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Trabajo Fin de Grado

The figure of the VILLAIN in Emily Brontë's *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

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Introduction

The following essay will tackle the analysis of a controversial issue in one of the most celebrated novels in the history of English literature. The Victorian novel *Wuthering Heights*, written by Emily Brontë in 1847, has often been considered to be an authentic expression of feelings and emotions, not only as regards its treatment of love, but also of hatred and revenge. This explains why studying in detail which character of the novel could be regarded as the most villainous has become so controversial. Several critics have delved into this question and have tried to draw some plausible conclusions. The main aim of this essay will be to undertake a close reading of the novel and rely on the ideas put forward by some of these critics in order to show which characters in the novel can actually be labelled as ‘villains’ and why.

Analysis

The figure of the villain in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* has been extensively analysed over the years by many different critics, whose final conclusions have widely differed from one another. Whereas some authors definitely support the idea that Heathcliff is the only possible villain in the novel –this is actually the most common belief, although not necessarily the most accurate one– some others prefer to reckon that there are other characters in the story that also include villainous traits in their personalities or that can definitely be considered to be the actual villains. The figure of the villain in *Wuthering Heights* has become a very controversial issue, quite difficult to clarify since more than one character in the story might be labelled as the proper villain of the story. Even though the figure of Heathcliff, due to his cruel behaviour and attitude towards other characters, has been for long regarded as the most evident diabolical representation of evil, and thus of the villain *per se*, a wide range of analyses have focused their attention on other characters, either apparently passive or active in the narrative. This is actually bound to have some effect on the reader's interpretation of the story, which is also affected by the special method employed in the writing of the novel, "a method which combines the objectivity of impersonal narrative with the subjectivity of the first person", as Graham Holderness (1985: 5) suggests.

The combination of all of these narrative strategies has led many critics to conclude that it is the figure of the practically omnipresent Nelly that should be regarded as the real villain of the novel. This theory was especially defended by James Hafley (1958: 199), who asserted that "Ellen Dean is the villain of the piece, one of the consummate villains in English literature." However, readers should always bear in mind that, even though she may be one of the most villainous characters in the story, she cannot be said to be the only one. Despite all the theories that have been developed,

what is fairly clear is that the figure of the villain in this nineteenth-century novel has become quite a complex issue, whose discussion very much depends on the perspective from which the reader analyses the story. Readers are on the whole required to play a very active role, both in the interpretation and the comprehension of this story. Emily Brontë used a combination of narrative techniques to write a novel which is full of villainous characters. As Marianne Thormählen argues:

> The varying views regarding the relative degrees of evil exhibited by the characters in *Wuthering Heights* reflect the issue, from the early condemnations of Heathcliff to the twentieth-century attempts to assign the villain's role to Nelly Dean (or even Lockwood). (1997: 183-84)

On the one hand, Heathcliff is presented from the very beginning of the novel as a stranger who arrives and disrupts the harmony of a good family, which is brutally affected by his destructive actions. This sudden arrival is described by the main narrator, Nelly, in the following way:

> So, from the very beginning, he bred bad feeling in the house; and at Mrs. Earnshaw's death, which happened in less than two years after, the young master had learned to regard his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges; and he grew bitter with brooding over these injuries. (Brontë 1994: 46)

According to Nelly, Heathcliff's arrival and presence is the source of tension and a rather negative atmosphere in the house. To quote Thormählen's words (1997: 184), "The child Heathcliff brings disorder into a previously well-organized family, disrupting family ties and forming a focus of extreme emotion." On the other hand, Catherine also contributes to breaking this harmony, especially as regards the social and sexual conventions of the Victorian age. What Holderness (1985: 27-8) actually suggests is that both "Catherine and Heathcliff are breaking up the order of what we take to be a fairly common Victorian setting". As a consequence of Heathcliff's

passionate love for Catherine Earnshaw and this girl's final preference for Edgar Linton, Heathcliff flees from the Heights and comes back some years later, transformed into a completely different man and cruelly thirsting for revenge. The moment he becomes aware that Catherine has agreed to marry Edgar has become one of the most often quoted episodes from the novel. While the analysis of this excerpt has led many readers and critics to see Heathcliff, not as the villain, but rather as the sufferer, as the victim of the story, Nelly's passive reaction towards Catherine's confession has turned the former into a rather ambivalent and villainous figure:

