Heathcliff’s ‘Queer End’ and Schopenhauer’s Denial of the Will

‘I wish to be as God made me,’ Emily Brontë was wont to reply, leaving her questioners mystified. And her readers to this day have been similarly discomfited by the enigmatic self-sufficiency of *Wuthering Heights*. In her 1964 survey of Brontë scholarship, Mildred G. Christian rightly noted that ‘the contradictory judgments on *Wuthering Heights* are the most striking fact in its critical history.’¹ The major reason for the contradictory judgments is that readers have reacted in different ways to Heathcliff and Cathy. While some readers have maintained that Cathy and Heathcliff are invested with positive values, others have seen them representing negative qualities which are exorcized in the end. The two poles can be illustrated by Ruth M. Adams, who maintains that ‘Catherine and Heathcliff themselves illustrate the perverse values that prevail in *Wuthering Heights*,’² and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr, who advances the antithetical reading when he concludes that the novel ‘results in a paradigm of love,’³ in which Emily Brontë shows that Heathcliff ‘is not innately demonic and that hate is subservient to love.’⁴ A survey of recent criticism reveals that no consensus has been reached about the novel’s ultimate direction. This diversity of opinion of course bears witness to the complexity and greatness of *Wuthering Heights* in its ability to engender different responses. What is needed, however, is an examination of those incidents in the novel which permit opposing interpretations. Since most of

² Ruth M. Adams, ‘*Wuthering Heights*: the Land East of Eden’ *NCF* xiii (June 1958) 6. This belief in the ‘perversity’ of the novel’s values is often presented in a qualified form; Miriam Allott, for example, has suggested that Emily Brontë’s piety forced her to reject the qualities Heathcliff represents. Professor Allott, however, concedes that the ‘rejection’ of Heathcliff is by no means final. See ‘*Wuthering Heights*: The Rejection of Heathcliff?’ *Essays in Criticism* viii (January 1958) 46.
³ ‘Lockwood’s Dreams and the Exegesis of *Wuthering Heights*’ *NCF* xiv (September 1959) 109
⁴ Shannon, *NCF* xiv 105

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the disagreements arise over Heathcliff, I intend to offer a close reading of Heathcliff's actions, especially those near the end of the novel, in order to point out where and why readers diverge in their opinions, and hopefully thereby to clarify some of Emily Brontë's assumptions in the portrayal of her principal characters.

Surprisingly enough, little detailed attention has so far been devoted to a close examination of Heathcliff's death, a curious omission when, as Melvin R. Watson has commented, 'Heathcliff is the story.' In part this failure to attend closely to Heathcliff is a result of the emphasis given to the structure of the novel. In his important article 'Nelly Dean and the Power of Wuthering Heights,' John K. Mathison showed that the structure of the novel serves the purpose of maintaining the reader's sympathy with Heathcliff until the end of the book. The reader's desire to overcome the narrative limitations of Nelly and Lockwood permits him to bear with more of Heathcliff's violence than would have been the case had Heathcliff told the story. Yet emphasis on the structure of the novel has at times obscured an important question - what is the reader's final opinion of Heathcliff? While the rhetorical devices may allow the reader to maintain sympathy with Heathcliff, surely they alone cannot turn Heathcliff into a sympathetic hero.

Readers of Wuthering Heights have often been self-conscious and apologetic about their sympathy towards Heathcliff. F.H. Langham, for instance, argues that 'Hindley's brutality, tyranny, and murderous violence far outdo anything of which Heathcliff can be accused on the evidence.' And Langham asserts that the reader continues to sympathize with Heathcliff because of the justice of Heathcliff's desire 'to hold a place in the scheme of things.' Yet Heathcliff's violence obviously troubles Langham, for he remains unwilling to credit Heathcliff with positive values, and his rather lame conclusion is that, 'for all this, in Heathcliff's behaviour there is an excess from which moral sympathy does turn away.' Yet this reading, like so many, ignores the ending of the book, and therefore never entertains the possibility that the narrative method functions to gain enough of the reader's

5 Melvin R. Watson, 'Tempest in the Soul: The Theme and Structure of Wuthering Heights' NCF iv (September 1949) 89. The best account to date of Heathcliff's actions in relation to the novel's themes is Frederick T. Flahiff's recent introduction to the Macmillan edition of Wuthering Heights (Toronto 1968).
6 NCF xi (September 1956) 106–29
8 F.H. Langham, 310
9 Ibid., 311
sympathy to keep his attention until the end of the novel when Heathcliff can undergo a redeeming process.

