

Duke Maskell issued the first part of a long essay entitled “‘There is only one Brontë’ . . . but which?” in our web magazine *Words in Edgeways* 17, where it can be found, subtitled “Don’t you cant, Nelly Dean”. The magazine then ceased publication before he was ready with the rest. Part Two, “Is Edgar Linton a Horse-Trough? (or a Flowerpot?)” is now on the editorial desk and the question is what to do with it. To begin with here is an airing of the last few pages—long for a column but only a fragment of the Part, on the first page of which is a footnote beginning “This essay is very long, perhaps *too* long. My excuse is that I want to make it *impossible* for anyone who reads it to see the book any more through Nelly’s or Charlotte Brontë’s eyes . . .” The title of the fragment is editorial. Page references are to the original 1907 Everyman edition of *Wuthering Heights*.

Why does Hareton Earnshaw love Heathcliff?

. . . Nevertheless, Heathcliff *does*, in revenge, set out to do to Hareton what Hindley did to him: to degrade him by denying him an education. Making sure that Hareton is an illiterate manual labourer is “the wind” meant to make “one tree . . . grow as crooked as another”. “He bent his malevolence on making him a brute,” Nelly says; and, when Hareton is about twenty, Heathcliff himself boasts, “He’ll never be able to emerge from his bathos of coarseness and ignorance. I’ve got him faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me, and lower; for he takes a pride in his brutishness. I’ve taught him to scorn everything extra-animal as silly and weak.” (187) But what he and Nelly say may be one thing and what the book shows another.

Firstly, there is an odd sort of gap between, on the one hand, what Heathcliff does, and doesn’t do, to Hareton and its effect on him and, on the other, the meaning Heathcliff and Nelly—but nobody else, not even Hareton—find in it. After all, all Heathcliff *does* is employ Hareton as a farm labourer and not pay for him—the son of his old enemy—to receive the education he gives his own son. What is so extraordinarily malevolent—or would have been widely thought so, in rural Yorkshire, at the end of the eighteenth century—in that? Especially when Hareton has, as Nelly says, been made destitute by his father’s gambling and is as completely dependent on Heathcliff as Heathcliff himself was on old Mr Earnshaw? When Hindley dies, the doctor, Mr Kenneth, says Hareton’s “sole chance” is to be allowed “an opportunity of creating some interest in the creditor’s heart, that he may be inclined to deal leniently towards him.” And what, in Kenneth’s eyes and in comparison with what he might have done, does Heathcliff do *but* deal leniently towards him and give him such an opportunity—which, as things turn out, Hareton takes, as such opportunities generally *are* taken, without any party intending it and just because of the natures of those involved.

For all Heathcliff’s talk, what his “revenge” means for Hareton himself—and, I think we can take it, for most of those around him, like the doctor—is that the life he leads is no better than a comfortable, even privileged, form of the life that the vast majority of people everywhere have always led. He’s a farm labourer. He works for his living but the living he gets by his work is good enough for him to grow up “well-made, athletic . . . good-looking in features, and stout and healthy”, “handsome”. And he’s hardly over-worked either. He comes home for his dinner at midday, and when work is done, on Sundays and in the evenings, he “lounges among the moors after rabbits and game”, “follows his shooting expeditions”, is “off with his dogs” for pheasants or is just idle—“could sit a whole evening staring into the fire and dozing”. He has more subtle privileges too. He not only lives in the master’s house but does so as if it’s his own home, on terms which prompt him, quite unselfconsciously, to speak of it as, as Cathy notes, “our house” and “our folk”—as, when Heathcliff sits in with him, why shouldn’t he? When Cathy turns up unexpectedly he feels free to entertain her for the day just as if he *were* the son and heir she mistakes him for. This is a form of revenge the vast majority of people in every land throughout human history would have been only too glad to have had inflicted on them. Fielding wouldn’t have thought it so bad and nor would Lawrence.

And what, quite, as the book shows it, has he lost by being uneducated? Just as Cathy’s “education” and the social “refinement” that accompanies it are only questionably good, so Hareton’s “degradation” is only questionably bad. The education denied him—as we see it in Lockwood, in Linton Heathcliff, in the whole Linton family and in Nelly, their hanger-on—doesn’t look much of a loss, except as it makes one more vulnerable to other people’s snobbery and bad nature. It’s the loss of the benefit Heathcliff expects education to give Linton—something “to preserve the superior and the gentleman in him, above his associates”. Cathy—the good in her—is injured by it—until she learns differently, and better, at *Wuthering Heights*. With the same wind to twist it that twists the rest of the Lintons, she *is* a tree that grows quite as crooked as another. Hareton, by any measure that isn’t merely snobbish, has by comparison grown perfectly straight and upright.

Any degrading effect upon him of his illiteracy and ignorance is much shallower than Heathcliff supposes. He is, it is true, a healthy young animal, but only in the way we would all wish to be—a *not*-Lockwood, *not*-Angel-Clare, *not*-Sue-Brideshead, *not*-Tom-Brangwen-the-younger and *not*-the-Little-Abortion in “Daughters

of the Vicar". We never see anything fairly to be called coarse or brutish in him—unless a liking for lounging, shooting and hunting with dogs be so. The very humiliations he suffers, from being baited about his ignorance by Cathy and Linton, could themselves scarcely be more "extra-animal". And it's not just his own pains he is sensitive to. What could be more considerately and more delicately self-effacing than his attempt to cheer up the thirteen-year old Cathy when what has upset her is the thought of being related to *him!* With a girl to be won, and ready to be won, Hareton *does* emerge, and pretty quickly too, from the bathos Heathcliff boasts he has trapped him in.

