In the opening chapter of this book, I observed that a Horneyan approach has led me to see that in realistic literature there are almost bound to be disparities between representation and interpretation, mimesis and rhetoric, and that I have also come to realize that these disparities can be either exacerbated or reduced by the choice of narrative technique. They are exacerbated by omniscient narrators, who by convention are supposed to be authoritative, and diminished by first person narration, in which interpretations and judgments express the point of view of a character. First person narration may not eliminate the tensions between rhetoric and mimesis, however, since the perspectives of self-serving narrators, such as Pip and Jane Eyre, often seem to be endorsed by the implied authors. As we have just seen in the case of The Awakening, in addition to disparities between rhetoric and mimesis, there may also be inconsistencies within the rhetoric. Chopin presents Edna from a variety of perspectives that cannot be reconciled with each other.

A comparison of Wuthering Heights with the other novels we have studied will show just how much difference narrative technique can make. Because Emily Brontë employs multiple narrators, none of whom is endowed with authority, I do not find a disparity between rhetoric and mimesis in this novel. Indeed, it is very difficult to locate the implied author's rhetorical stance. She seems to have disappeared from this novel, much as Flaubert thought he had done from Madame Bovary. As in The Awakening, characters are presented from a variety of perspectives, leaving us with a sense of bewilderment, but Wuthering Heights avoids thematic confusion through its impressionistic technique. Each of its narrators gives us an ex parte account of events, but since no perspective is privileged, its limitations belong to the character rather than to the implied author, and we do not have to reconcile it with the others. Emily Brontë had at least as many inner conflicts as Kate Chopin, but
she found a way of giving expression to the different sides of her personality that enriches rather than damages her art.

Before we examine the novel’s narrative technique, we must first consider the characters whose story is being told. Unlike most critics, I believe that Heathcliff and Cathy are imagined human beings whose behavior can be understood in motivational terms. One of the major questions in both the novel and the criticism is what kind of a being is Heathcliff. In the novel, the question is posed most directly by Isabella: “Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?” (ch. 13). When she flees from the Heights, Isabella calls him an “incarnate goblin” and a “monster” and wishes that “he could be blotted out of creation” (ch. 17). Nelly replies, “Hush, hush! He’s a human being” and urges Isabella to “be more charitable.” Nelly is the chief proponent of Heathcliff’s human status. Watching his agony at the death of Catherine, she thinks, “Poor wretch!... you have a heart and nerves the same as your brother men!” (ch. 16). Near the end, however, even Nelly wonders if Heathcliff is “a ghoul, or a vampire” (ch. 34).

The issue for critics has not been whether Heathcliff is a ghoul or a human being, but whether he is a realistically drawn figure or some other kind of character about whom it is inappropriate to ask motivational questions. A common view has been that as a character in a Gothic romance, he is an archetype, symbol, or projection of the unconscious who is not supposed to be understood as though he were a person. I believe that Emily Brontë meant Heathcliff to be perceived as a human being, since despite the aura of mystery with which she surrounds the question of his nature, she is at pains to make his behavior seem naturalistically motivated. As Frances Russell Hart observes, the Gothic represents not “a flight from novel to romance,” but “a naturalizing of myth and romance into novel” (1968, 103). The central experience it offers is a “dreadful, sublime shock to one’s complacently enlightened idea of human character and the reality to which it belongs” (88). In order for the Gothic to achieve this shock, its characters must be imagined human beings whose behavior, however strange, is psychologically credible.

Heathcliff retains his human status, however fiendlike he becomes, because Emily Brontë keeps telling us that he has been victimized and that his viciousness arises from his misery. Perhaps the strongest evidence that she meant us to see his cruelty as a natural phenomenon is the fact that several characters articulate the principle that bad treatment leads
to vindictiveness and several others illustrate its operation. Even the pampered, innocuous Linton girls turn savage after a brief exposure to Heathcliff. After her escape, Isabella lusts for revenge. Sounding much like Heathcliff, she wants to “take an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth; for every wrench of agony [to] return a wrench, [to] reduce him to my level” (ch. 17). And Nelly observes of the young Catherine that “the more hurt she gets, the more venomous she grows” (ch. 30). Abuse quickly generates powerful vindictive impulses in these girls, and their sufferings are trivial compared to what Heathcliff endured in childhood.

I believe that the failure to understand Heathcliff as a person has two main sources. The first is that many critics have entertained a view of the novel as predominantly metaphysical, lyric, or Gothic that has prevented them from even attempting to make sense of Heathcliff’s behavior. The second is that Heathcliff’s love for Cathy and his vindictiveness toward the Earnshaws and the Lintons have seemed so extreme as to be beyond the pale of human nature. Critics have deemed Heathcliff unrealistic, in effect, because his behavior has escaped their comprehension. There is always the possibility that the author’s intuitive grasp of psychological phenomena is deeper than our conceptual understanding. We can recover Emily Brontë’s intuitions, I believe, with the aid of Karen Horney, assisted by R. D. Laing and Abraham Maslow. Heathcliff’s vindictiveness and devotion to Cathy are both intelligible as defensive reactions to the deprivation and abuse to which he was subjected in childhood.

According to Abraham Maslow (1970), all humans have a set of basic needs that must be reasonably well met if they are to develop in a healthy way. In the order of their potency, these are physiological survival needs, needs for safety, for love and belonging, for esteem, and for self-actualization. Frustration of the basic needs arrests development and leads individuals to develop defensive strategies for making up their deficiencies. If we consider Heathcliff’s childhood with the basic needs in mind, it is evident that he was severely deprived. Mr. Earnshaw finds him at about the age of six “starving and houseless, and as good as dumb in the streets of Liverpool” (ch. 4). He appears to have been abandoned by his family and to have lost, or never fully acquired, the art of language. When Mr. Earnshaw picks him up, his very survival is in jeopardy. He
has been living, for we know not how long, in a state that is radically
devoid of safety, love and belonging, and esteem.

