“Well, we must be for ourselves in the long run”: Selfishness and Sociality in Wuthering Heights

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Contemporary reviewers, tasked with appraising Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1847) when it first appeared under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, pronounced themselves at a loss. Expecting in the wake of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre (1847) to be swept up in an earnest Bildungsroman, they were instead shocked and confounded by a tale of unchecked primal passions, replete with savage cruelty and outright barbarism. Their bewilderment, however, did not prevent them from closing ranks around the question of what were (to their minds) the novel’s unmistakable moral lapses. At the epicenter of its moral rot, they identified the vice of selfishness. A reviewer for the Atlas branded Linton Heathcliff as “selfishness in its most abject form,” adding that “selfishness” besmirched even “the love of Heathcliff.” In the Examiner,
an anonymous critic wondered whether Heathcliff’s “implacable . . . selfishness” disqualified the protagonist as a hero, for, he continued, “the hardness, selfishness, and cruelty of Heathcliff are in our opinion inconsistent with the romantic love that he is stated to have felt for Catherine Earnshaw.”2 Sydney Dobell in the *Palladium* identified an “intrinsic genius” springing from the “sublime egotism” of the author, thereby anchoring the novel in selfishness even as he sought to vindicate it.3 At the close of the century, Mary Ward saw the Romantic Movement epitomized in “the violent, clashing egotisms of Heathcliff and Catherine.”4 Readers today may be disposed to dismiss these judgments as reactionary didacticism, but the consternation of nineteenth-century readers points to a critical problem that has hitherto gone underexamined: why is a novel concerned with passionate love for others populated by characters who are radically selfish?

The proposition that Heathcliff and Catherine’s relationship is riven with selfishness has itself been a contested claim. Many general readers have identified Heathcliff with the archetypal figure of the passionate, self-sacrificing lover, a view no doubt stoked by Laurence Olivier’s noble and magnanimous portrayal of Heathcliff in the classic 1939 film version of the novel. But the same assessment prevails among critics as well. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, identifies in *Wuthering Heights* the credo that “a person is most himself when he participates most completely in the life of something outside himself.”5 More recently Martha Nussbaum has linked Heathcliff’s “unguarded love” with “the roots of a truer altruism” that transcends “the petty egoism of the daily.”6 Implicit in this view, of course, is the

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stipulation that Heathcliff and Catherine are generous and self-effacing to each other, wreaking collateral damage on proximate parties. With that said, the original diagnosis of selfishness has never been fully extinguished. Muriel Spark and Derek Stanford deride Catherine’s attachment as “self-love carried to the extreme,” and Q. D. Leavis characterizes her “self-centred nature” as “essentially loveless.” Marianne Thormählen elaborates a fuller explanation behind their selfishness, arguing that Catherine is “pathologically egotistical” because of her long-standing insanity, and, further, that Heathcliff secures a Faustian pact to exact his selfish revenge.

All these critics unite behind the assumption that Brontë attaches a negative valence to selfishness, for they attribute the novel’s glut of death and destruction to the malignant effects of a self-love unrelieved by benevolence. But if selfishness is pathological, then an epidemic has swept the Yorkshire moors, for common among all the characters that populate Wuthering Heights is an innate propensity for selfishness. Heathcliff inveighs against Catherine’s “infernal selfishness”; Nelly sums up Heathcliff’s existence as “a selfish, unchristian life”; Nelly notes “how much selfishness there is even in a love like Mr. Linton’s”; Lockwood derides even dependable Zillah as “a narrow-minded selfish woman.” No impartial spectators emerge from the narrative matrix to transcend or renounce their own interests. Nelly insists on the universality of selfishness when she concedes, “Well, we must be for ourselves in the long run; the mild and generous are only more justly selfish than the domineering” (Wuthering Heights, p. 114). I believe that this passage is an ethical focal point, staking out a theory of just selfishness. In audacious dissent from Victorian incitements to self-sacrifice, Brontë

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insists that the cultivation of selfhood is an ethically sound imperative, and that the laudable development of self-respect requires, paradoxically, a discriminating permeability to the influence of others.

Brontë defies her contemporaries in spurning the morality of self-negation—that is, striving to smother all desire—as both misguided and mortifying. *Wuthering Heights* contains no model of self-capitulation on behalf of the collective good. Brontë boldly acknowledges and legitimates desire, without shame or deflection. But in validating selfish motives, she is forced to ponder under what conditions sociality is still possible. A core part of her project in *Wuthering Heights* is to grapple with the manifold ways in which an impermeable or narcissistic selfhood becomes vitiated without circulation and exchange within a social sphere. After a series of failures—represented in Lockwood’s shame-saturated retreat into childish sociality, Heathcliff and Catherine’s self-destroying soul fusion, and Linton Heathcliff’s masturbatory selfishness—Brontë finally locates a mutually enhancing compromise between selfhood and sociality in the relationship of Cathy and Hareton. By maintaining their respective boundaries of self and yet making them selectively permeable, the two demonstrate that susceptibility to interpersonal exchange proves vital to fostering their autonomy as discrete selves. *Wuthering Heights* thus wages battle on two fronts, excoriating the temptation to enclose the self behind impenetrable barriers, but simultaneously denouncing the other extreme that would eradicate all difference through metaphysical soul-fusion. Brontë posits instead that mature selfhood can only be yielded by a posture of openness to external influences, even as the coherence of the self must be fortified against appropriation by those influences.

11 I use the following terms to clarify distinctions implicit in Brontë’s analysis: *sociality* connotes intersubjective exchanges within communities comprised of discrete individuals; *selfhood* means an autonomous entity with salient boundaries; *self-respect* refers to a sense of inherent dignity; *narcissism* refers to unidirectional appropriation into the self.
On the surface, Thomas Carlyle’s “Signs of the Times” (1829) articulated a blistering protest against the deep penetration of industrial mechanization into the human spirit. At bottom, however, Carlyle’s polemic was directed at the spurious acrobatics by which selfishness was being harnessed to meet the demands of the general good. Over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a number of prominent modern philosophers and economists had sought finally to do away with the tension between selfishness and moral duty. On the political front, John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) brought self-interest into agreement with a complex social compact. Warning that “Self-love” produced “Confusion and Disorder” within the state of nature, Locke argued that the most basic aim of self-preservation was best advanced by binding together free individuals into a social contract for the benefit of their mutual good, thus channeling selfishness toward social virtue. In the territory of ethics, David Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* (1738) called it a rare circumstance that a person’s “kind affections, taken together, do not over-balance all the selfish,” which in turn sanctioned the conclusion that “our sense of duty always follows the common and natural course of our passions.” Thus, the natural balance of the self’s passions could serve as the basis for moral duty. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), Adam Smith’s notion of enlightened self-interest combined psychological and economic reasoning to explain how self-interested ownership would effectively produce distributive fairness: “[The rich] are led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life” that laborers “would in vain have

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expected from [a landlord’s] humanity or his justice.”¹⁵ Hence, the seemingly intractable contradiction of selfishness and virtue was presumed resolved.