The phrase 'redeeming process,' it should be noted, has been applied to the character of Heathcliff, and not to the novel as a whole. Elliott Gose, in his interesting article, 'Wuthering Heights: The Heath and the Hearth,' has already shown that the novel embodies 'figurative image and narrative patterns,' whereby the perversion of Heathcliff and Cathy is resolved in the second generation – in Cathy II and Hareton. Gose places the change in the novel's direction near the end when Cathy resists Heathcliff's will in the incident concerning the uprooting of Joseph's mulberry bushes:

The moral teething is complete; someone has finally resisted tyranny, and Heathcliff, seeing the pattern of his youth repeated, gives up.11

But the use of such a phrase as 'Heathcliff ... gives up' indicates that Gose does not believe a positive change occurs in Heathcliff. What I wish to argue is that not only does a positive change occur at this point, but that Heathcliff learns something about himself and embodies this positive change.12

The first clear indication of Heathcliff's change in personality occurs near the end of the novel when Heathcliff meets Hareton rushing from the house after the younger Catherine has tormented him into throwing his books in the fire. Surprised, Heathcliff lays hold of Hareton's shoulder and asks: 'What's to do now, my lad?'13 But Hareton refuses to answer, and Heathcliff sighs:

It will be odd, if I thwart myself! ... But, when I look for his father in his face, I find her every day more! How the devil is he so like? I can hardly bear to see him. (ch xxxi p 240)

Such a statement serves both to tease and to appease the reader's expectations. Certainly Heathcliff's sudden change of mind seems to demand an


11 Elliott Gose, 18

12 Richard Chase, in the article cited in n 10, alleges that no such learning process takes place, but he has offered no evidence for this belief.

explanation; and in part an explanation is offered when Heathcliff ‘explains’ that he sees Cathy Earnshaw in Hareton. But why this should deprive him of the will to act remains unclear. The passage seems designed to persuade the reader to accept the change while awaiting further developments. Yet most unexpectedly, at this point when the reader’s curiosity about Heathcliff has been fully aroused, the novel’s focus shifts abruptly. It will be recalled that Lockwood himself overheard Heathcliff’s above-quoted comment while waiting at the Heights to tell him of his intended departure from Thrushcross Grange. Although Lockwood’s diary brings the reader to the very point when Heathcliff’s change commences, to the point where Lockwood could, if he wished, begin to observe new events for himself, Lockwood himself never witnesses the change. At this point Lockwood returns to London, and breaks off his diary with no evident curiosity about Heathcliff’s future. Only when he returns briefly on a chance visit eight months later, in September 1802, does Lockwood hear from Nelly the story of Heathcliff’s ‘queer end.’

As a result, the nature of Heathcliff’s ‘queer end’ appears as something of an epilogue, and no doubt this is one reason why Heathcliff’s death has not received the attention which is its due. Yet to fail to take account of this section is to run the danger of becoming a Lockwood, and to remain unaware of and uninterested in the crucial change towards which the story has been moving.

Although the implications of Heathcliff’s death are not spelled out, many clues are given that indicate its seriousness and importance. In her account, Nelly repeatedly emphasizes the changes in Heathcliff’s character preceding his death. For instance, Heathcliff brought her to the Heights from Thrushcross Grange because he was becoming ‘more and more disinclined to society’ (ch xxxii p 246). What this means at the sparsely populated Heights is that Heathcliff does not want to be alone with the younger Catherine. Nelly reports that Heathcliff told her he was ‘tired of seeing Catherine’ (ch xxxii p 245), that he disliked the way Catherine stared at him with her ‘infernal eyes’ (ch xxxii p 251). Heathcliff of course also dislikes Catherine’s open defiance. And undoubtedly Gose is correct when he places the change of direction in the novel at the point where Catherine and Hareton uproot Joseph’s mulberry bushes for a garden of plants and flowers imported from the Grange. Yet Heathcliff’s change is not directly contingent on Catherine’s defiance. Actually, the defiance itself arouses his anger, and for a moment, as Heathcliff holds Catherine by the hair, it seems that he may murder her. But as his anger reaches its peak, he suddenly stops:

his fingers relaxed, he shifted his grasp from her head to her arm, and gazed intently in her face. Then, he drew his hand over his eyes, stood a moment to collect himself apparently, and turning anew to Catherine, said with assumed calmness –
‘You must learn to avoid putting me in a passion, or I shall really murder you, some time!’ (ch xxxiii p 253)

