Hindley will be angry if he finds out that Heathcliff and Edgar have been in the same room, she once again asks Heathcliff to leave, this time for his own safety as well as her privacy (54).

Heathcliff is not appeased. He angrily demands that Catherine tell the Lintons she cannot visit with them and begs not to be “turn[ed]...out for those pitiful, silly friends of yours” (54). He then points to an almanac hanging on the wall on which he has been keeping track of all the days she has spent with the Lintons and all the days she has spent with him (54). He asks if she has noticed that there are more marks for the Lintons. Catherine irritably informs him that she *has* noticed, and she thinks his project is ““very foolish”” (54). She then asks if she ““should...always be sitting with you?”” (54). Indignant, Heathcliff storms out of the room (54). Heathcliff and Catherine’s exchange here ends on a drastically different note than that shared between Heath and Cate. Where *MTV’s Wuthering Heights* attributes Heath’s dependence on Cate to a stroke of luck or fate, Brontë shows that having to depend on a single individual to meet all of your emotional needs can have a much more devastating outcome. Because Catherine “saves [Heathcliff] from deep feelings of unlovableness and self-contempt” (Paris 108), the



possibility that he might lose her causes him a considerable amount of emotional anguish; he feels as if his very identity is rupturing (108). Catherine gives no indication that she means to end the friendship, but Heathcliff's insecurity prevents him from grasping this (108). Her response to Heathcliff's wall-markings *is* delivered coldly; however, her query of whether she should always be sitting with him—and only him—is a fair one. The lingering tragedy of this scene is not that Catherine wants to spend time with other people, but that Heathcliff does not have the chance to do the same. Brontë understood this much more clearly than today's filmmakers.

## CHAPTER IV

### CATHERINE DECIDES

While Cate, Cathy, and Catherine initially display attraction to the male protagonists, there is a point where the young women begin to question how safe they are around their partners. Near the middle of *MTV's Wuthering Heights*, Hendrix and Heath get into a disagreement over Earnshaw's will. As the argument escalates, Heath becomes so angry that he strikes Hendrix repeatedly. When Cate, who is present, sees that Heath's blows are producing blood, she calls him "an animal" and then hits him with a shovel in hopes that this might put an end to the altercation. The emotionally and physically wounded Heath disappears for several scenes. After a long search, Cate is unable to find her partner and brother, so she is offered shelter by the nearby Linton family until she can sort out her domestic issues. Heath shows up at their home several days later, and Cate is ecstatic to see that he is safe—that is, she is until he loudly and angrily informs her that she belongs to him and demands that she leave at once. She refuses. She runs into a spare bedroom where she is followed by Isabella Linton. Cate proceeds to vent her frustrations about her relationship with Heath when she sees Isabella. "All this time," she says tearfully, "I thought—I thought about seeing him again, and he walks in...and he leaps into my throat. I can't breathe." She pauses to catch up on her breathing, and then she

continues. “I’m afraid. I’m afraid of us. I’m afraid of what happens to us when we’re together. I don’t—I don’t want his love anymore. I don’t...” she trails off. “I don’t...”

The protagonists of *Catherine* and *Wuthering High School* face a similar choice when they are forced to examine the pitfalls of their romantic relationships. Catherine Eversole tells her friend Jackie that she has been accepted to Harvard, which is her dream college, but she is terrified of telling her boyfriend Hence about the news (223). She loves him, but saying yes will mean having to move to another state, which she fears could trigger Hence’s anger since he does not have any other family or friends besides her (206; 219). “He’s going to be so mad at me when I tell him about Harvard” (224), she explains anxiously. “You haven’t seen him when he gets like that” (224). Still, she wants to attend. Jackie asks her friend if Hence is “as supportive of your dreams as you are of his” (225), and Catherine sadly admits he is not (225). In *Wuthering High School*, Cathy Earnshaw must also decide if she wants to continue a relationship with her boyfriend, who she has slowly realized harbors aggressive and possessive tendencies. She still loves him, though, and so she offers to help him resolve these issues and encourages him to attend school more regularly. Her efforts are to no avail. When the principal threatens to suspend Heath, Cathy is only able to save him by offering that he and she volunteer at an upcoming school dance. While at this event, she witnesses Heath physically assault a teacher who has asked him to leave for disorderly conduct. She is devastated and tells her friend Ellen in a school bathroom that she “can’t take this anymore,” and that she “can’t deal with him.”