Surveying these theories from the standpoint of the nineteenth century, Carlyle announced that he had no stomach for prim resolutions to ancient problems. Explicitly indicting Locke, Hume, and Smith, he laments that men “have lost faith in individual endeavour,” for they adopt the credo that “to live, signifies to unite with a party” (“Signs of the Times,” pp. 63, 61). Heroic individualism, he avers, has been preempted by stultifying constraints of interconnectedness, extinguishing the spontaneity of autonomous action. In its zeal for cooperation, the modern regime had obliterated the value of selfhood. But even as he takes modern thinkers to task for entrapping the self in mechanical interrelations, Carlyle denigrates the modern “appetite for self-interest,” which “requires no virtue in any quarter” (p. 67). Indeed, he identifies self-denial as “the parent of all virtue” (p. 79). This seeming contradiction actually points to a subtle but vital distinction. Self-interest, he implies, is a petty sort of self-directed gratification. By contrast, the individual endeavor is an outward-directed blast of Romantic energy, mercurial and exhilarating. It is thus animated by a deep fascination with the world without, including the persons that occupy it. The individual endeavor, then, is a species of selfishness opposed to solipsism. *Wuthering Heights* would pursue a comparable distinction.

The literary genealogy of Emily’s Brontë’s concept of selfishness mostly bypasses her own contemporary novel tradition (Charlotte Brontë once advised, “For Fiction—read Scott alone all novels after his are worthless”), and instead reaches back to Romantic poetry and prose.¹⁶ Emily Brontë invokes a counter-vailing Romantic tradition that reacted against the popular idealization of pity and benevolence. Lord Byron, whose *Manfred* (1817) served as the main precursor to *Wuthering Heights*, had


created cultural icons of brooding, cynical characters that turn their backs on conventional Christian pieties about social camaraderie. With its narrative of incestuous union made literal, Byron’s poem is too often understood to limn social alienation as a consequence of a lascivious perversion coupled with his beloved’s untimely death.\(^{17}\) What Manfred actually says, however, is that his disaffection from community, when his “spirit walk’d not with the souls of men” and he held “but slight communion” with “the thoughts of men,” was the defining component of his character “from [his] youth upwards.” From the beginning he felt “no sympathy with breathing flesh.”\(^{18}\) Manfred ultimately fails to bridge the gulf between self and community. In effect, Byron laid out the question that would preoccupy Emily Brontë: on what terms, if any, can the impulse toward selfishness be reconciled with interpersonal love? Would the purest intensity of selfish drives eventuate in self-immolation or, worse still, maroon the self in isolation?

Emily Brontë inherited this vexed discourse concerning the various means by which selfhood risks mutilation. Though deeply dependent on those within her family circle, she had no truck with self-renunciation, preferring a sequestered life of introspective contemplation.\(^{19}\) Interned in the Heger Pensionnat in Brussels during the summer and fall of 1842, Brontë, rebelling against the regimented routine and compulsory tutelage of her instructor, Constantin Heger, composed an homage to “Le Chat.” In the demeanor of the cat, Emily found a praiseworthy exemplar of cool self-possession, which she preferred to groveling encomia to self-sacrifice: “A cat, in its own interest, sometimes hides its misanthropy under the guise of amiable gentleness”—but the same craftiness, she adds, runs deep “in ourselves.”\(^ {20}\)


\(^{19}\) Brontë biographer Juliet Barker writes that Charlotte and Anne “had a core of steel, a sense of duty and obligation which seems to have been flawed, if not altogether missing, in Emily” (Barker, \textit{The Brontës} [New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994], p. 237).

A similar enthusiasm for self-assertion is suffused throughout her poetry. She declares in an undated poem, “I’m happiest when most away,” finding freedom “When I am not and none beside.”21 For Brontë, a flourishing human life is brought about not by uprooting the selfish passions but by resolving to “[persevere] to shun/The common paths that others run.”22 Her moral directive, then, is not to conquer the self but to renounce social dictates and thereby gain personal freedom. This radical creed—that we should not only preserve our selfishness but obey it even at the expense of community—was anathema to both the Evangelical call for Christian fellowship and the clamor for solidarity among the Victorian social reform movements that were sweeping across England.

Evidently recognizing the heresy of Emily’s claims, Charlotte, in her Preface to the 1850 edition of Wuthering Heights, sought to expunge Emily’s clarion call for selfishness. Noting Emily’s “tendency to seclusion,” Charlotte bemoaned that her sister’s “mind...was too exclusively confined to those tragic and terrible traits,” and, managing at once to condescend to and insult her, concluded that “she did not know what she had done.” Exactly reversing Emily’s theme, Charlotte goes on to hail Nelly Dean as “a specimen of true benevolence” and to declare that Heathcliff’s “one solitary human feeling” was “not his love for Catherine” but “his rudely confessed regard for Hareton Earnshaw.”23 Charlotte’s anxious rewriting of the

22 Emily Brontë, “Plead for Me,” in Complete Poems, p. 22. A more famous expression of the sentiment expressed herein appears in “Often rebuked, yet always back returning,” though the poem is of contested authorship. In it, she resolves to walk “not in paths of high morality,” but “where my own nature would be leading: / It vexes me to choose another guide” (Complete Poems, p. 198).
novel’s characters may go some distance in explaining why Emily’s treatment of selfishness has gone underappreciated.

The outermost narrative frame of *Wuthering Heights* is constituted by Lockwood, and at stake with the character is the permeability of his own frame of selfhood. He is animated by deep urge for sociability, but he panics and withdraws at the instant of recognition and reciprocation. He would rather bear the loneliness of a recluse and the false reputation of “deliberate heartlessness” than allow himself to be known (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 7). Even between his compulsive retreats into sequestration, his priggish, overwrought diction builds a hard surface of sophistication that resists social intimacy. But he is disgusted not by what he discovers in others, but by what they reveal in him. Disfigured by self-loathing, Lockwood strives to experience sociality as a unidirectional appropriation of others absent any self-exposure, and he accomplishes this, as we will see, by psychically transfiguring his interlocutors into children.