Quite clearly Heathcliff is prevented from hitting Catherine this time because of something he sees in her eyes – the same thing he saw earlier in Hareton’s eyes – a resemblance to his own Cathy. Nelly, it will be remembered, comments that Hareton and Catherine Linton have eyes that ‘are precisely similar, and they are those of Catherine Earnshaw’ (ch. xxxiii p 254).

To the reader interested in understanding Heathcliff’s change, the crucial confrontation appears a short time later when Heathcliff finds Hareton and Catherine reading by the fire after he has forbade any further relationship. Nelly first relates how ‘they lifted their eyes together, to encounter Mr Heathcliff,’ and then makes the above-quoted comment of how similar their eyes are to those of Catherine Earnshaw. Yet the loquacious Nelly has almost nothing to say about Heathcliff’s reaction at this important juncture. She merely comments:

I suppose this resemblance disarmed Mr Heathcliff: he walked to the hearth in evident agitation, but it quickly subsided, as he looked at the young man; or, I should say, altered its character, for it was there yet. (ch xxxiii p 254)

Unusually vague at this point, Nelly can only ‘suppose’ that the resemblance disturbed Heathcliff. Thus, curiously enough, Emily Brontë deliberately eschews all overt explanation of Heathcliff’s behaviour, leaving it open to the reader’s interpretation. This no doubt explains why the novel has generated so many widely varying explanations.

Although the positive reasons for Heathcliff’s discomposure may remain mysterious, Emily Brontë takes pains to tell us the reasons that do not affect Heathcliff. Heathcliff himself states that he forsakes the chances of revenge neither from pity nor because he has lost the power:

I could do it [take revenge]; and none could hinder me. But where is the use? I don’t care for striking, I can’t take the trouble to raise my hand! That sounds as if I had been labouring the whole time, only to exhibit a fine trait of magnanimity. It is far from being the case – I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing. (ch xxxiii p 255)

Heathcliff’s inaction could be construed as altogether unmotivated. But such an ‘explanation’ requires careful qualification, since Heathcliff himself understands the apparent absurdity of his change of heart, and thus anticipates the reader’s possible objection:

‘It is a poor conclusion, is it not,’ he observed, having brooded a while on the scene
he had just witnessed. ‘An absurd termination to my violent exertions? I get levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready, and in my power, I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished!’

(ch xxxiii pp 254–5)

Although Heathcliff’s seeming lack of motivation has led a number of critics to ask whether the novel does not fail artistically in the last section, surely such a reaction misses the point: Emily Brontë recognized that Heathcliff’s end was ‘queer’; she wanted the reader to puzzle over its meaning.

For the reader to understand Heathcliff’s death, the novel demands an intuitive leap from the designedly ambiguous evidence to the ultimate meaning of Heathcliff’s change. The very structure of the novel indicates that such a leap is imperative. Since neither Nelly nor Lockwood understands Heathcliff, the reader must overcome the narrators’ lack of perception by means of his own insight. Thus the reader finds himself in a position remarkably akin to that described by eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philosophers where it seemed problematic that man could ever know the ‘ultimate reality’ (the Kantian Ding-an-sich) when he was limited to his perception of sense data or surface phenomena.14 Interestingly, Heathcliff at the end of the novel seems to transcend his previous limitations to attain a new mode of perception. The unusual nature of this change is difficult to explain without the context of Romantic metaphysical thought, but is clarified when compared with some strikingly similar examples cited by Schopenhauer in his major work Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (usually translated as The World as Will and Idea).15 Schopenhauer describes an experience and