The individuals who are with the Catherine character during this moment offer their counsel. Their unanimous advice is that the distraught young woman should discontinue

the relationship. Isabella Linton says to Cate, “He’ll always have a piece of your heart, but there’s a time for the childhood sweetheart thing to be over.” Jackie advises that if Hence cannot support Catherine’s goals, and she is ““afraid to tell him a simple thing like where you’re going to college”” (225), then they should not be together any longer (225). In *Wuthering High School*, Ellen does not tell Cathy outright what to do, but she does ask her friend a series of rhetorical questions to help her see that Heath might not be an ideal match for her. At first, it seems that the Catherine’s are going to agree with their confidantes, but they all suddenly change positions. Cate explains, “I don’t want [Heath’s love], but I need it. I can’t seem to live without him. We’re the same person. I...I am Heath.” Meanwhile, Catherine admits to Jackie that

Hence can be...unpredictable. But I could never break up with him. There should be a word for something that’s beyond love, something this strong...[i]t’s like my heart is made out of Silly Putty and he can stretch it all out of shape just by saying my name... (225)

Finally, after lamenting to her friend about how about much emotional pain Heath causes her, Cathy realizes that she “can’t stop with [him]. I hate it, but I can’t stop. I love him. We have the same soul.”

The concluding statements of the three young women are undoubtedly inspired by Catherine’s famous “I am Heathcliff” speech from Chapter IX in *Wuthering Heights*. In this stirring monologue, Catherine makes a series of observations to Nelly about the nature of her relationship with Heathcliff:

I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be, an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation if

I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in the world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my greatest thought in living is himself. 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 should not seem a part of it...my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but, as my own being ... (Bronte 63-4)

Catherine refers repeatedly to the type of metaphysical love that the three derivative works idealize, particularly when she muses that “surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be, an existence of yours beyond you” (63) and when she describes Heathcliff as “more myself than I am” (63). Hila Shachar and Patsy Stoneman believe that this passage reflects the strong influence that Romantic literature and ideology had on Brontë's writing, with Shachar contending that it points to “the transcendence of [one's] own body and existence” (34) and Stoneman identifying the Shelleyan concept of “twin souls” (122). All four scenes feature at least some variation on these Romantic elements; however, there is a key contextual difference between how they are implemented in Brontë's novel and in the contemporary versions. Unlike in the derivative versions, Catherine's “I am Heathcliff” speech in *Wuthering Heights* is not prompted when she decides she wants to be romantically linked with Heathcliff; it is prompted when she realizes she *cannot* be.

Analyzing the text that appears before this passage will help make it clear why Catherine comes to the conclusion that she cannot marry Heathcliff in the same paragraph that she avows her eternal devotion to him. Near the beginning of the chapter in which her pronouncement appears, Catherine informs Nelly that Edgar Linton has just proposed to her, and she wants Nelly's advice regarding the matter. Nelly is highly skeptical of the match because she is not convinced that Catherine loves Edgar, which Nelly believes to be the most important prerequisite for a happy marriage (61). Catherine insists that "of course" (61) she loves Edgar, but Nelly is still not convinced and asks her a series of questions to prove her love (61). Wishing to put an end to this inquisition, Catherine exclaims that it is because, "he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband" (61). Nelly calls this reason "worst of all" (62). She points out how there is no need to marry Edgar if she does not love him, for surely "there are several other handsome, rich young men in the world...What should hinder you from loving them?" (61) Catherine readily concedes to the truth of this statement, but points out that "if there be any [such men], they are out of my way" (62). Nelly suggests that perhaps Catherine might still have the opportunity to meet different men and perhaps Edgar "won't always be handsome, and young, and may not always be rich" (62). Catherine retorts sharply that she "[has] only to do with the present" (62), and therefore she wishes her servant would "speak rationally" (62) about the matter (62). Besides, she has already decided that she "shall marry him" (62), no matter what Nelly advises (62).