> Ere this speech ended, I became sensible of Heathcliff's presence. Having noticed a slight movement, I turned my head, and saw him rise from the bench, and steal out noiselessly. He had listened till he heard Catherine say it would degrade her to marry him, and then he stayed no further. (80)

Nelly knows Heathcliff is overhearing their conversation and does nothing to stop Catherine from talking. It is this malevolent attitude on the part of Nelly that has made some critics conclude that Nelly is not a merely passive narrator, but rather a most manipulative and devilish figure. It was the suffering and humiliation that Heathcliff put up with for years that eventually forced him to escape, which has prompted many readers to identify and empathise with him, a victim whose evil actions are nothing but his only way to survive and cope with pain and frustration. On his unexpected return, Heathcliff is described as a new and different man:

> Now fully revealed by the fire and candlelight, I was amazed, more than ever, to behold the transformation of Heathcliff. He had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man, beside whom, my master seemed quite slender and youth-like. His upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr. Linton's; it looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. A half-civilised ferocity lurked yet in the

> depressed brows and eyes full dignified: quite divested of roughness, though too stern for grace. (92)

According to Nelly's description, Heathcliff reappears completely changed, both physically and mentally. His expression seems to suggest an intense and fearful savagery that the housemaid cannot but compare with the physical and psychological inferiority of her master, Edgar.

Heathcliff's atrocious revenge is not only prompted by Catherine's decision to marry Edgar, but also by the ill-treatment he received from other members of the family, who in one way or another deprived him of a happy and peaceful childhood. Accordingly, some authors have asserted that Heathcliff should not be seen as the villain, but rather as the victim since, as Edgar F. Shannon (1959: 103) claims, "His whole life has been a struggle against inimical forces to maintain his identity and to achieve his overwhelming human need for fulfilment in love." This definitely turns him into a very cruel man, whose only aim in life is to make sure that those who made him suffer in the past now pay the price –he even blames Edgar Linton for Catherine's death and accuses Hindley of having been the source of much of his childhood suffering. As Edgar Shannon (1959: 395) goes on to say, "Heathcliff's cruelty, like Lockwood's to the dream-child, stems from isolation and misery. Heathcliff is the victim instead of the originator of evil." His hostility is perfectly brought to the fore in the two following excerpts, where Heathcliff discloses some of his malevolent plans and intentions. Firstly, he is much willing to take a violent revenge on Hindley: "I'm trying to settle how I shall 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!" (64). Secondly, he dreams of brutally attacking Edgar: "I'll crush his ribs in like a rotten hazel-nut before I cross the threshold! If I don't floor him now, I shall murder him some time; so, as you value his existence, let me get at him!" (108). Those who claim that Heathcliff is the villain of this dramatic story mainly

rely on his numerous evil and sometimes meaningless aggressive actions, often carried out in cold blood. The way in which he behaves towards Edgar Linton's sister, Isabella, to give but one example, also shows him as a very perverse man who married her, not out of love, but rather to take his own personal revenge on Edgar. Similarly, his treatment of Hareton as if he were a mere servant can also be taken as an example of Heathcliff's villainy, since he addresses him as if he were an idiot and does not take care of him, simply because he is Hindley's son. Heathcliff's manipulative personality allows him to have everyone and everything under control. He can easily intimidate and terrorise the other characters, who sometimes refer to him as if he were a devilish figure, not at all human. This can be seen in the two following quotations from the novel, when Isabella and Edgar respectively speak about him: "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (124); "we are eternally divided; and should she really wish to oblige me, let her persuade the villain she has married to leave the country" (132).

Some other authors have considered Edgar to be the hero of the story and, consequently, when Heathcliff reappears again after having been missing for three years, they see him as the main obstacle to the former's peace and harmony: "'What! The gipsy – the ploughboy?' he cried. 'Why did you not say so to Catherine?'" (91). As Holderness (1985: 13) argues, "It would perhaps be more orthodox to regard Edgar Linton – who has all the conventional requirements – as the hero, and Heathcliff as the villain of the piece." Yet, it is also clear that the novel also strives to depict Heathcliff, not only as a dangerous villainous character, but also as an unfairly punished man who, having suffered for many years everybody's indifference and contempt, eventually turns to violence to demand retribution. As John Hagan (1967: 312) has asserted, "The decisive fact is Emily Brontë's ability to convince us that cruelty is not innate in the