When Mr. Earnshaw brings him home, Heathcliff has a protector at
last; but he meets with contempt and rejection from the other members
of the household. Everyone refers to him as "it"; and Nelly, the children,
and Mrs. Earnshaw would all like him to disappear. He gradually gains
a place in the family, but it is never a secure one, and he is always
an object of hostility. When Mr. Earnshaw dies, Heathcliff is entirely
dependent on Hindley, who hates him. He has only one relationship that
makes him feel secure, and that is with Cathy. It is no wonder that he
clings to her with such intensity.

Heathcliff is a severely deprived, frequently abused child who devel-
ops all three of Horney’s interpersonal strategies of defense. The very
reserved Lockwood describes him as “a man who seemed more exagger-
atedly reserved than myself” (ch. 1). In addition to his exaggerated
withdrawal, Heathcliff displays extreme forms of aggression and compli-
ance. All the suggestions of demonism, vampirism, and ghoulishness
derive from his unrelenting vindictiveness and his sadistic delight in the
suffering of his victims. His frantic dependency on Cathy is one of the
most intense emotions in all of literature. It is so extreme that many
critics feel it can be explained only in metaphysical terms. Unlike most
of the people Horney describes, Heathcliff avoids inner conflict not by
subordinating any of his trends, but by a process of compartmentaliza-
tion. He moves toward Cathy, against Hindley and the Lintons, and
away from everyone else.

Heathcliff’s initial defense is detachment. When Mr. Earnshaw brings
him to the Heights, he protects himself against the hostility he meets
there by trying to be invulnerable: “He seemed a sullen, patient child,”
says Nelly, “hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hin-
dley’s blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved
him only to draw in a breath, and open his eyes as if he had hurt himself
by accident, and nobody was to blame” (ch. 4). Heathcliff is showing
them, in effect, that they cannot hurt him. His only way of gaining a
sense of control in a hostile world is by not reacting to what is done to
him. He follows the same pattern during his illness: whereas Cathy and
Hindley harass Nelly terribly, Heathcliff is “as uncomplaining as a lamb,
though hardness, not gentleness, made him give little trouble.” He gives
little trouble because he does not expect anyone to be concerned about
him, and it is important for him to feel that he is not dependent on them.

Heathcliff practices a resignation to suffering that removes him from the power of other people and makes him impervious to the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. He denies that anything is impinging on him and distances himself from his own feelings. Since he has no reason to trust other people or to expect anything but pain from his dealings with them, he is sullen, withdrawn, and unsociable. When his situation worsens after the death of Hindley’s wife, “his naturally reserved disposition was exaggerated,” says Nelly, “into an almost idiotic excess of unsociable moroseness” (ch. 8).

Heathcliff complains so little of his injuries that Nelly thinks he is not vindictive, but there is a burning rage beneath his stoical exterior. He does not show his rage because to express hostility would expose him to retaliations against which he is powerless to defend himself. The favoritism of Mr. Earnshaw allows Heathcliff’s aggression to surface; it gives “rich nourishment to the child’s pride and black tempers” (ch. 5). Heathcliff is a rejected and abused child on the one hand and a spoiled one on the other. The rejection and abuse generate a great deal of anger, and the protection of Mr. Earnshaw allows him to begin to express it.

Heathcliff’s aggression is directed primarily against Hindley, who is his chief tormentor. He controls Hindley by absorbing his abuse and then threatening to have him punished by his father. He forces Hindley to exchange horses, for example, by threatening to tell Mr. Earnshaw “of the three thrashings you’ve given me this week, and show him my arm, which is black to the shoulder” (ch. 4). When Hindley menaces him with an iron weight, Heathcliff invites him to throw it, “and then I’ll tell how you boasted that you would turn me out of doors as soon as he died, and see whether he will not turn you out directly.” Hindley’s rage toward the “beggarly interloper” whom he sees as “a usurper of his parent’s affection and his privileges” is kept in check as long as Mr. Earnshaw is alive; but after his father’s death, Hindley has his revenge. This, in turn, fuels Heathcliff’s anger, which he expresses through his rebelliousness while he is a child and by revenging himself upon Hindley as soon as he has the power. Wuthering Heights resembles an Elizabethan revenge tragedy in which there is a seemingly endless cycle of injury and retaliation.

Heathcliff’s chief defense is his attachment to Cathy. Wuthering Heights is above all the story of the formation of that attachment and of
the sufferings of the partners when their bond with each other is threatened. Heathcliff’s needs for love, warmth, and companionship have been repressed because it has seemed impossible that they would ever be satisfied. They emerge in the presence of Cathy, however, and he becomes completely dependent upon her. She is his first and only friend, his sole companion, the only person to whom he risks exposing himself emotionally. Since Mr. Earnshaw rejects Cathy because of her naughtiness, she and Heathcliff are outcasts together. They are in league against the others, and Cathy is the leader. They share a code that exalts mastery, toughness, and revenge. When their situation becomes much worse after the death of Mr. Earnshaw, they take refuge in each other, feed each other’s pride, and reinforce each other’s vindictiveness. They react to Hindley’s abuse by running off to the moors, forgetting “everything the minute they were together again, at least the minute they had contrived some naughty plan of revenge” (ch. 6). They compensate for being outcasts by belonging to each other, and they assuage the pain of their mistreatment by plotting retaliation. Whereas each would feel helpless alone, together they have a feeling of solidarity and power that enables them to laugh at their oppressors.