Nelly is left confused by this exchange: if Catherine has made up her mind, "where is the obstacle?" (62). Catherine places a hand on her head and a hand on her heart. "Here!

and here!...In whichever place the soul lives—in my soul, and in my heart, I’m convinced I’m wrong!” (62) Nelly calls her reaction ““very strange”” (63), so Catherine attempts to explain herself. She describes a dream she once had where she went to heaven but was cast out by angels because she would not stop crying ““to come back to earth”” (63). They ““flung [her] out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where [she] woke sobbing for joy”” (63). This dream, she tells Nelly, ought to be enough to defend her decision (63). She knows she has

no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn’t have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him; and that, not because he’s handsome, Nelly, but because he’s more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire. (63)

Shachar notes that while these passages do show that Catherine is in “debt to Romantic notions of love, it is important to keep in mind that they are only her sentiments” (33) and are not reflected by her current reality (33-4). And her current reality is not one that is particularly accommodating to Romantic ideals. Thus, Shachar thinks that Brontë does not use this scene to promote these ideals—like *Wuthering High School*, *MTV’s Wuthering Heights*, and *Catherine* do—but rather to present their limitations (Shachar 33; 35; 130).

Catherine’s impulse to deal only with the present, for example, coupled with her sober behest that Nelly ““speak rationally”” about her marriage to Edgar, reveals that she views love—one could say in any form—as something she cannot “afford” to pursue. She may

allude to obtaining a separate reality beyond herself, but there are immediate and legitimate reasons she can not do so (Shachar 35). One of these reasons is that she needs to be provided for financially. Nelly is highly critical of Catherine's decision to marry Edgar for his wealth, but as Beth Newman explains, Catherine actually has a very "reasonable fear of being reduced to poverty" (40). Like Heathcliff, she is ineligible for an inheritance (Lenta 64; Ward 291). It would also have been nearly impossible for a woman in her position to find gainful employment because work was usually limited to women with lower social standing (Langland 303; Walvin 108). For the few jobs that were available to someone like her, Catherine would have needed an education, but her family has been negligent in providing her with a consistent one (Langland 303).

She might also, in theory, remain living at home under the care of Hindley, who is her legal guardian. In fact, this arrangement is her most attractive option because she loves *Wuthering Heights* so much that she professes she prefers it to heaven. However, while Catherine clearly still has strong emotional attachments to her home, these are rooted in past joys; in the present, home as she knows it "has become a prison of domestic abuse" (Shachar 21) where she knows she cannot safely remain. Thus, if she is to achieve the security she craves, she is left with only one other alternative: marriage (Wakefield 120). Unfortunately, due to her seclusion and the fact that she "has no mother or other dutiful family member to make the necessary social connections" (Newman 40), her opportunities are restricted in this category as well. Shachar astutely comments about how Lockwood, a "sophisticated" Victorian man, romanticizes *Wuthering Heights* for its rough, unrestrained landscape and for its isolation from society, when for Catherine these things are a source of constraint (35). Shachar believes that the novel illuminates how



men like Lockwood could “interact with [their] material world in a manner that [was] impossible for [Catherine] as a middle-class woman...[who] can only move from one household to another, and is financially dependent on these households” (35).