The new tenant of Thrushcross Grange has undertaken a search for a community that is built on a foundation of shared abjection. His narrative opens with a paradox of sociality. He is thrilled to have lit upon “a situation so completely removed from the stir of society,” and yet he is equally thrilled to have identified Heathcliff as a potential partner “to divide the desolation between [them]” (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 3). Their “perfect misanthropist’s Heaven” seems to hold out promise as a quintessentially subcultural space where outsiders, scorned as pariahs, find solace in their common alienation. Recognizing himself in Heathcliff’s hermitic wariness, Lockwood observes how his “heart warmed” when he “beheld [Heathcliff’s] black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows” (p. 3). For Lockwood, an ostensible refusal of society actually signals a mutually scorned identity that could potentially serve as a basis for a community of exiles. Lockwood, however, soon checks his enthusiasm, fearing (correctly, it turns out) that he is projecting: “I bestowed my own attributes over-liberally on him. Mr. Heathcliff may have entirely
dissimilar reasons for keeping his hand out of the way, when he meets a would-be acquaintance, to those which actuate me” (p. 7). Lockwood is self-aware enough to recognize that he is imposing his own subjectivity on another, essentially extending his ego to overwrite another’s. Rather than discovering a community that shares his self-loathing, he may be exposing himself to yet another moment of scorn and rejection. This thought leads directly to a remembrance of his “dear mother,” who warned him that he “should never have a comfortable home,” that he would always be an outsider from the hallowed convention of the family (p. 7). Gripped by fear of being adrift from social belonging, Lockwood extends his hands to his feet in search of a surrogate “canine mother”—presumably, a mother whose love is not subject to contingency—only to find “her white teeth watering for a snatch” (p. 8). In short, Lockwood finds no home in the adult world of violence and disillusionment.

Our only window into Lockwood’s sexual history comes in his own explanation for why he is “unworthy” of a wife and home. Seized by an “over head and ears” obsession with a briefly mentioned “fascinating creature,” he not only admires his inamorata but also deifies her as “a real goddess in [his] eyes” (Wuthering Heights, p. 7). Her very inaccessibility sanctions the attraction, for it ensures voyeuristic eroticization without self-examination. He takes pleasure in his unacknowledged lust only “as long as she took no notice of [him],” and when she does, he erects barriers of coldness and opacity (p. 7). It is not woman per se that strikes terror into him, but woman-as-reflective-surface. In gazing at him, she forces a humiliating psychic introspection. Lockwood cannot bear to keep his own company. Having chosen to shield his shame, and in effect to fortify it, he is forced to search for social intimacy that neither sees nor evaluates him, a blind partner that will not reciprocate his gaze, that will welcome him without interrogating him.

In the absence of such a community at the Heights, Lockwood surrenders to a fantasy of wish-fulfillment by projecting onto its inhabitants childish qualities of innocence, docility, and trust. On his first brief visit, he lingers at the threshold, “pausing to admire a quantity of grotesque carving,” only to narrow his gaze on the “crumbling griffins and shameless little
boys” (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 5). Frozen in stone, these shameless boys emblematize objects of his longing: perpetually innocent and seen but unseeing. Lockwood sees, too, the name “Hareton Earnshaw” scratched into the door, connecting these art objects with the identity of a flesh-and-blood boy within. His observations after crossing the egress of the Heights reveal an obsessive focus on youth and age disparity. Lockwood first identifies Hareton as “a young man,” then, with eroticized associations, “the young man . . . erecting himself before the blaze” of the fire, and finally, with rapidly advancing intimacy, a “young man” who “appeared about to befriend [him]” (pp. 12, 14, 20). Similarly, Lockwood describes Cathy as “scarcely past girlhood,” and observes later that she “did not look seventeen” (pp. 13, 16). He loiters over her “exquisite little face” and “small features” (p. 13). Issuing playful banter over tea, he notes to himself that “her red under-lip” is “pushed out, like a child’s, ready to cry” (p. 14). As though conjuring the institutionalization of his fantasy, Lockwood notes the “great disparity between the ages” of Heathcliff and Cathy—twenty-three years, he estimates—only to note wistfully that only an even greater discrepancy of age would allow a man to “cherish the delusion of being married for love” rather than money (p. 16). In conjuring a makeshift community of childish playmates, Lockwood figures himself as the omnipotent adult and sole locus of judgment.

Lockwood’s illusion, however, unravels even as it is spun. Neither Cathy nor Hareton can convincingly pass as cherubic juveniles. At eighteen, Cathy is a grown woman—and a widow, no less. Nelly calls Hareton “a great, strong lad” when he is eighteen (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 237); in Lockwood’s timeframe, he is twenty-three—hardly the picture of fragile innocence. More important, they turn out to be ruthlessly impervious to his solicitations. Cathy meets his banter with chilly silence and stares at him “in a cool, regardless manner, exceedingly embarrassing and disagreeable” (p. 12). Hareton does worse, shooting a penetrative glare at Lockwood that prompts him to abort his own specular pleasures. Hareton’s stare, more retaliation than reciprocation, threatens to violate the shell Lockwood has built around his diseased sense of self.
The now-famous dream sequence played out in Lockwood’s mind records his fear of social judgment as well as the breakdown of his protective strategies. Ensconced in Catherine’s girlhood bed and protected from without by sealed panels, he gives himself over to the fantasy of her diary, until finally “the air swarmed with Catherines” (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 24). His voyeuristic consumption of her childhood narrative, which is appealingly scrawled in her “childish hand,” anticipates his future relish over Nelly’s narrative of the history of the Heights (p. 24). In the first dream, Lockwood arrives at the chapel, where Jables Branderham thunders at Lockwood from the pulpit: “Lo, this is human weakness. . . . Brethren, execute upon him the judgment written!” (p. 29). The assembly then converges on Lockwood to batter him with their pilgrim’s staves. The scene registers Lockwood’s sense that he is irretrievably tainted with sin, prompting the community’s judgment and swift condemnation. As a divine judgment penetrates into the darkest recesses of his soul, sociality becomes an occasion not for belonging but for persecution. In the second dream, Lockwood’s fantasy of Cathy as docile child collapses, as the innocent nymph proves unwilling to be appropriated. His dream turns nightmarish when she demands admittance to his protected interior. Terrified by the “child’s face” and implacable demand (“Let me in—let me in!”), he viciously slices the hand that reaches for him, then “piled the books up in a pyramid against it,” in effect summoning the super-ego to “silence” the fantasy (pp. 30–31). With the barricade of books, he again attempts to insert a narrative buffer between himself and sociality, as though trying to fictionalize Catherine into an appropriate text.