Although Heathcliff is far from being the typical subordinate partner in a morbid dependency relationship, we must recognize that in relation to Cathy he is quite self-effacing. He submits himself to her, obeys her commands, and glories in her greatness. He is able to gratify both his need for love and his need for aggressive triumph through her. After he has been scorned by the Lintons when Cathy is injured by their dog, he restores his pride by dwelling on their admiration of her: “she is so immeasurably superior to them—to everybody on earth, is she not, Nelly?” (ch. 6). He gains an intoxicating sense of worth through his identification with this marvelous being to whom he is an object of love. Since Heathcliff pursues glory through his idealized image of Cathy, he must maintain his sense of her superiority. When he beats her in the race from the Heights to the park, he excuses her defeat by pointing out that she was barefoot. He reports that when the Linton’s bulldog bit into Cathy’s ankle, “She did not yell out—no! She would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow.” She was sick, he insists, “not from fear . . . but from pain.” Heathcliff is spellbound by Cathy’s aggressive qualities and needs to deny that she could ever show weakness. Heathcliff is not envious of Cathy because he shares in her triumphs. Her love and superiority are so important that he represses his
vindictive impulses toward her when she hurts him and displaces them onto others. If she extends her protection to others, he will not attack them directly. Her wishes account for his initial restraint toward both Edgar and Hindley.

Cathy saves Heathcliff from deep feelings of unlovableness and self-contempt. She is the one person who finds him admirable and who promises to fulfill his overwhelming need for affection. This gives his feeling for her the neurotic intensity that makes it so romantic and that Horney associates with morbid dependency. For the dependent partner in such a relationship, love appears “as the ticket to paradise”: “no more feeling lost, guilty, and unworthy. . . . love seems to promise protection, support, affection, encouragement, sympathy, understanding. It will give him a feeling of worth. It will give meaning to his life. It will be salvation and redemption. . . . To love, for him, means . . . to merge with another being, to become one heart and one flesh” (1950, 239–40). This passage helps us to understand Heathcliff’s feeling that he has been cast into hell when Cathy rejects him (she has been his salvation) and his anguished cry upon her death—“I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!” (ch. 16).

It is essential to recognize that the relationship is as important to Cathy as it is to Heathcliff and that it serves her psychological needs as well as his. According to Nelly, within a few years of Heathcliff’s arrival, Cathy was “much too fond” of him: “The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him” (ch. 5). It is because Cathy needs him almost as much as he needs her that Heathcliff can open himself to her. While Heathcliff gains a sense of power and glory through his identification with Cathy’s superiority, she has these needs met through his deference and adulation, which mean all the more to her because he is an aggressive person whom she respects. Although her childhood is certainly better than Heathcliff’s, Cathy, too, experiences deprivations that intensify her needs for love and belonging. She loses her mother when she is eight and is severely rejected by her father, who tells her that he cannot love her and that he and her mother “must rue that ever we reared thee!” (ch. 5). Cathy and Heathcliff are both alienated, emotionally deprived children who feel a profound affinity and who cling to each other with passionate intensity. Cathy identifies with Heathcliff as completely as he does with her and feels truly at home in the world only through his existence.

Heathcliff and Cathy seem to be engaged, in effect, in a mutual
morbid dependency which is so intense that they do not have a sense of themselves as autonomous beings with separate identities. As a result, each feels that existence is unbearable without the other. The degree of their need for each other is the product not only of their alienation from the world around them but also of their alienation from themselves. The pathological conditions of their childhoods are such that they are suffering from what R. D. Laing calls “ontological insecurity,” that is, an insecurity about the distinctness and substantiality of their own identities. According to Laing, the ontologically secure person experiences “his own being as real, alive, whole; as differentiated from the rest of the world . . . so clearly that his identity and autonomy are never in question; . . . as having an inner consistency, substantiality, genuineness, and worth; as spatially coextensive with the body; and, usually, as having begun in or around birth and liable to extinction with death” (1965, 42). The ontologically insecure person has the opposite feelings. Heathcliff and Cathy do not feel real, alive, and whole in and of themselves but only when they are joined with each other. They do not feel intrinsically genuine and worthwhile; they do not have a sense of personal autonomy; they do not believe that the self is coextensive with the body; and they do not feel that their beings will end with their individual deaths.

Laing’s description of the way in which ontologically insecure people relate to each other explains in a psychological way Cathy and Heathcliff’s most extreme utterances about their indivisibility and what many critics have taken to be the metaphysical dimension of their relationship:

A lack of sense of autonomy implies that one feels one’s being to be bound up in the other, or that the other is bound up in oneself, in a sense that transgresses the actual possibilities within the structure of human relatedness. It means that a feeling that one is in a position of ontological dependency on the other (i.e., dependent on the other for one’s very being), is substituted for a sense of relatedness and attachment to him based on genuine mutuality. Utter detachment and isolation are regarded as the only alternative to a clam- or vampire-like attachment in which the other person’s life-blood is necessary for one’s own survival. . . . Therefore, the polarity is between complete isolation or complete merging of identity rather than between separateness and relatedness. (1965, 53)

Heathcliff and Cathy’s relationship is not based on genuine mutuality, especially after Cathy becomes more refined and Heathcliff begins to
degenerate, but on a sense of necessity. Cathy explains to Nelly that her love for Linton “is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it... My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but as my own being” (ch. 9). Although he is less articulate about it, it is clear that Heathcliff’s sense of being is equally bound up with Cathy. He does not wish to survive her: “oh God! would you like to live with your soul in the grave?” (ch. 15). When they are merged with each other, they feel at home in the world, but when they are separated, they feel completely isolated in a universe that has turned into “a mighty stranger” (ch. 9).

Wuthering Heights is above all a novel about merger and separation. Cathy and Heathcliff are embattled children who become ontologically dependent on one another and who find in their alliance a mutual support that saves them from feeling alone in the world and gives meaning to their lives. They become embedded in this relationship and are unable to grow beyond it or to feel themselves whole beings with separate identities. The novel explores what happens when people who are so bound to each other are torn apart. After their union is shattered, they spend the rest of their lives looking back upon it as a paradisal state from which they have fallen and looking forward to a reattainment of their bliss, if not here, then hereafter. The most radical separation occurs when Catherine dies. There is an eventual movement back toward merger, which occurs at the end when Heathcliff joins her in the grave.