Catherine’s only options for marriage partners, then, are Edgar Linton and Heathcliff. Catherine tells Nelly that when she considered Heathcliff as a potential suitor, she ultimately concluded this would be impossible because marrying him would ““degrade”” (Brontë 64) her and make them both ““beggars”” (64). She explains that this is because Heathcliff has been ““brought low”” (63) by ““the wicked man in there”” (64). Catherine’s phrasing is often read as having solely economic implications since Heathcliff is poor and of a lower social standing than Edgar. Thus, some critics have been harsh towards Catherine’s rejection of Heathcliff for this reason, deeming it to be a superficial act of self-betrayal. Terry Eagleton, for example, contends that she “trades her authentic selfhood for social privilege” (101), while Margaret Lenta argues that “most readers sympathize with and agree that marriage with [Heathcliff], whatever its social disadvantages, would have been a better thing for Catherine than the alliance she eventually makes with Edgar Linton” (69). Although they are correct that financial security is indeed a factor in Catherine’s decision not to marry Heathcliff, it is important to note that when she says “brought low” she is also making a reference to his current “deteriorated” mental state (Thormählen 74). In other words, because of the abuse he has experienced at the hands of Hindley, Heathcliff has himself become dangerous, unpredictable, and controlling. Thus, Catherine does not see her rejection of him as an act of self-betrayal, as Eagleton and Lenta maintain, but of self-preservation.

In “‘This Shattered Prison’: Confinement, Control, and Gender in *Wuthering*

*Heights*,” Jamie S. Crouse further elucidates how Catherine came to this conclusion:

Heathcliff’s attempt to control [Catherine] pushes her out of an equal relationship, establishing an emotional barrier between them that positions him in hierarchy over her...The control that Heathcliff yields over Catherine pushes her into an engagement and subsequent marriage to Edgar, whom she knows she does not really love. Her famous speech to Nelly revealing her engagement to Edgar contains many clues to understanding Catherine’s diminishing sense of control and her attempts to regain that control. (184)

Burgan similarly contends that Cathy resents Heathcliff’s requirement for “total loyalty” from her, and therefore “[her] choice of Edgar Linton as her husband must also be read as an act of lacerating self-preservation against Heathcliff’s need to become the sole justification for her existence” (401). If Crouse and Burgan’s analyses are correct, then Catherine’s decision process is vastly different than that shared by the protagonists of the young adult version. In their stories, it is shown that if an individual is possessive of his partner, even if it is to the point of violence, it is merely an indicator of his high level of devotion to the partner. It is also implied that if a young woman is the only significant relationship in her partner’s life, then she is entirely responsible for his emotional well-being. The three young women do recognize the potential danger of staying with their partners; however, they ultimately determine that if a “soul mate” bond is present between two individuals, the maintenance of that bond should be given priority over all other considerations, including compatibility, safety, and autonomy.

It seems that Brontë anticipated that some readers would hold these views, for Nelly provides the same rationale when she realizes Heathcliff might be left alone if Catherine

married Edgar. She tells Catherine, “As soon as you become Mrs. Linton, he loses friend, and love, and all! Have you considered how you’ll bear the separation, and how he’ll be quite deserted in the world?” (64). To Nelly’s surprise, Catherine *has* considered it. Even if she can not marry Heathcliff, she explains, she still plans to maintain their friendship and to provide for him financially with Edgar’s wealth:

Every Linton on the face of the earth might melt into nothing before I could consent to forsake Heathcliff...He’ll be as much to me as he has been all his lifetime...Nelly, I see now you think me a selfish wretch, but, did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? Whereas, if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother’s power. (64)

Nelly protests that this plan is not just misguided, but “the worse motive you’ve given yet for being the wife of young Linton” (64). While it is certainly naïve on Catherine’s part to assume this arrangement will not cause any interpersonal complications among the three parties involved, her strategy once again reminds us of her lack of options. It also indicates she is aware of how vulnerable Heathcliff is and that she is just as protective of his interests as she was when they were children. As she so famously emphasizes, she could never abandon Heathcliff because “[H]e’s always, always, in my mind” (64). However, unlike the decision scenes in *MTV’s Wuthering Heights*, *Wuthering High School*, and *Catherine*, Brontë does not give the impression that Catherine’s compassion for Heathcliff must come at the expense of her own security and identity (Burgan 395).