characters of her hero and heroine, but is the consequence of their extreme suffering." According to this, the selfish character of Catherine Earnshaw might also be regarded as a villain in certain parts of the novel. If some readers finally consider Heathcliff to be the most villainous character of the story, it is also true that he cannot be regarded as the one and only villain in the novel. Heathcliff is the novel's hero par excellence. Even Lockwood makes this clear when he inadvertently says, "Yes: I remember her hero had run off, and never been heard of for three years; and the heroine was married" (88). The novel is also full of moments when the true nature of his soul is revealed: it is undeniable that Heathcliff is full of hatred, but over and above everything, he is full of unrequited and tragic love. The following quotation is an intense and sincere expression of Heathcliff's feelings for Catherine:

> Two words would comprehend my future – *death* and *hell*: existence, after losing her, would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton's attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years as I could in a day. (134)

If the real nature of Heathcliff's feelings and the real reason why he finally acts in such a violent and cruel way are taken into account, Heathcliff cannot be labelled as the real villain of *Wuthering Heights*; an authentic villain is not capable of loving anyone, least of all the way Heathcliff loves Catherine.

This explains why, for some other critics, the true villain of *Wuthering Heights* is Ellen Dean. It is clear that Nelly plays a really important role in the story, even though she may at first be described as a merely instrumental character, whose main task is to narrate to Lockwood (and thus to readers as well) the stories of both families, that is, what happened in the Heights and in the Grange before his arrival. Nelly is much more than a mere narrator, since she is also part of the story itself, no matter how insignificant and passive her role may at first seem to be. As John K. Mathison (1956:

106-7) claims, “Nelly Dean is not a mere technical device: we cannot forget as the story progresses that we are hearing it from her rather from the author. She is a minute interpreter.” In other words, not only does she apparently tell the story objectively, as a mere observer, but she also interprets and narrates it in quite subjective terms. Moreover, she witnesses the most important events in the novel, if not all of them, which gives her this privileged position. Nelly narrates all of those happenings, even though on many occasions they seem to have nothing to do with her. Nelly’s ambivalent and fascinating nature has been described by Carl R. Woodring as follows (1957: 302): “She also acts attentive witness, narrator, and elucidator of past events, (…) not only plays an active role economically designed, but also commands interests as a personality.” Accordingly, Nelly should not be regarded as a mere subjective internal narrator, but rather as a complex character with a determining role in the story that she is narrating. As Gideon Shunami (1973: 449) argues, “Nelly lacks the qualities and qualifications necessary for her to be a reliable narrator,” mainly because she portrays events, not only as she interprets them, but also as she wants the rest to perceive them. It therefore becomes clear that Nelly’s narration is often biased and by no means neutral. She is a subjective narrator whose main interest is to make readers identify and feel a greater degree of empathy towards certain characters. Moreover, she always strives to depict herself as the good and loyal servant.

In the opinion of a number of critics, Nelly should not be considered to be the only non-reliable narrator in the novel. For example, Shunami (1973: 451) goes as far as to affirm that neither Nelly nor any of the other narrators in the novel, such as Lockwood and some other characters at some points, should actually be taken at face value. What he mainly suggests is that the reader should not completely believe any of the voices that appear in the novel, which somehow discloses Brontë’s intention to let

readers (whether or not influenced by the different narrators) decide for themselves which character is the villain and which is the hero. On the one hand, Nelly's unreliability and subjectivity imply that she drives her narration as she pleases, including personal opinions and descriptions mostly based on the way in which she wants Lockwood to perceive everything, in order to guide and condition both Lockwood and the reader's viewpoint. An example of this manipulation could be the following quotation, in which Nelly fondly refers to the second Catherine:

> The twelve years, continued Mrs. Dean, following that dismal period, were the happiest of my life: my greatest troubles in their passage rose from our little lady's trifling illnesses, which she had to experience in common with all children, rich and poor. (164)

Her unreliability also resides in her constant interventions in the story, which grant her an active role, not just a passive one as she pretends to show. As Hafley argues (1958: 204), "she will of course tell it [the story] so as to present herself in the genteel and upright role she fancies; she blames herself for what has happened only at times when she can be sure of his [Lockwood's] sympathizing with her." However, it must also be noted that Nelly can at times be accused of being rather ignorant, incapable of understanding the people around her, or of recognizing that her acts and resolutions actually influence the story (Shapiro 1969: 288). In fact, as was stated before, Nelly can be regarded as that character that is present in almost all the important situations, if not playing an active role, at least as an observer.