From here forward, Lockwood’s pleasures consist solely in the consumption of others’ narratives. In extracting the saga of the Heights from Nelly Dean, Lockwood gains vicarious access to sociality without risking self-exposure. Her storytelling excites him “almost to a pitch of foolishness,” and he later exclaims to Cathy: “take my books away, and I should be desperate” (*Wuthering Heights*, pp. 43, 364). His “sudden impulse” to visit the Grange is triggered by his need to acquire the remainder of the story—that is, to renew the pleasure of a non-participatory
sociality (p. 369). When Nelly’s narrative ends, Lockwood feels “irresistibly impelled to escape them again,” for the entrance of Cathy and Hareton shifts his role in the social dynamic from observer to participant (p. 413). His reliance on a narrative-based sociality requires a nomadic existence at the periphery, forever sneaking glimpses of others’ bonds of intimacy. He cannot “find sufficient company in himself,” as he wishes so fervently, because it is from his personal sense of inadequacy that he is compulsively in flight (p. 35). Pusillanimous and self-loathing, Lockwood does not strive for self-assertion, but opts for the meager compensations of imaginatively projected or narratively conveyed communities. Brontë implies, then, that an openness to self-exposure must precede any intimate social interaction, and thus we are led to a more hopeful form of sociality in the relationship of Catherine and Heathcliff.

Critics have lauded the love between Catherine and Heathcliff as one of the most vibrant in English literature—so fierce, indeed, that it would seem to soar beyond conventional moral evaluation. Heathcliff’s all-consuming obsession, his voracious neediness toward his beloved, is all the more shocking given the abuse that is visited upon him through his childhood. Mr. Earnshaw discovers him abandoned “in the streets of Liverpool,,” “starving, and houseless,” and hauls him to Wuthering Heights, where he is promptly spat on, pinched, beaten, and, for his dark complexion, branded a spawn of the devil (Wuthering Heights, pp. 45, 46). In a gesture that prefigures Harold Skimpole’s cruel eviction of Jo, the orphan crossing sweeper of Charles Dickens’s Bleak House (1852–53), Nelly dumps Heathcliff at the landing of the stairs in hopes that he will wander into the night (Wuthering Heights, p. 46). Their collective “ill-treatment,” Nelly observes, leaves him “hardened” and “insensible” to gratitude (pp. 46, 47). This tough exterior makes him unreceptive to love, much less capable of requiting it. Much later, Isabella’s overtures of affection will awaken “no reciprocation of sentiment,” and after their disastrous marriage, he takes her use of the “adjective our” as
a “mortal offence” (pp. 124, 176). Heathcliff ultimately dilates into blanket contempt for “common humanity” and “duty” (p. 180). This duplicity of sociality—adoring Catherine, spurning all others—confounds easy explanation. My contention is that Heathcliff and Catherine do not merely bond but struggle toward total assimilation into a unitary self, thereby forsaking sociality altogether. Their disastrous example cautions against succumbing to the illusion that human separateness either can or should be eradicated in a totalizing fusion of selves.

Outwardly, the battle for Catherine is carried on as a brutal social rivalry. René Girard’s model of triangulated desire places Edgar and Heathcliff in a mutually generative relationship of desire mediated through Catherine. Eve Sedgwick’s insistence on attending to apportionment of power further clarifies the relationship, in that Catherine is not simply trafficked; she intends to attach herself to Edgar’s power in order to improve the prospects of his rival, Heathcliff (Wuthering Heights, p. 101). On the surface, then, Edgar’s participation in the homosocial bond makes this a crowded bedroom. But Heathcliff’s past alters this picture. As decisively fawned over by his paternal protector as he is alienated from maternal care, he evades standard family rivalries. Mrs. Earnshaw would prefer “to fling it out of doors,” evincing no reason for Heathcliff to possess her as a surrogate mother (Wuthering Heights, p. 45). Mr. Earnshaw, in trusting, protecting, and “petting” Heathcliff, negates his status as rival to Heathcliff’s desire for possession. Nelly observes that the child “was simply insensible [to Earnshaw], though knowing perfectly the hold he had on his heart, and conscious he had only to speak and all the house would be obliged to bend to his wishes” (p. 47). Thus, Earnshaw constitutes not a threat but a conduit through which to magnify Heathcliff’s own authority. With no mother to possess, he directs his possessive instinct onto a willing Catherine, but in the absence of a threatening rival, that possession is uninhibited and totalizing. Catherine is fully assimilated as a seamless extension of Heathcliff’s self.

Theorizing the collapse and consolidation of Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s once bounded selves renders the subsequent narrative newly intelligible. For example, after watching Edgar and Isabella jockey over their dog, Heathcliff is astonished at the spectacle of social conflict. He recounts to Nelly: “Edgar and his sister had it entirely to themselves; shouldn’t they have been happy? We should have thought ourselves in heaven!... When would you catch me wishing to have what Catherine wanted?” (Wuthering Heights, pp. 58–59). Later, Nelly affirms that “the notion of envying Catherine was incomprehensible to him” (p. 70). He cannot envy Catherine because he cannot conceive of their separateness. He believes he is Catherine, making distributive unfairness or clashing interests unimaginable.25

Catherine succumbs to the same delusion. When she and Heathcliff lay claim to the same soul, Nelly remains obtusely incredulous, but Catherine means precisely what she says. Indeed, Catherine finds separation from Heathcliff unthinkable, because they are not simply bonded; they are each other. “Nelly, I am Heathcliff,” she declares in the most memorable scene of the novel (Wuthering Heights, p. 102). They are metaphysically amalgamated, possessing souls, Catherine insists, that “are the same” (p. 100). Importantly, Catherine does not claim that their souls are interdependent or symbiotically attached, nor even that they are analogous or identical; rather, Catherine asserts, they share a single identity: “If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be” (p. 101). When Heathcliff, “livid with emotion,” turns his back on her, she declares herself indifferent, for already “he’s in [her] soul” (pp. 196, 197). In effect, Heathcliff and Catherine, by mutual consent, have surrendered the integrity of their discrete selves. No longer are they separate beings with boundaries made permeable to a social interchange; they have collapsed their boundaries and

25 I am extending an argument made by Leo Bersani, who observes that the echoes and resemblances cutting across and within generations disperse individual identities (see Bersani, A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984], pp. 197–217). Camille Paglia, likewise, detects in Heathcliff and Catherine the conflation of soul images, which she terms “allegorical repletion,” meaning the “filling up of fictive space with a single identity appearing simultaneously in different forms” (Paglia, Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990], p. 447).
become a single self. As a consequence, their other-directed love is converted into a sterile form of selfishness, cordoned off from sociality.