It could be argued that Catherine’s language is too vague in this instance to draw the firm conclusion that she perceives Heathcliff’s behavior as unsafe. After all, “brought low” can be interpreted in countless ways, and Catherine tells Nelly that if they were

married her greatest threat would be poverty, not Heathcliff. Placing her decision in context with her evolving attitude towards Heathcliff both leading up to and following her decision, however, shows that she has Heathcliff's personality in mind, even if she does not explicitly say so to Nelly. According to both Hancock and Burgan, during the first few years of their friendship, there is never any reason for Catherine to notice anything amiss about her companion's behavior because she is raised in a household where everyone, including herself, employs aggression and violence as a means of asserting power (Hancock 60-1; Burgan 398). This analysis is supported by Nelly's observations. At the very beginning of Nelly's narrative, Catherine responds to her disappointment over not getting a gift from her father by spitting in the face of the person she believes is responsible (30). Nelly also notes that "in play, [Catherine] liked, exceedingly, to act the little mistress; using her hands freely, and commanding her companions" (33) and "she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once" (34).

When Catherine meets the Lintons in late childhood, Burgan postulates that she is exposed to an alternative way of handling conflict (401). Catherine becomes especially impressed with Edgar, whom Nelly describes as having a "sweet, low manner of speaking" (Brontë 55). Her burgeoning friendship with both Edgar and his sister inspires her to further her education and improve her own manners (Brontë 52-3). As a result, Catherine begins to view Heathcliff differently. She marvels at how "black and cross" he seems after she has grown "used to Edgar and Isabella Linton" (42). Nelly is also convinced that "Catherine marked the difference between [Heathcliff and Edgar]...[t]he contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country, for a beautiful

fertile valley” (55). Later, when Catherine is going through the reasons she thinks Edgar might make a good husband, two of the reasons she lists are related to his disposition, namely that he is “pleasant to be with” (61) and “cheerful” (61).

Whether or not Catherine is actually attracted to Edgar when she accepts his proposal has been the subject of much debate, however. In “Re-Reading Edgar Linton and *Wuthering Heights*,” William Leung provides a history of the extensive amount of censure the “weak” (4) and “ineffectual” (4) Edgar has received from critics who have favored Heathcliff’s more authentic passion for Catherine and who believe Brontë favors it as well (8). This summary covers nearly a hundred and fifty years and takes up almost five single-spaced pages (4-7). Leung, however, believes Brontë’s portrayal of Edgar is more sympathetic than so many critics have allowed. One of his pieces of evidence is the preface Charlotte Brontë’s wrote for her sister’s novel in 1850, in which she makes the following claim:

...[F]or an example of constancy and tenderness, remark that of Edgar Linton.

Some people will think these qualities do not shine so well incarnate in a man as they would do in a woman, but Ellis Bell could never be brought to comprehend this notion: nothing moved her more than any insinuation that the faithfulness and clemency, the long-suffering and loving kindness which are esteemed virtues in the daughters of Eve, become foibles in the sons of Adam. (315)

Leung contends that “Charlotte’s peculiar wording...strongly supports the impression that she was privy to Emily’s belief and was paraphrasing Emily’s actual expression of the belief” (7). Those who believe Heathcliff would have made a better choice than Edgar

“are too prone to forget that the negative side of Heathcliff’s [passion] is violence, destruction, social chaos, and another kind of inhumanity” (13).