15 It is impossible to argue that Emily Brontë had actually read any of the works of Schopenhauer, since the extent of her reading is unknown. However, Charlotte Brontë's characterization of Emily as an immature genius, secluded from the world, and relying entirely on her own imagination is no longer acceptable (Charlotte’s preface to the 1850 edition of Wuthering Heights). Even if it were not that Charlotte herself, in another passage, describes the extreme dependence of the entire family on books and study, Emily’s period as a schoolteacher at Law Hill, Halifax, and her period abroad studying at the Hégers’ in Brussels indicate that she had more opportunity to read and study than Charlotte revealed. By the time they left Brussels, Emily and Charlotte both read French fairly fluently, and Charlotte mentions her sister’s rapid progress in learning German (letter to Ellen Nussey, July 1842), but the extent of Emily’s knowledge of German literature remains uncertain. However in the 1830s and 1840s it was unnecessary to read German in the original to learn something of German philosophy. The Brontë’s favourite journal, Blackwood’s, reviewed and commented on a great deal of German literature and philosophy. Moreover, Emily Brontë’s period in Brussels was ‘at a time when romanticism was in flood in the French-speaking countries,’ and she would surely receive some account of the major figures in the home of Madame Héger (see John Hewish, Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study [New York 1969] 34).
an attitude to the phenomenal world of which Emily Brontë provides a concrete character example. The one account, while it does not necessarily give rise to the other, helps us to understand it.

Schopenhauer, following Kant, believed that all objects in the material world were but the objectification of another dimension. In Kantian terms this other dimension was called the noumenal world; Schopenhauer preferred to call it ‘the Will.’ Schopenhauer claimed:

every individual is transitory only as phenomenon, but as thing-in-itself is timeless, and therefore endless. But it is also only as phenomenon that an individual is distinguished from the other things of the world; as thing-in-itself he is the will which appears in all, and death destroys the illusion which separates his consciousness from that of the rest: this is immortality. His exemption from death, which belongs to him only as thing-in-itself, is for the phenomenon one with the immortality of the rest of the external world.16

Steeped in the writings of Plato and Kant, Schopenhauer believed that man could never be happy in this world until he had grasped the basic fact that the phenomenal world which he saw around him, and of which he was a part, was only a shadow of the real world; until he did so, he would continue to pursue unreal ends that would prove transitory. To gain such an understanding, the individual must see through the transitory nature of the world conditioned by the Kantian categories of time and space to the eternal noumenal world where space and time cease to exist.17 As soon as the individual understood that all phenomena were mere objectifications of the one Will, he would then see the absurdity of striving for transitory and unreal goals, and attempt to realize himself as part of the underlying world Will.

Schopenhauer said that the first step in recognizing that the phenomenal world was only a shadow of the Will would be taken when a man recognized, ‘in all beings his own inmost and true self.’18 What Schopenhauer describes


17 Although it is unwise to place undue emphasis on Emily Brontë’s short French devoirs which she wrote in Brussels for M. Héger, one cannot help noting their similarity to some of Schopenhauer’s ideas. In ‘The Butterfly,’ Emily Brontë writes: ‘Nature is an inexplicable puzzle, life exists on a principle of destruction; every creature must be the relentless instrument of death to the others, or himself cease to live.’ This vision of a universe without meaning is transformed, however, when she recognizes that man’s soul can escape into a ‘new heaven’ at death. Compare also her essay on King Harold where she describes him transformed on the field of battle, ready to yield to Death, whose touch will strike ‘off his chains.’ See Five Essays Written in French, trans. L.W. Nagel (Austin, Texas 1948).

18 The World as Will and Idea 1 489 (bk iv sec 68)
is precisely what happens to Heathcliff. His change commences when he sees the resemblance of the younger Catherine and Hareton to his Cathy, and when he perceives that they are living out the patterns of his own youth. Seeing through exterior appearances, he begins at this point to understand that his life force (Will) is identical with that working in Catherine and Hareton. No longer does he see people merely as phenomena; he is able to see through to their noumenal existence. Of Hareton, he says:

Five minutes ago, Hareton seemed a personification of my youth, not a human being. I felt to him in such a variety of ways, that it would have been impossible to have accosted him rationally. ... His startling likeness to Catherine connected him fearfully with her.