Because Heathcliff treats Catherine as indistinguishable from his own self, his unbridled praise of her—idolizing her as “immeasurably superior” to “everybody on earth”—constitutes not outward-looking admiration but inward-looking narcissism (Wuthering Heights, p. 63). This narcissism is made apparent later, when the accusations he levels at Catherine relentlessly redound back onto himself: “how can I bear it?”; “Do I want to live?”; “I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!” (pp. 195, 198, 204). Heathcliff’s grief, however agonized and intense, never exceeds self-pity. Her welfare as a distinct other never becomes salient. From this point of view, Heathcliff’s heart-rending tragedy takes on the appearance of petty self-lament.

Heathcliff’s “love” for Catherine involves no perceptual sensitivity, no recognition of his own vulnerability and neediness, no wonder or curiosity toward the unknown, no sense that the social entails the friction of abrasive difference. Exalted in their own heaven, rambling like savages in the state of nature, they are oblivious to the reality that their fusion of souls is a delusion that evades the social exigencies of conflict and compromise. When Catherine decisively exerts her independent will, deserting Heathcliff to marry Edgar, the fallout for his selfhood is catastrophic. Heathcliff registers her betrayal as an internal resurrection in his psyche, a self-mutilating death drive. Catching word of Catherine’s conjugal union, Heathcliff plans to do “execution on [him]self” (Wuthering Heights, p. 119). Instead, having lost out on Catherine, he devotes himself to blighting the happiness of those whose lives she had touched, in effect retroactively eradicating her social influence that exceeded their self-enclosed soul.

The delusion of soul fusion is, in a number of ways, precisely what maims them both. First, they retain their individuated selves, and when separated (at first spatially and then later by Catherine’s death), they cannot bear the existence of their solitary bodily reality. Catherine becomes “afraid of being alone,” terrified by her own image in the cheval glass (Wuthering Heights,
Heathcliff, too, finding selfhood unbearable, bashes his head into the trunk of a tree, declaring he would rather be driven mad than remain in an "abyss" by himself (p. 204). Hence, their striving for total amalgamation is literally self-destructive. Second, they are both battered by the other’s independent will. Both are constantly outraged by betrayal when their purportedly unitary desires diverge; hence, the endless stream of recriminations.

Heathcliff, to take one representative example, is outraged that Catherine “betray[ed] [her] own heart” in marrying Linton, and concludes that she broke both their hearts in the process (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 198). Because Heathcliff will not recognize her independent desire, he can only conclude that she is self-annihilating. Third, in retreating into the anti-social isolation of their shared “self,” Heathcliff scorns all other social ties or obligations. “I have no pity! I have no pity!” he bluntly declares in his monomaniacal quest for his beloved (p. 186). And fourth, in collapsing into a single identity, they become calcified and moribund, unreceptive to the abrasive difference of otherness. Catherine, famously, regards her relationship with Heathcliff as eternally fixed (resembling, in her words, “eternal rocks”), and she derides her organic and changing attachment to her husband (p. 101). Lost is the dynamism inherent in sociality.

On some level, all four of these errors are the same error: a repudiation of embodied reality. Obsessed with the singleness of their metaphysical soul, they torture and mutilate their corporeal selves for failing to harmonize with their idealized metaphysical union. Catherine comes to regard her body as a “shattered prison,” and she wearies “of being enclosed there” (*Wuthering Heights*, p. 197). Heathcliff, likewise, desairs over “living” with his beloved’s “soul in the grave” (p. 198). Hence, their initial social bonding has eventuated in a will-to-destruction of their physical selves. Curiously, some scholars have been eager to root out the implication of necrophilia in Heathcliff’s covetousness of Catherine’s body, but there is no evidence that

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26 On the differences between Catherine and Heathcliff, see Bersani, *A Future for Astyanax*, p. 204; and Daniela Garofalo, “Impossible Love and Commodity Culture in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*,” *ELH*, 75 (2008), 819–40.
he wants to penetrate her corpse, or even interact with her corpse at all. His only care in “disturb[ing]” her body, he tells Nelly, is to dissolve her face and commune with her ineffable presence (p. 349). Here again, he is obsessed with physical eradication, destroying the remnants of an embodied life that rebelled against total assimilation. Heathcliff and Catherine’s failure of sociality warns against the temptation to dissolve the boundaries of the self in a misguided strike for total absorption of the beloved other. Sociality cannot be meaningfully achieved through a process of assimilation that annihilates difference.

The match between Hareton and Cathy resets the Heathcliff and Catherine relationship for a fresh attempt at realizing love, but not before Heathcliff engineers a marriage between Linton Heathcliff and Cathy. That the pairing fails is not for lack of effort on Heathcliff’s part; it is, rather, because Cathy arouses no desire, erotic or otherwise, in Linton. Understanding Linton’s failure of sociality requires pursuing a question seldom asked, because its answer would seem to be self-evident: what ails Linton Heathcliff? To be sure, readers have long yielded to a seductively simple answer: phthisis. Little Linton’s pallid countenance, wasting cough, and weak constitution all mark him as a victim of chronic pulmonary tuberculosis. And yet doubt lingers. British literary convention, in contradistinction to sociological data, held that consumption was an ailment peculiar to women. In addition, Linton lacks many of the crucial indicators of tuberculosis. Clarity of mind, delusion of health, bright eyes—these are the conventional, and here strangely absent, symptoms of the disease. In a novel in which blood splatters across page after violent page, only once is Linton shown spitting up blood, and even this under peculiar circumstances (to be discussed shortly) (Wuthering Heights, p. 306). Most strikingly, no one, including Nelly Dean, ever suggests that Linton be sent away to convalesce in a foreign

27 Edgar Linton’s tubercular sickness, in contrast, manifests precisely these symptoms (see Wuthering Heights, p. 314).
climate, the single most common treatment for phthisis. We might ask, then, whether Linton Heathcliff’s symptoms might be code for a more sinister scourge.

Linton Heathcliff is, I propose, an onanist, or chronic masturbator. His caretakers detect all the trademark manifestations of the secret vice: his “white complexion,” his “large languid eyes” surrounded by “hollowness,” his “pale” face and “languid expression,” his generally “listless apathy” and specifically “apathetic eyes,” his bouts of “lethargy” (Wuthering Heights, pp. 252, 317–18, 338, 319). Indeed, Nelly connects Linton’s “peculiar personal sufferings and distresses” to his penchant for “lay[ing] in bed all day,” and Zillah, the housekeeper brought in after Catherine’s death, observes that Heathcliff would “turn him out of doors, if he knew half the nursing he gives himself” (pp. 315, 258, 259). Nelly, too, comments obliquely that Linton is “in the habit of passing dreadful nights” (p. 292). In the terms of Victorian medical discourse, Linton, like Uriah Heep of Dickens’s David Copperfield (1849–50), is suffering from spermatorrhoea, an umbrella term referring to the enervation produced by the loss of the individual’s finite supply of semen. When excessive masturbation depletes the onanist’s reserve, he becomes apathetic and alienated. Heathcliff himself snarls at his son, “Get up, you idle boy!” invoking the terror of boyhood indolence that was believed to contribute to the scourge of self-pollution (Wuthering Heights, p. 268).