Additional confirmation of Heathcliff’s inadequacy as a marriage partner is provided after Catherine marries Edgar, when someone else expresses romantic interest in him. After Heathcliff returns from his three-year disappearance, Isabella Linton develops “a sudden and irresistible attraction towards [him]” (79). Since Isabella does not truly know anything about him and assumes that his moodiness reveals a capacity for deep feeling, Isabella is surprised when her wish to be near Heathcliff during a walk on the moors is met with a harsh rebuttal by Catherine. “It is impossible that you can covet the admiration of Heathcliff” (80), Catherine emphatically exclaims. “[And] that you can consider him an agreeable person!” (80). She hopes that she has merely “misunderstood” (80) her sister-in-law’s hopes and intentions, but Isabella remains adamant.

She even resentfully suggests that Catherine’s control over Heathcliff is the only thing standing in the way of him forming an attachment with anyone else (80). Seeing Isabella’s mind unchanged, Catherine insists she would not trade places with Isabella “for a kingdom” (80). She then itemizes all of the reasons that Isabella could never enjoy happy nuptials with Heathcliff:

...Heathcliff is...an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone. I’d soon put that little canary into the park on a winter’s day as recommend you to bestow your heart on him! It is deplorable ignorance of his character, child, and nothing else, which makes that dream enter your head. Pray don’t imagine that he conceals depths of

benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! He's not a rough diamond—a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic; he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man...[H]e'd crush you, like a sparrow's egg, Isabella, if he found you a troublesome charge... There's my picture; and I'm his friend—so much so, that had he thought seriously to catch you, I should perhaps, have held my tongue, and let you fall into his trap. (81)

Isabella is still incredulous and “certain” (81) that Catherine's warning is rooted in jealousy and not out of concern for her (81). Catherine tells Isabella that maybe she ought to “try for [her]self” (81), and she leaves the parlor, angry. Before this altercation appears in the novel, Catherine has not always acted kindly towards her sister-in-law, so Isabella's skepticism is understandable. Yet, there is a lot of evidence that Catherine speaks from firsthand experience and out of legitimate concern for her sister-in-law's safety. The speed and lucidity with which Catherine delivers her rebuke implies that she formed this view of Heathcliff before presenting it to Isabella, possibly even when *she* was considering him as a husband. If there is any doubt, Nelly confirms the veracity of what her mistress has said. While Catherine is listing Heathcliff's faults, Nelly observes to herself that “she seemed to speak sincerely” (80). Then, when Catherine is out of earshot and Isabella declares that surely she has “uttered falsehoods...Mr. Heathcliff is not a fiend; he has an honourable soul, and true one, or how could he remember her” (81), Nelly recommends that Isabella, “[b]anish him from [her] thoughts” (81). Heathcliff, she warns, is “a bird of bad omen; no mate for you. Mrs. Linton spoke strongly, and yet I can't contradict her. She is better acquainted with his heart than I, or any one besides; and she never would represent him as worse than he is” (81).

Even Heathcliff admits he would make a poor match for Isabella. After making Heathcliff aware of Isabella's affections, Catherine begs him not to "seize and devour [Isabella] up" (84) by marrying her. He gripes in response:

...I like her too ill to attempt it...except in a very ghoulish fashion. You'd hear of odd things, if I lived alone with that mawkish, waxen face; the most ordinary would be painting on its white the colours of the rainbow, and turning the blue eyes black, every day or two. (84)

While it at first Heathcliff is ready to dismiss the matter, he changes his mind once he realizes Isabella can be used as a pawn to get revenge on her brother Edgar. Nelly witnesses him "lapse into ominous musing" (84) during the days that followed his conversation with Catherine, comparing him to "an evil beast prowled...waiting [for] his time to spring and destroy" (85). Catherine becomes aware of his intentions, and she again begs him to stay away from Isabella. Giving away her sister-in-law as a spouse, Catherine tells her closest friend to his face, "is as bad as offering Satan a lost soul. Your bliss lies, like his, in inflicting miseries" (89).