(Ch xxxiii p 255)

Heathcliff realizes that Nelly (and possibly the reader as well) will misunderstand him when he says that Hareton resembles Catherine Earnshaw. As Hindley’s son, Hareton is Cathy’s nephew, and would have the Earnshaw features. But Heathcliff is not referring simply to a family resemblance. He says, ‘That, however, which you may suppose the most potent to arrest my imagination, is actually the least, for what is not connected with her to me?’ (Ch xxxiii p 255). Moreover Heathcliff is beginning to perceive that all individuals are mere objectifications of the single world force. Everywhere he looks he finds that ‘the most ordinary faces of men and women,’ even his own features ‘mock [him] with a resemblance’ to his Cathy (Ch xxxiii p 255). Even objects begin to resemble Cathy: ‘I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags! In every cloud, in every tree – filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day, I am surrounded with her image!’ (Ch xxxiii p 255).

So far what has been described of Heathcliff’s change is consonant with Romantic neo-platonism in general. But Schopenhauer’s innovation in Kantian thought was his claim that as soon as an individual understood completely that phenomenally different objects were all products of the same world Will, then the individual’s volition would cease, since he would see that all differences in the world were only seeming differences. This applies to Heathcliff, since his volition ceases as soon as he sees the spirit of his Cathy in the world around him. His new knowledge of the nature of the world quiets his will. 19

Interestingly enough, as soon as Heathcliff begins his change, he once

19 In a curious, but extremely insightful essay on ‘affinities’ between Lord Byron and Emily Brontë, Margiad Evans pointed out that the clue to Emily Brontë’s writing was her ‘pacifism towards death.’ ‘Byron and Emily Brontë: An Essay’ Life and Letters lvi (June 1948) 203.
again becomes the principal figure of interest. In the middle section of the novel, Heathcliff occupies less of our attention as the stories of the second generation ‘people of calm’—Hareton, Catherine, and Linton—are developed at length. That Heathcliff should become a relatively minor figure in the middle section is only natural, since his sole interest at this time is his desire for revenge. Miriam Allott notes: ‘At the very point where his need for vengeance dies, Heathcliff does in fact fully revive as Heathcliff, that is to say, as the powerfully compelling and complex figure of the first part of the story.’ However, this description is only partly correct. When Heathcliff resumes his place at centre stage, he is not the old Heathcliff, but a changing Heathcliff. Our interest revives because of his change and his ‘queer end.’

Heathcliff’s death, sometimes described as suicide, has long been a source of confusion, but it becomes less so when seen in relation to Schopenhauer’s description. In terms remarkably similar to those of Emily Brontë, Schopenhauer gives a full explanation of the type of ‘suicide’ which Heathcliff represents:

There is a species of suicide which seems to be quite distinct from the common kind, though its occurrence has perhaps not yet been fully established. It is starvation, voluntarily chosen on the ground of extreme asceticism. All instances of it, however, have been accompanied and obscured by much religious fanaticism, and even superstition. Yet it seems that the absolute denial of will may reach the point at which the will shall be wanting to take the necessary nourishment for the support of the natural life. This kind of suicide is so far from being the result of the will to live, that such a completely resigned ascetic only ceases to live because he has already altogether ceased to will. No other death than that by starvation is in this case conceivable (unless it were the result of some special superstition); for the intention to cut short the torment would itself be a stage in the assertion of will.21

When Schopenhauer says that the reason for this type of death is ‘extreme asceticism,’ he means that the person becomes so completely absorbed in the attainment of the spiritual life that he neglects the material world. In Heathcliff’s case, his ‘spiritual reunion’ with Cathy so completely overpowers him that he cannot be reached by normal motives. So powerfully does his vision of reunion with Cathy affect him, that he unwittingly starves himself. When Schopenhauer described such starvation cases, he was not speaking entirely theoretically, but attempting to explain a number of historic incidents. He cites several examples, including one which occurred in England in the 1830s, with which Emily Brontë might easily have been

20 Essays in Criticism viii. 45
21 The World as Will and Idea i 518 (bk iv sec 69)
acquainted. 22 Certainly Heathcliff's death follows closely Schopenhauer's pattern.