In many scenes readers are able to see that the characters, especially the first Catherine, tend to trust Nelly and consequently share their secrets with her. Catherine's confidence in Nelly is clearly brought to the fore on several occasions. For example, Nelly is quite aware of Catherine's reliance on her when she says: "She did bring herself, finally, to confess, and to confide in me: there was not a soul else that she

might fashion into an adviser" (69). Cathy will also ask Nelly to keep a secret at a very specific moment: "'Nelly, will you keep a secret for me?'" (77). Nelly is consequently shown as being quite influential; it is undeniable that she should not be seen as a simple and detached narrator. To quote Woodring's words (1957: 302), "Nelly is the natural recipient of natural and unnatural confession." All of this allows her to be in possession of all the important information necessary to control both her master's lives and her own narration, and this is one of the reasons why she might be regarded as the villain or, at least, as one of the main villains in the novel. To insist on an example previously given, when Catherine tells Nelly that she is going to marry Edgar because having anything to do with Heathcliff would degrade her, it is possible to observe that Nelly acts passively in order to subtly change the course of the events as she fancies (80). Nelly's silence allows Heathcliff to become aware of how selfish and arrogant Catherine is, which triggers off his subsequent revenge and transformation. It might therefore be concluded that Nelly can be blamed for the impending tragedy, since she is partly responsible for Heathcliff's violent reaction. Nelly is aware of Heathcliff's presence, but chooses to say nothing instead of informing Catherine that Heathcliff is overhearing their full conversation. It is therefore clear that, as John Fraser (1965: 231) asserts, "Her intervention, whether by speaking or by remaining silent, has more or less disastrous consequences." John Mathison (1956: 122) has also commented on this scene. According to him, "Nelly's major failure (though few could have done better) is in the decisive episode during which Cathy reveals her intention of marrying Linton, […]. Nelly dissembles her knowledge of Heathcliff's presence, but worse, her knowledge of his departure at the worst possible moment." This moment could be taken as clear evidence of Nelly's villainous character, which, according to James Hafley (1958: 202), could in turn be put down to the fact that she is not really part of the

Earnshaw family. In contrast with this, Nelly systematically tries to depict herself in quite positive terms; she shows herself as a good woman who does not do any harm and wishes the members of the two families well. For instance, she often pretends to be fond of Catherine, even though on many occasions it is obvious that she does not really like her. The following quotation could be used as an example of her pretending to be worried about Cathy: "In the midst of my agitation, I was sincerely glad to observe that Catherine's arms had fallen relaxed, and her head hung down" (145).

Another interesting idea which James Hafley (1958: 212) puts forward is that "She [Nelly] has, of course, not told this long story to Lockwood without a very good reason; he is gullible, he is weak, he is disposed to like her." In other words, Lockwood becomes the perfect recipient of her narration, and also the perfect mediator between her and the readers. Her possession of useful information, her constant interventions, both in the story itself and in the way in which she narrates it, and the way in which she renders the figure of Lockwood impartial can be taken as the most significant reasons for considering Nelly to be the actual villain of *Wuthering Heights*. Moreover, unlike Heathcliff, she does not seem to have any reasons to be so manipulative, and even cruel, towards the other characters' feelings other than her own selfish interests. This is likely to bring about feelings of annoyance on the part of many readers; after having read the whole novel one cannot but consider the possibility of thinking that appearances can be, and in fact are, absolutely deceptive.

Besides, it must be taken into account that the frame narrator through whom the reader actually gets to know the story is Lockwood, who also plays quite an important role, since he mediates and filters Nelly's narration to the readers. Even though Nelly can be regarded as the most important narrator, it must not be forgotten that, in the end, it is Lockwood's narration that readers really *hear*. The bulk of the story is of course