After a short period of furtive courtship, though, Heathcliff succeeds in deceiving Isabella into marriage. Nelly learns through a letter from a now disillusioned Isabella that he began fulfilling his promise to subject her to abuse the day they were married (106). Concerned, Nelly visits Isabella at Wuthering Heights, where Heathcliff boasts about how easy it was to win her:

She abandoned [her former life] under a delusion...picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion. I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she



persisted in forming a fabulous notion of my character, and acting on the false impressions she cherished. But, at last, I think she begins to know me. (118)

As Dworkin, Ewbank, Oates, and Judith Pike have noticed, the way in which Heathcliff compares himself to “a hero of romance” in this passage is significant. Dworkin, Ewbank, and Oates contend that Brontë is making overt attempts to undermine our reading of Heathcliff as the “hero” of *Wuthering Heights* because she knew that certain readers, particularly young female readers fond of Romantic and Gothic literature, would be likely to overlook even his most violent behaviors on account of his zealous love for Catherine (Dworkin 82; Ewbank 28; Oates 443). Oates writes:

Heathcliff’s mockery makes us aware of our own bookish expectations of him, for he is defiantly *not* a hero...Brontë’s wit in this passage is supreme, for she allows her ‘hero’ to define himself in opposition to a gothic-romance stereotype she suspects her readers ([even] well into the twentieth-century) cherish... (443; emphasis original)

Oates goes on to argue that Brontë uses the teenage Isabella “to ridicule such readers” (443). Dworkin agrees, and further contends that Isabella herself represents the “bad reader” (82), based on the fact that she gets multiple glimpses of what Heathcliff is capable of, but she still pursues him (82). Dworkin defines the bad reader as someone who “romanticizes the sadist and reads the rapist, the abuser, the violent man, as a romantic hero” (82). Pike also believes Isabella’s experience underscores that “women can become victims of abuse due...to their naiveté and the blind inculcation of false notions of romance and marriage” (372).

After the female protagonists of *Catherine*, *MTV's Wuthering Heights*, and Lifetime's *Wuthering High* decide to stay with their partners, unexpected external circumstances end up keeping the two protagonists from being together. However, readers and viewers are still led to assume that the heroines would not have been in any danger had their relationship been allowed to continue uninterrupted. When Isabella makes this same assumption in *Wuthering Heights*, however, the clearly laid out consequence of her misconception is being trapped in an abusive relationship. While it cannot be said with absolute certainty that Catherine would have suffered the same fate had *she* married Heathcliff, Brontë provides ample proof leading up to, during, and following Catherine's decision that a marriage between them would probably not have had the ideal outcome that *Catherine*, *MTV's Wuthering Heights*, and Lifetime's *Wuthering High* hint at. As a psychologically wounded Isabella tells her husband in a rare moment of bravery, "[I]f poor Catherine had trusted you, and assumed the contemptible, degrading title of Mrs. Heathcliff, she would soon have presented a similar picture" (141).

It seems surprising that Lindner (*Catherine*), Williams (*Wuthering High*), and Enscoe and DeYoung (*MTV's Wuthering Heights*) would romanticize Heathcliff given not just Brontë's explicit warning against doing so, but also the fact that his cruelty towards women still carries contemporary resonance. While conditions for women in the context of marriage have certainly improved since Brontë's time—divorce laws lean much more strongly in favor of women than they did during Brontë's time, for example—intimate partner abuse still remains an issue for many women. It is especially prevalent among the target audience of these three works; according to a 2013 study completed by the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, women between the ages of sixteen

and twenty-four experience the highest rate of being physically, emotionally, and verbally abused by their partner (33). Moreover, almost three quarters of the women in this age group who reported being a victim of abuse said they would have left their partners earlier but, like Isabella, they had trouble determining if what they were experiencing constituted as actual abuse (Knowledge Networks 22). Since the female protagonists of the young adult retellings stay with their respective partners despite seeing multiple warning signs of their violent natures, it can be argued that the writers of their stories encourage and perpetuate the very “bad reading” *Wuthering Heights* cautions against and that, to this day, keeps so many young women from being able to avoid and leave dangerous relationships.

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