As Schopenhauer explains, a death such as Heathcliff's is actually the opposite of suicide: the person dies, not because he hates the world, but because he has discovered he need not take the world seriously. In fact, such a person cannot be said to 'will' at all. He dies because he has completely lost all will—even the will to eat. The frequently made claim that Heathcliff 'deliberately wills his own death' 23 is a distortion of the text. When Nelly asks Heathcliff whether he has a 'feeling of illness' or whether he is 'afraid of death,' Heathcliff is surprised:

Afraid? No! ... I have neither a fear, nor a presentiment, nor a hope of death. Why should I? With my hard constitution, and temperate mode of living, and unperilous occupations, I ought to, and probably shall remain above ground, till there is scarcely a black hair on my head. (ch xxxiii p 256)

To suggest that he deliberately does anything is patently absurd; something happens to him over which he has no control. 24

Indeed, Heathcliff's comments suggest that he is losing all control over his body. He says, 'And yet I cannot continue in this condition! I have to remind myself to breathe—almost to remind my heart to beat!' (ch xxxiii p 256). The passage could be treated as hyperbole, designed to show that Heathcliff is losing all interest in life. However, Schopenhauer discussed this very question of the possibility of a person's losing all interest in willing and so forgetting to breathe. Noting that the question whether breathing belongs to the set of voluntary or involuntary movements is disputed, Schopenhauer concludes that although various people have attempted to explain breathing

22 Schopenhauer notes: 'Old examples of this may be found in the "Breslauer Sammlung von Natur-und Medicin-Geschichten," September 1799, p 363; in Bayle's "Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres," February 1685, p 189; in Zimmermann, "Ueber die Einsamkeit," vol. i, p 182; in the "Histoire de l'Academie des Sciences" for 1764, an account by Houttuyn, which is quoted in the "Sammlung fur praktische Aerzte," vol. i p 69. More recent accounts may be found in Hufeland's "Journal fur praktische Heilkunde," vol. x p 181, and vol. xlvi p 95; also in Nasse's "Zeitschrift fur psychische Aerzte," 1819, part iii p 460; and in the "Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal," 1809, vol. v p 319. In the year 1833 all the papers announced that the English historian, Dr Lingard, had died in January at Dover of voluntary starvation; according to later accounts, it was not he himself, but a relation of his who died. The World as Will and Idea 1518–19 (bk iv sec 69)

23 Wade Thompson, PMLA lxxviii 73

24 That Heathcliff knows something is happening to him is evinced by his statement to Nelly: 'There is a strange change approaching' (ch xxxiii p 255), but clearly he has no idea what shape this change will take.
as a mixed function, it can actually be included in the set of voluntary actions:

However, we are finally obliged to number it [breathing] with the expressions of will which result from motives. For other motives, i.e., mere ideas, can determine the will to check it or accelerate it, and, as is the case with every other voluntary action, it seems to us that we could give up breathing altogether and voluntarily suffocate. And in fact we could do so if any other motive influenced the will sufficiently strongly to overcome the pressing desire for air.25

In Heathcliff’s case, a motive exists almost strong enough to overcome his desire for air. He exclaims:

I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it. They have yearned towards it so long, and so unwaveringly, that I’m convinced it will be reached — and soon — because it has devoured my existence. I am swallowed in the anticipation of its fulfilment. (ch xxxiii p 256)

The ‘single wish’ is, of course, his desire for reunification with Cathy.

In his discussions of the possibility of an enlightened individual’s dying as a result of starvation or suffocation, Schopenhauer generally conceived of the case in terms of the individual’s denial of his will. Heathcliff’s death, however, may not appear immediately to follow this pattern, since Heathcliff claimed that his will was swallowed up by the single desire of rejoining Cathy. Moreover, the question still remains as to why Heathcliff should become assured of his reunification with Cathy at the moment when he sees in the growing relationship between Catherine and Hareton a reminder of his love for Cathy. Both points are clarified when one recalls what Cathy meant to Heathcliff. Their relationship is not presented as an ordinary love affair, but as the meeting and mingling of two people such that each completes the other. When Cathy explained to Nelly — ‘I am Heathcliff’ — she was expressing the feeling that Heathcliff and she were the same substance. It will be recalled that in her dream at the Grange, Cathy found that her ‘misery arose from the separation that Hindley had ordered’ between Heathcliff and herself (ch xii p 107). She does not mean that they are united sexually, but that they are made of the same ‘stuff.’ Heathcliff’s recognition of his own life patterns in the lives of Hareton and Catherine teaches him that Cathy and he, although phenomenally different, are in essence part of the one Universal Will. This knowledge enables him to understand that he has not lost Cathy, that they are still one. Their bodies are only transitory phenomena; their real nature has never been divided or separated because