narrated by Nelly, who tells it to Lockwood. However, the final narration comes to the reader through him and thanks to him, not her. This is one of the reasons why the figure of Lockwood should also be given special attention. In contrast, some critics, such as Peter Miles (1990: 90), have claimed that "Lockwood is not the final interpreter." In other words, Lockwood should not be regarded as the most important voice or the actual and final interpreter of the story, but rather as a normal, and apparently objective, mediator. Gideon Shunami (1973: 464) has reached a similar conclusion when affirming that "The account, in any case, is Nelly's; and Lockwood's significance is simply as a paradoxical illustration, through his innocence and simplicity, of Nelly's unreliability." To put it differently, Lockwood is used by Brontë to subtly hide Nelly's control of events, at the same time as this control is in a way also made evident. However, although Lockwood should not actually be considered to be the proper villain of the story –unlike the other characters in the novel, he does not even take part in the events that occurred in and between the two families– he also influences the readers' perspectives since it is actually through his words that the story is known. It is not until Chapter IV that Nelly begins her account. Moreover, over the entire narration Lockwood introduces comments that make readers aware of his constant presence. To give but one example: "I am too weak to read; yet I feel as if I could enjoy something interesting. Why not have up Mrs. Dean to finish her tale? I can recollect its chief incidents as far as she had gone" (88). In addition, the whole story is introduced by Lockwood himself (44), who is also the one who closes the novel (279). He has also been said to encompass some villainous traits. Arnold Saphiro (1969: 289), for instance, has emphasised that "Lockwood too can become violent, like a cornered animal, when he thinks he is threatened", but the reader must always bear in mind that this, as was argued before, does not turn him into the absolute villain of the story, and that his

villainy is not at all comparable to Heathcliff's or Nelly's. Some authors have contrasted Nelly's potential villainy with Lockwood's by comparing their different ways of narrating events. V.C. Knoefflmacher (1989: 16) reached the conclusion that "Whereas she [Nelly] tries to convert her listeners to her own point of view, Lockwood is content to take us across the threshold of a structure we are then free to scrutinize more thoroughly on our own. Lockwood's chief asset for the reader, therefore, remains his initial receptivity." In other words, Nelly's attitude and narrative skills focus on convincing the reader to believe what she is saying, and are used to depict herself in quite positive terms and control, to some extent, readers' perceptions. On the contrary, Lockwood just informs of what he discovers and gets to know as Nelly's narration advances, always reproducing what others have stated. As Carl Woodring states, "The author [Brontë] manipulates and tolerates Lockwood more for structure and plot than for theme" (1957: 302). Therefore, Lockwood's 'villainy' could be put down to the fact that he is the real narrator of the events, even though those events belong in a story that is in turn narrated to him by another person: Nelly. Nelly's control over her narration and the other characters of the story somehow prevents readers and critics from seeing Lockwood as the ultimate villain of *Wuthering Heights*, even though he can sometimes show some villainous traits.

Other characters of the novel could also be analysed as regards the controversial figure of the villain in *Wuthering Heights* so that a final and more accurate conclusion can be reached. Even though the previously discussed figures of Heathcliff, Ellen Dean and Lockwood are the ones endowed with more remarkable villainous traits, almost all the other characters in the novel can also be said to embody some evil and egoistic attitudes, whose consequences are disastrous for the others and the unravelling of the story in general. The selfish personality of the first Catherine, who only worries about

her own social and economical status and does not really care about the others' feelings or needs, is actually a sign of her evil nature, which consequently turns her into another kind of villain since her actions cannot always be regarded as kind or even logical. Furthermore, the way in which she sometimes treats the others reveals a malicious nature that could also be used to label Catherine as a villain, as when she annoyingly exclaims to Edgar Linton: "You are one of those things that are ever found when least wanted, and when you are wanted, never!" (118).

Whereas, as is argued by Arnold Saphiro (1969: 289), Heathcliff clearly leads the villainous actions in the second half of the novel, Catherine reveals herself as one of the main villains in the first one. Saphiro literally states that "In the opening half of *Wuthering Heights* Emily Brontë shows how Cathy's selfishness and her attempts to compromise with society's dictates keep her from fulfilling her love for Heathcliff" (289). What this critic basically means is that Catherine's careless and devilish actions trigger off what happens afterwards. Thormählen also reaches a similar conclusion:

> Catherine […] destroys the lives of the two men who love her; brought ruin and misery on her sister-in-law; and left her small nephew helpless in his drunken father's hands when removing his nurse […] If Catherine had been able to register any valid desire or sentiment apart from her own, the effects would not have been so horrendous. (1997: 187)

In other words, Catherine could have avoided all the distressing events that followed her previously mentioned decision to marry Edgar, which is actually the first of her egotistic and inconsiderate actions. Moreover, there is a moment when she even clearly states that she does not really love Edgar, which implies that she is marrying him for spurious reasons, not for love. In the following quotation Nelly makes Catherine's selfish nature and real and evil preoccupations evident:

> ‘I’m very far from jesting, Miss Catherine,’ I replied. ‘You love Mr. Edgar because he is handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich, and loves you. The last, however, goes for nothing: you would love him without that, probably; and with it you wouldn’t, unless he possessed the four former attractions.’ ‘No, to be sure not: I should only pity him – hate him, perhaps, if he were ugly, and a clown.’ (78)

This episode discloses Catherine’s real interest in marrying Edgar. She is not at all in love with him, nor even interested in his persona. However, his wealth endows him with a fairly good economic and social status, which will have a most positive effect on Catherine after their marriage. There is a key moment when Catherine makes clear what she is really pursuing when marrying Edgar: “And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband” (78). John Hagan’s conclusion (1967: 310) also proves to be true. As he puts it, “It remains true, of course, that Catherine’s acceptance of Edgar’s proposal is the necessary condition for all that happens subsequently, but we cannot ignore that part in her fate played, however unwittingly, by Heathcliff’s wounded pride and ambition.” Readers must therefore bear in mind these basic and fundamental implications, which actually turn these two figures –Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw– into the two great villains of the story. However, as has on the other hand been asserted by some critics, it is fairly clear that there is more to these two characters. Whereas some of Catherine’s actions and reactions can bring about feelings of contempt, some other moments in the novel show her as a passionate woman who is really in love with Heathcliff. This is clearly shown in the following quotation, where she openly expresses her dependence and devotion for Heathcliff:

> My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff’s miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great 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. (81)

Catherine is here depicted as a sensitive human being, able to love and think of others, and the same is true of Heathcliff. This is why some critics, among whom John Hagan could be included (1967: 323), insist on the idea that "We recognize in them the tragedy of passionate natures whom intolerable frustration and loss have stripped of their humanity." To put it differently, most readers are prone to understand their devil behaviour and to justify it on account of their previous suffering and personal troubles.

Similarly, Hindley's violent acts, especially against Heathcliff, can also be regarded as signs of his being another villain. If he had not hurt and ill-treated Heathcliff the way he did it in the past, Heathcliff might have never turned into that wicked and villainous character. Therefore, Hindley, although a secondary character, nonetheless plays a really important role in the story. His cruel behaviour towards Heathcliff, together with Catherine's rejection, undoubtedly triggered off Heathcliff's subsequent vile actions. Judging by this, Hindley could also be regarded as a villain, since his behaviour affects the others' acts and reactions, especially Heathcliff's. However, a rather different interpretation is also possible. According to John Hagan (1967: 322), "as in Heathcliff's case, Hindley's 'tyrannical and evil conduct' is the direct result of his overwhelming sorrow." To put it differently, his villainy is perfectly understandable, and somehow justifiable, if readers take into consideration what happened to him in the past and the way he felt before he started showing this cruel behaviour. To some extent, his father's preference for Heathcliff when the latter becomes a new member of the Earnshaw family arouses in Hindley feelings of rejection and hostility that become rather visible in his attitude towards Heathcliff, even towards Catherine, since his sister soon seems to develop quite an intimate relationship with the intruder. As regards the way in which he treats his son Hareton –he often

shouts at him as if he did not really care about his son's feelings– it is clear that this cannot be fully justified. Consequently, Hindley also embodies tyrannical traits that might invite to regard him as yet another villain, although not as remarkable as others. All in all, Hindley's villainous potential makes it clear that every single character in the story should be analysed from this perspective.

One should not to forget that the true protagonists of this story are Heathcliff and Catherine, and that one of the reasons why their love is not finally consummated is Edgar Linton, who could therefore also be regarded as a villain when looking at things from this angle. He undoubtedly contributes to destroying Heathcliff's happiness and, consequently, also prompts Heathcliff's revengeful devil actions, even though, more often than not, he may seem to adopt a rather passive attitude. Moreover, his callous attitude towards his sister Isabella after she marries Heathcliff – he refuses to help her out of that horrible situation when she mostly needs him– shows Edgar as a rather cruel man, also capable of feeling no mercy whatsoever. Edgar's words when he refuses to give Isabella a hand speak for themselves:

> 'She went off her own accord,' answer the master; 'she had a right to go if she pleased. Trouble me no more about her. Hereafter she is only my sister in name: not because I disown her, but because she has disowned me.' (122)