Clues signifying the sexual nature of Linton’s self-infatuation are embedded throughout the text, as in his partiality for “sucking a stick of sugar-candy” (Wuthering Heights, p. 338). Perhaps

28 On the symptoms of consumption as mediated through literary convention, see Clark Lawlor, Consumption and Literature: The Making of the Romantic Disease (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).


30 Francis Grose defines “Sugar stick” as “The virile member” in A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue [1796], ed. Eric Partridge (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963). Although this sense is not recorded in OED, a note in an 1807 edition of the Urquhart-Motteux translation of Rabelais (Book I, chapter 39) suggests that the term was regarded as feminine slang: “the Italian cazzo...what our merry translator calls
most revealing of all, Linton has an infatuation with hands. His own hands have been reduced to "attenuated fingers," as though his sexually sinful hands have wasted away (Wuthering Heights, p. 325). In contrast, he begs Catherine, "give me your hand," and kisses her "supporting hands," as though paying homage to her comparatively saintly fingers (pp. 326, 325). In "retaining her hand" and in clinging to "Catherine's arm," Linton both symbolically and literally compensates for his weakness (pp. 317, 321).

And what of his discharge of blood, ostensibly the most conclusive sign of tuberculosis? This reaction comes immediately on the heels of Cathy's impulsive grab and pull on his attenuated fingers; the "blood gushe[s] from his mouth" as she touches the instruments of sin (p. 306).

None of these textual clues, of course, conclusively overthrows the standard understanding of Linton as a victim of consumption, but, as Diane Mason has shown in her work on Victorian masturbation discourse, the overlapping symptoms of many diseases allowed authors to code for a plurality of maladies. For instance, prominent medical authorities connected masturbation not only with the symptoms described above, but also to effeminacy, impaired manliness, and loss of vitality in children. Fittingly, Linton attracts denigration as "a pale, delicate, effeminate boy" who is "scarcely likely to reach manhood" and who is "more a lass than a lad" (Wuthering Heights, pp. 245, sometimes the carnal trap-stick, (though our ladies call it, their sugar-stick.)" (The Works of Francis Rabelais, Translated from the French, with Explanatory Notes by Du Chat, Motteux, Ozell, and Others, 4 vols. [London, 1807], I, 280). Jonathon Green quotes later nineteenth-century examples from bawdy songbooks and pornography (see Green's Dictionary of Slang, 3 vols. [London: Chambers Harrap Publishers, 2010]).

31 Blood, whether emitted orally or through urine, was itself thought to be a common symptom of onanism. For examples, see Jean Stengers and Anne Van Neck, Masturbation: The History of a Great Terror, trans. Kathryn A. Hoffmann (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 3, 47, 49, 65.

32 See Diane Mason, The Secret Vice: Masturbation in Victorian Fiction and Medical Culture (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2008), pp. 5, 15, 16. The logic of masculine impairment through seminal loss arose from what Michael Mason dubs the "haematic" theory, according to which semen is a precious, difficult-to-manufacture component of the blood. Barring seminal waste through onanism or nocturnal emission, the semen would be reabsorbed into the blood and would then power the expression of secondary sexual characteristics. Hence, effeminacy becomes a symptom of seminal depletion. See Michael Mason, The Making of Victorian Sexuality (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), p. 209.
312, 269). On their own, these various symptoms could mean anything, but compiled together, they coalesce into signifiers of an otherwise unmentionable sin.

Linton Heathcliff fails at sociality because his infantile, self-directed libido discharges itself to depletion and death. To the Victorians, tubercular wasting, whether understood as a heritable or transmissible disease, was social in character, brought about by a familial or proximate transmission between persons. In contrast, the solitary vice, though often learned from nursemaids or lascivious boarding-school pupils, was understood as a personal moral failure. It is telling, then, that little Linton is treated not as an innocent victim but a culpable sinner. Not only does Cathy entreat her cousin “to subdue his selfish agony,” but Nelly accuses him of being “a heartless, selfish boy,” full of “selfishness and spite” and plagued by a “self-absorbed moroseness” (Wuthering Heights, pp. 331, 339, 310, 318). Indeed, his selfishness leaves Linton with “no power to sympathise with his cousin’s mental tortures” (p. 340). The absence of sympathy is the crux of Linton’s failure. His selfishness disables his capacity for imaginative identification. He understands what it means to inflict pain—indeed, he feels a triumphant thrill watching Cathy beaten like “a dog, or a horse”—but he does not transpose himself into her subject position (p. 340). To Linton, persons are sites of otherness to which he attaches no relation. Brontë uses the contemporary understanding of the act of self-pollution to limn the worst sort of selfishness: not self-assertive exploration, but navel-gazing narcissism. In a novel otherwise affirming the value of selfishness, Linton represents its most stunted manifestation.

The 1939 film version of Wuthering Heights omits the second generation entirely, as though trimming a superfluous redundancy. The scholarly assessment of Cathy

and Hareton has been but little kinder. Critics have been wont to interpret their relationship as an enervated repetition of their predecessors’ example, tamed of the roiling combative energies that made Catherine and Heathcliff so mercurial, and, for many readers, so alluring. Lynn Pykett, joining a chorus of critical agreement, argues that Cathy and Hareton oversee a “transformation of the Heights into a domain of feminine values, a haven of tranquillity” set apart “from patriarchal tyranny, masculine competition, domestic imprisonment and the Gothic.”

But this conclusion does not pass muster. The centuries-old Earnshaw manor is not restored. Cathy and Hareton transplant their hopes to the Grange, abandoning the Heights to its advancing decay, windows busted out and slates jutted off. The farmhouse seems poised to collapse into history, joining the lonely graves of Heathcliff and Catherine nestled within the nearby moors. Vacant save for irascible Joseph, the Heights is a crumbling monument to a site of sociality annihilated by Heathcliff and Catherine.