So it's no wonder that he so little reciprocates Heathcliff's "malevolence" towards him. That he should *love* Heathcliff though, like a father, is more of a wonder but still, it seems to me, perfectly intelligible.

A child may need other things than the most obvious—what are most obvious to *us*, to modern, enlightened and humanitarian-minded man (*and* woman, woman, perhaps, even more so). We shouldn't over-estimate the importance of kindness. Although we do—other things being equal—earnestly hope that parents will be kind to their children, what children need of their parents isn't limited to, and isn't, perhaps, even, mainly, kindness. There is more than one way of being lacking as a parent, and it is possible for a parent to give a child what the child essentially needs without ever intending to.

Edgar is kind, gentle, affectionate (*supportive?*) towards his daughter but without, apparently, either she meaning much to him or he to her. Heathcliff may not be the brute to Hareton that he is to Linton and Cathy but he certainly bears him an ill will, and is repaid with love, with what seems to be a depth of love that Edgar neither gives nor receives. And what makes the difference, it seems to me, is that, kind and affectionate as Edgar is towards his daughter, he has no power of judgement in him. He doesn't know and can't judge her, as he doesn't know and can't judge himself. He has made her a vicious little snob without any suspicion that that's what she is or that he is responsible. And he doesn't see, is incapable of seeing, what other possibilities there are—as there *are*—in her. If he loves, he does so without knowing what it is he loves. But to love, to see with the eyes of love, surely, *is* to know. Love that doesn't incorporate knowledge is deficient as love. It gives and is returned shallowly. What else?

Whereas Heathcliff, although he shows Hareton ill-will, knows and judges him aright. He recognises his worth, and in such a way that one can fairly say that, though he may not love him, he sees and loves what is worth loving in him—which is by no means something quite apart or so very far off *from* loving him.

Heathcliff wants Cathy to marry Linton. When she comes to see him, Heathcliff, comparing him with Hareton, says he's afraid Cathy

will discover [Linton's] value, and send him to the devil. Now, if it had been Hareton!—Do you know that, twenty times a day, I covet Hareton, with all his degradation? I'd have loved the lad had he been someone else. . . . he's no fool; and I can sympathize with all his feelings, having felt them myself. I know what he suffers now, for instance, exactly: . . . there's this difference; one is gold put to the use of paving-stones, and the other is tin polished to ape a service of silver. *Mine* has nothing valuable about it; yet I shall have the merit of making it go as far as such poor stuff can go. *His* had first-rate qualities . . . more than any but I am aware of. And the best of it is, Hareton is damnably fond of me! . . . [as] the one true friend he has in the world. (186–8)

And then, having himself deliberately made Hareton self-conscious and vulnerable to the other two's spiteful and snobbish baiting—"I've tied his tongue. He'll not venture a single syllable, all the time!"—Heathcliff recoils from the result—"Have you noticed, Catherine, his frightful Yorkshire pronunciation? . . . Do try to behave like a gentleman, now do!"—and "casts a look of singular aversion on the flippan't pair".

The next time Heathcliff sees Hareton suffering for his ignorance at Cathy's hands, his reaction could hardly be more fatherly:

And his agitation precluding futher speech, he advanced hastily to the entrance, where I made way for him to pass. But ere he had crossed the doorstones, Mr Heathcliff, coming up the causeway, encountered him, and laying hold of his shoulder asked:

"What's to do now, my lad?"

"Naught, naught," he said, and broke away to enjoy his grief and anger in solitude.

Heathcliff gazed after him, and sighed.

"It will be odd if I thwart myself," he muttered, unconscious that I was behind him. "But when I look for his father in his face, I find *her* every day more. How the devil is he so like? I can hardly bear to see him." (259)

And then, a bit later, he speaks of "the thousand forms of past associations and ideas he awakens or embodies":

Five minutes ago, Hareton seemed a personification of my youth, not a human being: I felt to him in such a variety of ways, that it would have been impossible to have accosted him rationally. In the first place, his startling likeness to Catherine connected him fearfully with her. . . . well, Hareton's aspect was the ghost of

my immortal love; of my wild endeavours to hold my right; my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish:

So it's not so surprising that when Cathy challenges Heathcliff, it's Heathcliff, his *father*, whom Hareton wants to protect:

“Wisht! wisht!” muttered the young man reproachfully. “I will not hear you speak so to him. Have done.” . . . I heard Hareton sternly check his cousin, on her offering a revelation of her father-in-law's conduct to his father. He said he wouldn't suffer a word to be uttered to him, in his disparagement: if he were the devil, it didn't signify: he would stand by him; and he'd rather she would abuse himself, as she used to, than begin on Mr Heathcliff . . . how would she like *him* to speak ill of her father? (274 and 275)

—or that when Heathcliff leaves the dinner table without eating, Hareton is afraid that “we had grieved him some way” or that, when he tries to get him to rejoin them, Heathcliff—seemingly reciprocating Hareton's concern—“bid me,” Hareton tells Cathy, “be off to you: he wondered how I could want the company of anybody else.” So it's not surprising or unintelligible either that Hareton should grieve for Heathcliff as he does.

It, no doubt, says a lot about Hareton that he *can* love Heathcliff but *that* he can hardly say anything about Heathcliff. Heathcliff says of Edgar as lover and husband—perfectly truly, it seems to me—“It is not in him to be loved like me: how can she love in him what he has not?” Of Edgar, as a father, he might, with just as much (or, if you like, little) truth, say the same.

Duke Maskell

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