The first turning point in the relationship occurs when Hindley deprives Heathcliff of the instruction of the curate, drives him into the company of the servants, and makes him a common laborer. Heathcliff bears his “degradation pretty well at first, because Cathy [teaches] him what she learn[s], and work[s] or play[s] with him in the fields” (ch. 6); but the social difference Hindley has created becomes important after Cathy’s stay at the Linton’s and her sister-in-law’s efforts to make her into a lady. Before both had been “rude as savages”; now Cathy looks at Heathcliff from a distance and gives him the message that something is wrong with him. Cathy had been his sustaining source of affirmation, the withdrawal of which exposes him to painful feelings of inadequacy and self-hate. He becomes envious of Edgar Linton and feels that in
order to please Cathy he must become something quite different from what he is. As the social and cultural gap between them grows, Heathcliff becomes increasingly demoralized.

Their estrangement is almost as painful to Cathy as it is to Heathcliff. Her visit to Thrushcross Grange throws her into inner conflict by giving a new form to her search for glory, one that separates her from Heathcliff and forces her to repress some of the strongest components of her own personality. Instead of feeding her pride through a spirited rebellion, she now craves the approval of the Lintons, who represent the conventional world. She wants to triumph by becoming “the greatest woman of the neighborhood” (ch. 9), but in order to do this she must give up her unladylike ways and conform to accepted manners and mores. She must also give up Heathcliff, at least as a mate. It is unthinkable for her to marry this coarse, ragged, impoverished young man. Since her need for social conquest is in conflict with her need to remain bonded to Heathcliff, she is bound to experience frustration and regret whatever she does.

By marrying Edgar, Cathy will fulfill her ambition, but she knows that she can never feel at home at the Grange, where she is expected to be submissive, calm, restrained, and civilized. Heathcliff is the same psychological type, whereas Edgar is her opposite. Heathcliff worships her for the untamed, rebellious, masterful spirit of which the Lintons disapprove. Edgar is a self-effacing person whose compliance she at once exploits and despises. “I have such faith in Linton’s love,” she later tells Nelly, “that I believe I might kill him, and he wouldn’t wish to retaliate” (ch. 10). Cathy can be spontaneous at the Heights, but by marrying Edgar Linton she dooms herself to a permanent sense of constraint.

The effects of Cathy’s decision on Heathcliff are even more devastating than they are upon her. By marrying Edgar, Cathy satisfies at least some of her conflicting needs, but she leaves Heathcliff with nothing. Even the unromantic Nelly understands this: “he’ll be the most unfortunate creature that ever was born! As soon as you become Mrs. Linton, he loses friend, and love, and all! Have you considered how you’ll bear the separation, and how he’ll bear to be quite deserted in the world?” (ch. 9). Perhaps the severest blow of all is to Heathcliff’s sense of worth, which is based almost exclusively on Cathy’s love and approval. We do not know what Heathcliff did during his mysterious three-year absence, but his objective is clear. Ever since Cathy’s return from the Lintons’, Heathcliff had wanted to be rich and refined like Edgar; and he runs
away when he hears Cathy telling Nelly that it would degrade her to marry him now. His objective is to restore his pride by acquiring wealth and polish, to show Cathy that he is as good as Edgar and that she was wrong to have despised him.

Cathy does not expect to lose Heathcliff. She intends to marry Edgar and become the greatest woman of the neighborhood, using her new wealth to rescue Heathcliff from the clutches of Hindley and help him to rise. Heathcliff will remain as devoted to her as always, and they will retain their intimate bond. Under the pressure of her inner conflicts, Cathy develops a fantasy in which all of her needs will be satisfied. She envisions Edgar and Heathcliff accepting an arrangement that would be extremely repugnant to both but that she must have if she is to fulfill her contradictory needs.

Cathy’s reaction to Heathcliff’s departure is intense. She falls into a delirium, becomes seriously ill, and emerges from her illness more domineering than ever. Because of her suffering she feels entitled to total submission from everyone else. Although she marries Edgar after a couple of years and seems happy with him at times, she remains in a state of chronic depression. She is moody and demanding and is kept in temper only by the entire compliance of Edgar and Isabella. Her domineering behavior is an indirect expression of her rage and grief.

While he is away, Heathcliff fears that Cathy has forgotten him, and he expects nothing from the future but “death and hell” (ch. 14). On his return, he intends to display his accomplishments to Cathy, to kill Hindley, and then to kill himself. Cathy’s reception assures him of her love and gives him a motive for living. The meaning of his life now lies in maintaining his contact with her and pursuing his revenge. He will attempt to wipe out his earlier humiliations by a series of vindictive triumphs that will subject others to the same kind of suffering they had inflicted on him. He is enraged not only with Hindley and Edgar, but also with Cathy, who he feels has treated him “infernally” (ch. 11). He tells her that he shall not “suffer unrevenged”; but his old taboo against being vindictive toward her is still in operation, and he plans to take out his rage on others.

Cathy now has both Edgar and Heathcliff and is beginning “to be secure and tranquil” (ch. 11). This precarious situation deteriorates rapidly, however, when Heathcliff and Cathy argue over his intentions toward Isabella and the worm, Edgar, turns, forbidding Heathcliff admission to the house and telling Cathy that she must choose between
them. This renewed separation, coming so soon after their reunion, is more than Cathy can bear. Enraged by the thwarting of her claims, she retaliates by becoming self-destructive: “I’ll try to break their hearts by breaking my own.” Her strategy succeeds, for through her death she poisons Edgar’s life and reduces Heathcliff to utter desolation. I believe that Emily Brontë means us to see Heathcliff as wronged most of all by Cathy, whose betrayal and death inflict psychological torments that account for much of his demonic behavior.