I emphasize this point because Heathcliff and Catherine tend to be habitually idolized, even as Cathy and Hareton are denigrated as attenuated, feminized, and infantilized. My contention is that the Cathy and Hareton pairing is not a faded copy of the previous generation, but an inverted model—and one no less potent. The bonding of Catherine and Heathcliff proceeds schematically: repulsion (Catherine “show[s] her humour by grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing”), attraction (they become “very thick”), and finally rupture as their autonomous selves reassert themselves (Wuthering Heights).

Cathy and Hareton, in contrast, begin in attraction, shift into repulsion, and end in reconciliation. The structural reversal points to radically different approaches to social bonding. Only to this latter mode of cultivating permeable selfhood does Brontë grant a future.

Three interrelated qualities would seem to render Hareton and Cathy conducive to sociality. First, they share a keenness of perception. Cathy, Nelly notes, has “a heart sensitive and lively to excess in its affections” (Wuthering Heights, p. 232). These sensitive affections afford her a charity that is otherwise sadly lacking in Wuthering Heights. When Linton Heathcliff broadcasts peevish complaints, Cathy habitually subdues her own irritation, sensing the genuine fear and agony that undergirds his lugubriosity. Her acuteness in perceiving and readiness in responding to the plight of others—even agreeing to marry Linton in order to console her father at his death—sets her squarely apart from impermeable Heathcliff (whose “hardness” makes him insensible to the suffering of others) and fatuous Lockwood (who confuses rabbits with cats and nemeses with spouses). Hareton, though treated with rough indifference, nevertheless shares Cathy’s perceptiveness. His “sensitive though uncultivated feelings,” Hareton confesses later in the novel, led him to advocate on Cathy’s behalf, even when it meant earning Heathcliff’s ire (pp. 366, 380).

Second, their experiences in childhood evince neediness, a recognition that they are not self-sufficient beings. So devastated are Edgar and Nelly at Catherine’s death that they initially ignore the birth of Cathy: “An unwelcome infant it was, poor thing! It might have wailed out of life, and nobody cared a morsel, during those first hours of existence” (Wuthering Heights, p. 201). Sigmund Freud famously characterized the “oceanic feeling” experienced by babies at birth as a feeling of indissoluble oneness between the unindividuated ego and outer world. For Cathy, that boundary materializes with great urgency, not only differentiating the self from the not-self, but also underscoring her condition of dependency from without.

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Hareton’s neediness is even more pronounced. He is, as Lockwood insists to Cathy, “desirous of increasing his amount of knowledge,” and entailed in their reconciliation is her willingness to honor his need: they enter into their “occupations of pupil and teacher” (Wuthering Heights, pp. 364, 391). Thus, from the outset, pure self-reliance is simply off the table.

Neediness, alone, however, is insufficient, for this could be pursued with narcissistic abandon: registering an egoistic desire, identifying an external source of gratification, and appropriating it. This response is Heathcliff’s insofar as it involves monomaniacal focus on his beloved (to the exclusion of all other concerns) and a rapacious desire to appropriate her into himself. What Heathcliff lacks, and Cathy and Hareton both share, is a wonder and curiosity about the world beyond a mere search for the objects of existing desires. “A perfect recluse” bounded by the range of the park, Cathy asks of Nelly: “I wonder what lies on the other side [of those hills]—is it the sea?” (Wuthering Heights, p. 233). Cathy seeks analogies to understand the golden rocks, and inquires after their brightness at dusk. This capacity for a roving search, without any particular object as its target, indicates a genuine amazement at and respect for the unknown. She wants to traverse the hills simply because, as she puts it, “I know the park, and I don’t know those” (p. 234). Thus, her curiosity shines through, notwithstanding her social insularity and pretensions of birth.

Hareton, too, has an inquisitive hunger. When Cathy arrives on the scene, he “stare[s] at her with considerable curiosity and astonishment; comprehending precious little” of her loquacious remarks and staring, mesmerized, “like a child to a candle” (Wuthering Heights, pp. 237, 359). It is clear that he does not have in mind a use to which to put her, so his interest cannot simply stem from seeing her as a means of gratification. Rather, his awe and curiosity seem to spring from a sense of profound difference, and, subsequently, a recognition in himself of his own lacking. Her beauty, her manners, and most of all her ability to decipher the cryptic volumes that she turns over in her hands all adumbrate a faintly drawn conception of a life from which he has been excluded. Humiliated by his ignorance, Hareton strives to become, as Lockwood puts it to Cathy, “emulous of your
attainments” (p. 364). Hence, his sense of personal wonder draws him into social dependency—one, indeed, that is mutually felt, for Cathy is equally fascinated by “the Fairy cave, and twenty other queer places” concerning which Hareton has accumulated his own fund of knowledge (p. 243). In recognizing the magisterial complexity of what lies outside themselves, Cathy and Hareton are spurred toward interchanges of their respective knowledge. Thus, through sensitivity, recognition of neediness, and wonder are selfishness and sociality wedded.

A further point remains, however, for their eventual partnering comes about only after fierce and prolonged conflict that shores up, rather than breaks down, their differences. The same qualities that prompt them to enter into a social relationship also leave them disposed to stop short of total annihilation of the boundaries between their respective selves. In understanding the irreducible uniqueness evinced by perceptiveness, the vulnerability revealed by neediness, and the respect for otherness as other brought about by awe and wonder, Cathy and Hareton come also to understand that their own worth is inseparable from their status as discrete selves. To be sure, their own sense of inequality must be eliminated before they can unite. Cathy must relinquish her supercilious self-regard, and Hareton must overcome his mortification at his ignorance (Wuthering Heights, pp. 358, 380). Yet what separates them from all other couplings in Wuthering Heights is their choice to respect the independent interests of the other while identifying an overlapping consensus on which to build a future. Brontë underscores their separateness in a number of ways, describing their “two . . . radiant countenances,” in contrast to Heathcliff and Catherine’s assimilated soul. The metaphor of a treaty sworn by allies makes this point too, emphasizing agreement on mutual ends without the sacrifice of sovereignty (p. 382). With “both their minds tending to the same point,” Cathy and Hareton manage to unite without slaying their selfish desires (p. 384).

In forgoing criticism of Heathcliff, Cathy dramatically illustrates her willingness to respect the autonomy of her beloved. Without surrendering her contempt for Heathcliff, she sees that Hareton has transposed Heathcliff into a surrogate father. Reflecting that Hareton is “attached by ties stronger than reason
could break,” she resolves to honor that attachment regardless of her personal dissent (Wuthering Heights, p. 391). What is radical in this approach to sociality, given the tenor of prevailing Victorian morality, is that it does not demand feminine self-effacement. Rather, it asks only that Cathy respect Hareton as a separate being pursuing his own evaluation of ends.