In contrast with all these negative actions, which can easily turn Edgar into yet another villainous figure, Nelly does her best to portray him as the perfect man and master. Thus, throughout the novel, there are also numerous instances when he can be regarded as a kind and well-meaning man. He often forgets about himself. He only has eyes and thoughts for Catherine; he is truly in love with her, even though he knows his love is unrequited. As can be seen in the following example, even though Catherine can be most unkind towards him, he always comes back to her:

> The soft thing looked askance through the window: he possessed the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half killed, or a bird half eaten. Ah, I thought, there will be no saving him: he's doomed, and flies to his fate! And so it was: he turned abruptly, hastened into the house again, shut the door behind him; and when I went in (…) the quarrel had merely effected a closer intimacy. (73)

Although it is evident that he can also be cruel and his nature is not that soft and pure, he is mostly portrayed as a good person with some imperfections, resulting from his own frustrated feelings and emotions.

Finally, there is another character in *Wuthering Heights* that could also be regarded as a villain: Linton. As he is Heathcliff's son, it seems only logical that his inner nature should be as cruel and nasty as his father's, which accounts for his inhumane treatment of Hareton. Linton is rather unfair to Hareton, whom he even humiliates at some points by laughing at him and at his ignorance and lack of education: "Linton giggled –the first appearance of mirth he had exhibited. 'He does not know his letters,' he said to his cousin. 'Could you believe in the existence of such a colossal dunce?'" (189). It is Linton's vile attitude against poor Hareton that basically constitutes the core of his villainy, which, although not as remarkable as that of other characters, nonetheless deserves some mention. Furthermore, he could be paradoxically accused of being even worse than the other villains previously discussed since, after all, Hareton –together with the second Catherine– is the only character in the novel that does not seem to have an evil nature. Hareton and Cathy are the only ones who finally survive –maybe as some sort of recompense for their innocence and resilience– and manage to live happily together at the end of the story, in clear contrast to the bad end that awaits the rest of the characters. Both are ill-treated by those around them, and are portrayed in rather good terms by the narrator, who, when describing Catherine for the

first time, goes as far as to say: “She was the most winning thing that ever brought sunshine into a desolate house” (165).

In conclusion, even though the figure of the temperamental and violent Heathcliff has often been regarded as the one and only possible villain in *Wuthering Heights*, mainly because some of his actions are so cruel and shocking that no plausible explanation can be found to justify them, things are not as easy and straightforward as they may seem at first sight. The apparent passivity of Nelly, made evident whenever she wants to pretend that she is just an observer, becomes more and more conspicuous and subversive as the novel progresses. Similarly, other characters such as Lockwood, the frame narrator, the first Catherine, Hindley, and even Edgar Linton, also embody important evil traits, which makes it even more difficult to find out who the actual villain is. One should never trust appearances: even though Heathcliff is the character whose actions appear to be most demoniac and devious, and he only dies when his revenge has been completely accomplished, it is nonetheless true that he cannot be regarded as a villain who dedicates his life to tormenting the others out of sheer pleasure. In fact, as was explained before, he had very good reasons to become a villain; he only cared about Catherine, for whom he would have killed, even died, but she, like the other members of the family, finally betrayed him. As regards Nelly’s perversity, it cannot be so easily understood and justified, as is the case of Lockwood and Catherine Earnshaw’s. To sum up, almost all the characters in the novel, with the exception of Hareton and the second Catherine, contain a certain degree of perverseness, which could be deemed more or less important, depending on the perspective from which it is analysed. In short, what readers should bear in mind when reading the novel is that beauty in *Wuthering Heights* –as in life in general– is always in the eyes of the beholder.

Conclusion

The analysis carried out in this essay has made it clear how important it is to look at every single detail when studying the concept and figure of the villain in *Wuthering Heights*. As has been stated, many critics have tackled this aspect and put forward their own theories, most of which conclude that Heathcliff is the most villainous character in the novel. However, these opinions have considerably changed over the years, mainly because they have been pitted against those offered by other critics, who have considered Nelly to be the true villain in this story. This essay has studied the different characters in Emily Brontë's novel to prove that no simple conclusion can be reached, since most of these characters can at some points be regarded as villains. In other words, one of the merits of this novel is to show that truth is never monolithic, that the same character, the same situation, can be interpreted in many different ways, depending on the reader's biases and perspective.

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