Cathy seeks death not only as a means of revenge, but also as a way of achieving reunion with Heathcliff. She is eager to die in order to escape into a “glorious world,” which is not heaven but a place like the Heights where she will be at one with her Heathcliff. This is not the angry man at her side in the final scene, who mingles curses with his kisses, but the Heathcliff she retains “in [her] soul” (ch. 15). She tells Nelly that when she achieves this union, she will be “incomparably beyond and above” them all.

Heathcliff cannot bear the thought of their final separation any more than could Cathy, and after her death he turns to his belief in ghosts as a refuge from his loneliness. Cathy has accused him of killing her. He prays that her spirit will not rest, that she will haunt him as long as he lives: “Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only do not leave me in this abyss where I cannot find you!” (ch. 16). Cathy’s ghost is presented so ambiguously that it is impossible to say whether we are meant to believe in its actual existence, but we do not need to believe in the ghost to account for Heathcliff’s sense of being haunted by Cathy. Since life without her is truly unbearable, he must believe in her continued existence in order to assuage his anguish, just as she had to believe that she would be reunited with him after her death.

In childhood Heathcliff develops two ways of compensating for mistreatment, merging with his glorified image of Cathy and plotting retaliation. The first half of the novel is the story of Heathcliff’s love; the second is the story of his revenge. At first Heathcliff is the object of our sympathy as victim and lover; it is not until the death of Cathy that he becomes a monster. The stories of his love and his revenge are closely intertwined, since his rage is fueled in part by his anger with Cathy and his despair at losing her, and it subsides only when he senses the prospect of achieving reunion.
The harshness of his early experience leads Heathcliff to develop arrogant-vindictive trends. He is obsessed with a desire to retaliate for his humiliations and to prove his superiority to those who have damaged his pride. He needs to hurt his enemies more than they have hurt him: his schemes are designed to reduce his persecutors and their representatives to a state of misery and degradation greater than his own. His sadistic behavior is fueled also by his grief at Cathy’s loss; he tries to assuage his pain by making sure that everyone else bears him company in his misery.

The first object of Heathcliff’s vindictiveness is Hindley Earnshaw, whose treatment of him was enough, says Nelly, “to make a fiend of a saint” (ch. 8). His behavior toward Hindley follows the *lex talionis*: he wants to vent his rage and restore his pride by doing to Hindley what Hindley has done to him. He spends much of his childhood waiting for the time when he will be powerful enough to even the score: “at least while I’m thinking of that, I don’t feel pain” (ch. 7). Hindley literally ruins Heathcliff’s life by demeaning him in such a way that he is separated socially from Cathy. Heathcliff retaliates by contributing to Hindley’s degradation and gaining control of his possessions, rendering Hindley as powerless and frustrated as he had been. He repays Hindley for all those childhood floggings by kicking and trampling on him and dashing his head against the flags while he is unconscious. His rage toward Hindley is immense. Hindley’s self-inflicted end gives him great satisfaction, but his need to even the score is not yet satisfied, and so his revenge continues into the next generation. He exults at having the opportunity to degrade Hareton now as Hindley had degraded him. He revels in the feeling that he has got Hareton “faster than his scoundrel of a father secured me” and that his victim is “damnably fond” of him (ch. 21). He imagines Hindley seeing what he has done and suffering at having been “outmatched.”

Heathcliff has not been abused by the Lintons as he has by Hindley, but he still has ample motives for revenge. On his first encounter with the family, when Cathy is bitten by their dog, they treat him with contempt and hostility. Heathcliff has an overwhelming need to restore his pride through a series of vindictive triumphs over them. It gives him immense satisfaction to be adored by the once scornful Isabella while he despises her. He wants to turn the tables on the Lintons by gaining power over them and putting them in the position he once occupied. His sadistic behavior toward Isabella and Cathy II is fueled in part by his
particular animosity toward Edgar, who has taken Catherine away from him. Since he is restrained by Cathy’s regard for Edgar, he uses Edgar’s sister and daughter as proxies in suffering.

Heathcliff’s viciousness toward the Lintons can be attributed in part to the fact that they are the opposite psychological types. Cathy and Heathcliff both have contempt for Edgar’s self-effacing qualities. Heathcliff is outraged that Edgar has, in fact, triumphed over him; like Iago (see Paris 1991a), he has a need to demonstrate his superiority to soft people like that. He shows that their strategy does not work by treating them more harshly when they appeal for pity and using their self-effacing qualities against them. He knows that the Lintons cannot resist an appeal to their sympathy or affection; and this, combined with his own contempt for all such appeals, makes them easy victims. His conquests vindicate his own character traits, which were rejected for theirs, and demonstrate their inferiority.

Heathcliff is so cruel to the Lintons also because he is threatened by their self-effacing behavior, to which he reacts with extraordinary intensity. The reaction of the arrogant-vindictive person to self-effacing behavior is so extreme, explains Horney, because “it is prompted by his need to fight all softer feelings in himself” (1945, 69-70). He despises in others “their compliance, their self-degrading, their helpless hankering for love. In short, he despises in them the very self-effacing trends he hates and despises in himself” (1950, 207). Heathcliff’s self-effacing behavior is all channeled toward Cathy. He romanticizes its intensity, but he, too, displays the compliance and has the helpless hankering for love that he despises in Isabella. Indeed, his enslavement is far more extreme than hers. Isabella suggests this by her comment on his behavior after Cathy’s death: “if I were you, I’d go stretch myself over her grave and die like a faithful dog. The world is surely not worth living in now, is it?” (ch. 17). The Linton women are constantly appealing to the softer side of Heathcliff’s nature. If he allowed himself to respond, he would have to despise himself for being like them and to condemn himself for his cruelty. The more they plead, the harsher he becomes in his effort to avoid self-hate.