Critics have been disposed to dismiss the pairing of Cathy and Hareton as a domestication and diminution of the novel’s energy, but in fact the two emerge at the conclusion of the tale engorged with uncanny power. Joseph describes Cathy as a “flaysome, graceless quean, ut’s witched ahr lad, wi’ her bold een, un’ her forrard ways” (Wuthering Heights, p. 388). Heathcliff, bowled over by their alliance, rages against Cathy as an “accursed witch” (p. 389). As Cathy boldly scorns his insults, Heathcliff marvels, “By God! she’s relentless” (p. 410). Heathcliff sees in Hareton “the ghost of [his] immortal love,” endowing him with androgynous occult power (p. 394). Their fierce collusion drives Heathcliff scared and starving from the hearth of the home (p. 397). Hareton and Cathy’s impending marriage has absorbed the uncanny into a domestic wellspring of power. Awed, Lockwood grumbles, “They are afraid of nothing... Together they would brave Satan and all his legions” (p. 413). Together, perhaps, but as autonomous selves.

The boldness of Emily’s Brontë’s rebellion from self-effacement may not fully register until Wuthering Heights is placed in juxtaposition to the work of her sister Charlotte. The ingénue of Jane Eyre betrays an intense craving for personal freedom, but she is essentially educated into accepting that true self-fulfillment can best be realized in servitude. This teleology is forecasted throughout the novel. Jane, after all, desires, gasps, prays, all but screams for liberty, but failing that, issues “a humbler supplication,” before finally begging for

“a new servitude.”\textsuperscript{37} The supper bell rings and she dutifully returns to the school to resume her occupation. Nothing could be further from the selfish expressions of \textit{Wuthering Heights}, which are passionately, ferociously hurled in claustrophobic spaces between contending parties. The issuance of Jane’s selfish desires, in contrast, amount to nothing more than an ineffectual catharsis, a torrent of mental ejaculations that purge emotional frustration without securing the prize of liberty. While it may be tempting to read the deus ex machina of Rochester’s blindness as enabling a balance of power, the primary function of his impairment is simply to create an exigence for servitude. Rochester’s hypermasculine self-sufficiency failed to provide an object for Jane’s devoted selflessness; his injury realizes that need. Thus, Charlotte Brontë figures Jane’s happiness as the renunciation of her selfish desire for liberty in favor of a truer contentment realized in care for another. In a move that recalls the theories blasted by Carlyle’s “Signs of the Times,” Charlotte resolves Jane’s selfishness and interpersonal duty in tranquility.

Indeed, selfishness, for Charlotte, emerges as a term of excoriating derision. Jane’s legendary outburst (“Unjust!—unjust!”) pours forth in her outrage at the deference paid to Eliza, whose damning sin is simply being “headstrong and selfish” (\textit{Jane Eyre}, pp. 13, 12). Likewise, Jane expresses affection for Rosamond Oliver, for though she is coquettish, indulged from birth, hasty, vain, and unthinking, she falls short of the cardinal enormity of being “worthlessly selfish” (p. 470). The only selfishness that Charlotte approvingly admits turns out to be a specific type of gendered selfishness, the selfishness of Edward Rochester. He freely allows: “the world . . . may call me absurd, selfish—but it does not signify. My very soul demands you: it will be satisfied” (p. 557). Collapsing his selfishness and her happiness, Jane embraces her “dear master”: “I will be your companion—to read to you, to walk with you, to sit with you, to wait on you, to be eyes and hands to you” (p. 556). In short, Jane agrees to transform herself into surrogate appendages for his

damaged form. She finally finds her calling in self-forgetting. So extreme was Jane’s submission, even by the standards of Victorian morality, that Marian Evans penned a tart letter to Charles Bray, lamenting, “All self-sacrifice is good—but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcass.”

The fate of Jane and Rochester throws into relief Emily’s contrasting vision of safeguarded selves. Hareton’s attraction to Cathy, we have seen, is an outgrowth of curiosity, not a desire for appropriation; nevertheless, she guards herself ferociously from his encroachment: “Get away, this moment! How dare you touch me?” (Wuthering Heights, p. 226). And Hareton is no more inclined to submit than Cathy. Having endured her mockery over his ignorance, Hareton gives a “manual check . . . to her saucy tongue,” for “his self-love would endure no further torment” (p. 366). When finally they do negotiate terms of mutual trust, neither party to the arrangement is dissolved or enslaved. Lockwood observes: “I did not doubt the treaty had been ratified on both sides, and the enemies were, thenceforth, sworn allies” (p. 382). Rochester’s imperial arrogation is replaced by the two-party pact of Hareton and Cathy. Their distinct interests, beliefs, histories, and loyalties remain intact—even, at times, at odds—but the preservation of their separate selves is a condition of their happiness, not an impediment. For honoring the value of selfhood, Wuthering Heights might thus be regarded as a black sheep among the novels of the Brontë sisters, but it is a metaphor Emily would have embraced, for it connotes what she most valued: respect for difference.

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ABSTRACT

Thomas J. Joudrey, “‘Well, we must be for ourselves in the long run’: Selfishness and Sociality in Wuthering Heights” (pp. 165–193)

This essay traces a problem that has long dogged criticism of Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights (1847): why is a novel concerned with passionate love for others populated by

characters who are radically selfish? Brontë, drawing on the Byronic tradition and eschewing contemporary exhortations to self-renunciation, validates selfish desire even at the expense of communal responsibility. In so doing, she is forced to contend with the possibility that selfishness risks disabling sociality and marooning the self in shame, isolation, or solipsism. Brontë shows, however, that selfishness and sociality are symbiotically implicated, in that selfishness acts as a precondition of robust sociality. After a series of failures—represented in Lockwood’s shame-saturated retreat into childish sociality, Heathcliff and Catherine’s self-destroying soul fusion, and Linton Heathcliff’s masturbatory selfishness—Brontë ultimately locates a brokered compromise between selfishness and sociality in the relationship of Cathy and Hareton. By maintaining their respective boundaries of self and yet making them selectively permeable, the two demonstrate that susceptibility to interpersonal exchange proves vital to fostering their autonomy as discrete selves. *Wuthering Heights* wages battle on two fronts, excoriating the temptation to enclose the self behind impenetrable barriers, but simultaneously denouncing the other extreme that would eradicate all difference through metaphysical soul-fusion. Brontë posits instead that mature selfhood can only be yielded by a posture of openness to external influences, even as the coherence of the self must be fortified against appropriation by those influences.

Keywords: Emily Brontë; *Wuthering Heights*; selfishness; Charlotte Brontë; sociality