Heathcliff’s vindictiveness serves a number of psychological functions. It restores his pride, expresses his rage, and helps him forget his pain. Cathy II understands very well the relationship between his lovelessness, his misery, and his cruelty: “You have nobody to love you; and, however miserable you make us, we shall still have the revenge of
thinking that your cruelty rises from your greater misery! You are miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him?” (ch. 29). What contributes most to the sadistic person’s callousness toward others, observes Horney, is his “bitter envy” of them, which “stems from his feeling excluded from life” (1950, 211). Heathcliff tries to assuage his suffering by persecuting others so that they will be “as defeated and degraded as he” and will share in his misery (1945, 202).

Heathcliff’s end is in keeping with what we know of his personality. The turning point is the scene in which the young Cathy defies Heathcliff to strike her and announces that she and Hareton are allies. He seems about to tear her in pieces when he stops, gazes intently in her face, draws his hand over his eyes, and lets her go. Heathcliff is disarmed by the alliance of Cathy and Hareton, which reminds him of his own alliance with the first Cathy, and by Cathy’s eyes, which are those of her mother. The resemblance between Hareton and the first Cathy is even stronger, especially after his mental faculties have been awakened, and Heathcliff’s taboo on vindictiveness toward Cathy now becomes operative toward Hareton as well. Hareton reminds him of his earlier self, moreover. Hareton’s aspect, he tells Nelly, is “the ghost of my immortal love, of my wild endeavours to hold my right, my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish” (ch. 33). Heathcliff has been doing unto others what he feels has been done unto him; but once he begins to identify Cathy II and Hareton with Cathy and himself, he sees them as victims rather than as enemies and loses his desire to strike.

Heathcliff’s loss of vindictiveness is also the result of his growing indifference to everything around him as he becomes more and more absorbed by the idea that his reunion with Cathy is near. This development is triggered by the resemblances we have just examined and by his experience of seeing Cathy’s as yet uncorrupted body in her coffin when Edgar is buried. Both of these things give him a stronger sense than he has yet had of the proximity of his beloved. With his loss of interest in revenge and his sense of Cathy’s nearness, his energies now concentrate on a single objective. He longs for death, as Cathy had done earlier, as the only means by which he can reestablish their union. After he loosens one side of Cathy’s coffin, he bribes the sexton to pull it away when he is laid there and to slide out a side of his coffin too so that “by the time Linton gets to us, he’ll not know which is which!” (ch. 29). His dream of merger now takes the form of the mingling of their dust so that they can no longer be identified as separate entities. He dies with a “gaze of
exultation” in his eyes that Nelly is unable to remove. He has finally reentered his heaven.

Except for the possible presence of ghosts, whose actual existence is never confirmed, *Wuthering Heights* is as realistic as most other Victorian novels. Heathcliff, Cathy, the Lintons, Lockwood, and Nelly are all mimetic characters whose behavior is intelligible in terms of their psychological traits. In its presentation of the devastating effects of traumatic childhood experiences, *Wuthering Heights* is one of a long line of nineteenth-century novels, and it is more perceptive than most in its recognition of the destructive effects of abuse on the human personality. What often happens in Victorian fiction is that abused characters develop self-effacing trends which are then glorified because of their seeming unselfishness. Suffering is presented as ennobling, a source of moral growth. Emily Brontë understands better than most of her contemporaries that bad treatment is harmful to people, and she vividly portrays its destructive consequences. Heathcliff is such a memorable character not because he is a demon, symbol, or principle, but because he acts out in an extreme way responses we have all had to loneliness and rejection. We find him a frightening yet sympathetic figure because he shows us some very real potentialities of our nature.

Although Clifford Collins says that there is perhaps “no other novel in English which it is possible to interpret strictly in terms of thematic development” (Sale 1963, 314), I find *Wuthering Heights* to be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to interpret thematically. It is one of those novels about which Wayne Booth (1961) complains in which the author has disappeared. The story is told largely by Nelly, through Lockwood, and there is little agreement about Emily Brontë’s relation to her narrators. Mark Schorer feels that Emily Brontë set out to celebrate “the moral magnificence of unmoral passion” but that, partly as a result of her narrative technique, the triumph at the end “is on the side of the cloddish world, which survives” (1950, xii). The “voice that drones on is the perdurable voice of the country, Nelly Dean’s” (xv). John K. Mathison represents a large body of critics, however, when he says that “as Nelly contentedly provides her superficial interpretations of motive ... we are constantly directed toward feeling the inadequacy of the wholesome, and toward sympathy with genuine passions, no matter how destructive or violent” (Sale 1963, 338).
There is clearly a system of contrasts in the novel involving Heathcliff, Cathy, and the Heights on the one hand and the Lintons, Nelly, and the Grange on the other; but what exactly is being contrasted? According to Schorer, Brontë is presenting through Heathcliff and Cathy “a devastating spectacle of human waste” (1950, xi), but many other critics feel that theirs is the story of a splendid passion, the grandeur of which is emphasized by the contrast with ordinary experience. What is Emily Brontë’s attitude toward Heathcliff and Cathy, Nelly and the Lintons, the Heights and the Grange? Why does she tell her story of extreme love and hate through the medium of Nelly and Lockwood, never speaking in her own voice?

From a Horneyan perspective, the Heights represents extreme forms of both aggressive and self-effacing behavior (there is extreme detachment, too), whereas the Grange represents a moderate form of self-effacing behavior combined with a moderate detachment. Both Hindley and Heathcliff are inconsolable on the death of the woman they love and are destructive to themselves and others, whereas Edgar, though grief-stricken, is eventually comforted. Heathcliff, Cathy, and Hindley are all highly vindictive people, while the Lintons represent a more charitable attitude. They turn vindictive when they are persecuted, but this is a passing phase for them rather than a fixed trait of character. In the second generation, the characteristics associated with both Heights and Grange are combined and softened.

The novel’s system of contrasts is developed not only through the juxtaposition of Heights and Grange, but also through its narrative technique. The story of extreme love and hate is told by the moderate and predominantly self-effacing Nelly to the detached Lockwood, who tells it to us. All three of the Horneyan trends are present in the novel in varying degrees of intensity and in various combinations.

Where does Emily Brontë stand in this system of contrasts? If, as Mark Schorer says, it is Nelly’s voice that endures at the end, Brontë would seem to be favoring the moderate self-effacing position. A good case can be made for this. Nelly represents the standard compliant values of her culture. She is the voice of the community and perhaps also of the implied author. She stands for forgiveness as opposed to revenge. “It is for God to punish wicked people,” she admonishes Heathcliff when he swears to even the score with Hindley; “we should learn to forgive” (ch. 7). She later urges Isabella to “be more charitable” toward Heathcliff.
and scolds her for her vindictiveness: “One might suppose you had never opened a Bible in your life” (ch. 17). She disapproves of Cathy’s vanity and arrogance and hopes they will be chastened. Of Heathcliff she thinks, “Your pride cannot blind God! You tempt Him to wring [your heart and nerves], till He forces a cry of humiliation” (ch. 16). When Heathcliff is near death, she urges him to send for a minister—“you have lived a selfish, unchristian life”—and is “shocked at his godless indifference” (ch. 34). She sides with Edgar against Cathy, “for he was kind, and trustful, and honourable,” whereas she has “little faith” in Cathy’s “principles, and still less sympathy for her feelings” (ch. 10). She compares Hindley’s moral deterioration after the death of his wife to Edgar’s pious resignation: “Linton . . . displayed the true courage of a loyal and faithful soul: he trusted God, and God comforted him. One hoped, and the other despaired” (ch. 17). The novel is so full of Nelly’s pious reflections that she seems to many to speak for Emily Bronte.

One of Nelly’s dicta is that “people who do their duty are always finally rewarded” (ch. 25); and this, with its corollary, that the wicked are punished, is borne out by the novel. Heathcliff and Cathy are, as Schorer says, “a devastating spectacle of human waste” (1950, xi). They are miserable and self-destructive. The novel ends with the good people triumphant. Bronte seems to be trying to provide through Cathy II and Hareton a more desirable alternative to the personalities and actions of Cathy and Heathcliff. Her mother’s spirit and rebelliousness are present in Cathy II, but much softened and combined with her father’s moderate compliant traits: “her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender” (ch. 18). She seems to combine the best of the Heights and the Grange. It is Cathy who breaks the cycle of injury and revenge by her movement toward Hareton after she has treated him scornfully. She is prompted to this by Nelly’s scolding and by her guilt for having put an end to Hareton’s efforts at self-improvement. Her alliance with Hareton is crucial in leading Heathcliff to relinquish his quest for revenge, as we have seen. Hareton is able to respond to her because, despite his degradation at the hands of Heathcliff, he does not have a vindictive personality. The members of the second generation are better, in part at least, because they have been better treated. The marriage of Hareton and Cathy represents the triumph of love and forgiveness over hatred and revenge, and it is “the crown” of Nelly’s wishes: “I shall envy no one on their wedding-day—there won’t be a
happier woman than myself in England!” (ch. 33). The fact that Cathy and Hareton are going to move to the Grange seems to be a final endorsement of the values for which it stands.

Plausible as the preceding interpretation is, it is not the dominant view of the novel, which tends, rather, to see it as celebrating the intensity of Cathy and Heathcliff’s love for each other and justifying, to some extent at least, Heathcliff’s revenge. Nelly surrounds Cathy and Heathcliff’s story with a haze of disapproval, but their glamour somehow shines through her moralizing and makes her and the people she favors seem dull and commonplace by comparison. As many critics have pointed out, Emily Brontë makes it quite evident that Nelly is frequently obtuse in her dealings with Cathy and sometimes drives her into frenzies of self-destructive behavior. It is not difficult to make a case that Nelly is an object of satire in the novel and the source of much of the mischief.

Although self-effacing traits and values are often glorified, they are also mocked and scorned, especially by Cathy and Heathcliff. Cathy has contempt for Edgar’s “weak nature” (ch. 11) and Heathcliff for his “puny being” (ch. 14). Edgar’s attendance on Catherine during her illness is scoffed at by Heathcliff: “that insipid, paltry creature attending her from duty and humanity! From pity and charity!” These are feeble motives compared to Heathcliff’s all-consuming passion. As we have seen, Heathcliff has enormous contempt for Isabella’s “sighing and wheedling.” Although she talks of her vindictive impulses to Nelly, Isabella is incapable of taking revenge when she has the opportunity to do so. Hindley tries to enlist her as an ally, but when Heathcliff appears Isabella warns him of Hindley’s plans. When Hindley abuses her for her “base spirit,” we tend to agree and to sympathize with his contention that “treachery and violence are a just return for treachery and violence!” Many critics have argued that Heathcliff’s victims are getting what they deserve. Brontë often makes vindictiveness seem justified.

In addition to the scorn of Cathy and Heathcliff, there are other things that make humane or compliant behavior seem weak or foolish. The kind-hearted Mr. Earnshaw harbors Heathcliff “to his bane” (ch. 34), and Edgar’s parents die as a result of caring for Catherine when she is ill. Edgar is caught when Cathy strikes him and then threatens to cry herself sick if he leaves. Nelly tries to encourage him to depart: “‘Miss is dreadfully wayward, sir!’ I called out. ‘As bad as any marred child—you’d better be riding home, or else she will be sick, only to grieve us’” (ch. 8). But “the soft thing” is “doomed, and flies to his fate!” A blow to the pride is often
what precipitates love in a self-effacing person, and a display of suffering usually has a coercive effect. Cathy, like Heathcliff, understands the weaknesses of those she wishes to manipulate and skillfully exploits them. The scorn for Edgar comes here from Nelly, who stands up to aggressive people but is herself a soft touch for self-effacing ones. She urges Edgar to confront Heathcliff after his return, since “there’s harm in being too soft” (ch. 11); but a good deal of mischief is caused by her inability to be firm with Cathy II. When Heathcliff puts pressure on Cathy to come to see Linton despite her father’s prohibition, Nelly gives in: “I couldn’t bear to witness her sorrow” (ch. 23). Cathy is likewise compelled by Linton’s sufferings. Her “indulgent tenderness” (ch. 27) toward that repulsive young man puts her in his power, and in Heathcliff’s. It is an unsavory spectacle that does not win admiration for self-effacing behavior. Nelly and Cathy are happy in the end, as their virtue is rewarded; but so is the unrepentant Heathcliff, who dies in a state of exultation. God never forces a cry of humiliation from him.

Miriam Allott argues that *Wuthering Heights* “is an effort to explore and, *if possible*, to reconcile conflicting ‘attractions’” (1970, 186). Whereas Allott sees Emily Brontë as drawn “by different parts of her nature toward both storm and calm,” I would say that she was drawn toward both the arrogant-vindictive and self-effacing solutions at the same time that she saw their destructiveness. Our inability to determine where she stands in the system of contrasts results from the fact that her inner conflict is expressed but not resolved by the novel. She sees each solution not only from within but also from the perspective of the other, and she feels for each the scorn that is generated by the opposing set of attitudes. She manages to give coherent expression to her very mixed and complicated attitudes by means of her narrative technique. She allows the aggressive side of her nature to be expressed through the story of Cathy and Heathcliff, but she combines with it a continuous commentary from the self-effacing point of view, making it impossible for us to accuse her of approving these monsters. Her scorn for her self-effacing side is expressed through Cathy and Heathcliff, and in other ways as well, while having Nelly tell the story permits her to pass moral judgment and to satisfy her self-effacing shoulds.

The detached side of Emily Brontë is also expressed through her narrative technique. Lockwood is usually seen as the representative of civilization, but he may also be seen as a representative of detachment. He comes to the region in order to get away from his fellows and finds
it “a perfect misanthrope’s heaven” (ch. 1). He tells us a great deal about himself in his reaction to Heathcliff’s reserve. At first he attributes Heathcliff’s moroseness to “an aversion to showy displays of feeling,” but then he realizes that he may be bestowing his “own attributes over-liberally on him.” Lockwood despises himself for his detachment: “Let me hope my constitution is almost peculiar: my dear mother used to say I should never have a comfortable home, and only last summer I proved myself perfectly unworthy of one.” He was attracted to “a most fascinating creature” until she showed signs of reciprocating his interest, and he then “shrank icily into [himself], like a snail.” Lockwood longs for human companionship but is terrified of emotional involvement. He visits Heathcliff a second time because Heathcliff’s own greater reserve makes him safe to be with. After his painful experience, however, Lockwood curses himself for his social impulse and reminds himself that “a sensible man ought to find sufficient company in himself” (ch. 3). He seeks Nelly’s company despite his determination to hold himself “independent of all social intercourse” and then feels himself to be a “weak wretch” for doing so (ch. 4).

The outermost frame of the novel is Lockwood’s flirtation with the idea of a romance with Cathy II, but he is very much afraid of “the fascination that lurks” in her eyes (ch. 14) and does not want to “venture [his] tranquillity by running into temptation” (ch. 25). When he returns to find Cathy engaged to Hareton, however, he bites his lip, “in spite, at having thrown away [his] chance” (ch. 32). It seems clear at the end that Lockwood will never be able to form a loving relationship and have a comfortable home.

Nelly’s narrative enables Lockwood to engage in a characteristically detached way of experiencing life, that is, through other people’s passions. Lockwood is afraid of his feelings and is constantly defending himself against them. The result of his detachment is boredom, however, a sense of the emptiness of life. Nelly’s story is of people who are acting out their impulses all the time, in an intense, uninhibited way. Cathy and Heathcliff are not emotionally dead, the way Lockwood is; and through them he gets a vicarious sense of being alive: “I could fancy a love for life here almost possible” (ch. 7). What makes Cathy and Heathcliff appealing to the reader is, in part, their juxtaposition with Lockwood. They have the vitality and intensity he lacks. Their grand passion is self-consuming, but his tepid little romance never gets off the ground, and he goes away with nothing. In comparison to theirs, his life is sterile.
The detached side of Emily Brontë is attracted by the intensity of Cathy and Heathcliff, just as Lockwood is; but, like him, she is also frightened by it. Cathy and Heathcliff are fascinating creatures; but they confirm Lockwood’s worst fears, that if you lose control of your emotions, especially in relation to the opposite sex, you will be destroyed. Their fate reinforces his detached solution, just as it does Nelly’s self-effacing one, at the very same time that it challenges its validity. Detachment is treated with the same ambivalence as are the aggressive and compliant solutions.

Given Emily Brontë’s inner conflicts, it is amazing that *Wuthering Heights* is not as thematically confused as *The Awakening*. The difference lies in the narrative technique. By having the story told by Nelly and Lockwood, with much internal quotation from other characters, Emily Brontë can give expression to all of her trends, and to the crossfire of conflicting shoulds they generate, without having any one position emerge as normative, and therefore as inadequate to her ambivalence. Each set of trends can be at once expressed, justified, and criticized from the point of view of the others. Chopin’s inner conflicts wreak havoc in a novel that employs omniscient narration; but *Wuthering Heights* is an impressionistic novel, like *Lord Jim* (see Paris 1974), in which interpretation is dramatized. All of the value judgments and attitudes belong to the characters and are appropriate to their personalities. This creates a problem of narrative reliability in the sense that we do not know where in the novel’s system of conflicting values the author stands, but it avoids the problems that would have resulted from the establishment of a moral norm. Brontë’s narrative technique serves the needs of her detachment by preserving her privacy, by enabling her to disappear. She does not want us to know where she stands. It is a way of managing her inner conflicts that does much to produce the novel’s richness and complexity, its elusiveness and never-ending fascination.