25 The World as Will and Idea i 151 (bk ii sec 23)
it partakes of the Universal Will. As a result of this new knowledge, Heathcliff loses all interest in existing as a part of nature, surrenders all volition, and thus delivers himself from any individual existence. He has become conscious that his own nature is identical with the kernel of the world, and thus identical with Catherine's nature.

In the mind of the layman, Schopenhauer's philosophy of the denial of the will has been misconstrued; the belief has arisen that he advocated suicide as a remedy to existence in a world of sorrow. But Schopenhauer always maintained strongly that one could not escape this world merely through death; suicide, he contended, was not a denial of the will, but an assertion of the will. To escape the phenomenal world forever, and so overcome death, one had to attain consciousness of the essential oneness of all objects. Consequently if Heathcliff is to be reunified with Cathy in a noumenal existence, it is not enough that Cathy should have died, but that she should have died eternally to this world.

But is this the case? Although Cathy's death resembles Heathcliff's in a number of important respects, Emily Brontë has chosen to de-emphasize those positive results which arise from Heathcliff's achievement in denying his will. Hints are given that suggest Cathy gives up the world freely for a better world, but the full implications of her death are left to be worked out later in Heathcliff's death. In her comment following Cathy's death, Nelly sums up the reader's puzzled reaction to Cathy:

To be sure, one might have doubted, after the wayward and impatient existence she had led, whether she merited a haven of peace at last. (ch xvi pp 137–8)

Yet the sight of Cathy's corpse convinces Nelly that Cathy has achieved peace:

One might doubt in seasons of cold reflection, but not then, in the presence of her corpse. It asserted its own tranquillity, which seemed a pledge of equal quiet to its former inhabitant. (ch xvi p 138)

As was the case with Heathcliff, critical opinion has divided over the quality of Cathy's death. The reason for this is that Emily Brontë has again deliberately created an ambiguity. For instance, after the quarrel between Heathcliff and Edgar that causes her fatal illness, Cathy locks herself in her

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26 D.H. Lawrence in his insistence that what man sees as the universe and as himself is 'not much more than a mannerism' and that the 'one glorious activity of man' is 'the getting himself into a new relationship with a new heaven and a new earth,' is the British novelist whose position most closely resembles that of Emily Brontë. See 'The Crown' Phoenix II, ed. W. Roberts and H.T. Moore (New York 1968) 415.
room and asks Nelly to tell Edgar that she is ‘in danger of being seriously ill.’ The she adds: ‘I wish it may prove true. He has startled and distressed me shockingly! I want to frighten him’ (ch xi p 100). These comments seem those of a confused girl, not those of a Schopenhauerian saint. And at this point in the novel, surely Cathy is confused. Although she realizes early that she and Heathcliff are one, she is untrue to this perception when she attempts to compromise with the social world by marrying Edgar. Later, however, when confronted with Heathcliff and her husband, she is forced to choose between them. For a time she tries to blame her plight on Nelly, but soon realizes the failure of her attempted compromise and chooses death as the only solution. When Edgar finally discovers Cathy in her distracted mood, after she has locked herself in her room for three days, she has already made her decision. She tells Edgar:

What you touch at present, you may have; but my soul will be on that hilltop before you lay hands on me again. I don’t want you, Edgar; I’m past wanting you.

(ch xii p 109)

This speech might be regarded as another act of petulance on Cathy’s part, originating from her irritation at Edgar’s failing to come to her immediately, but the following events show this interpretation to be false. As soon as Cathy recognizes that she has no further use for the conventional social world, but requires the freedom represented by the moors, she loses her will. She does not commit suicide. In fact she no longer talks about refusing to eat; she simply acquiesces to all around her.

An important reason for the reader’s uncertainty about Cathy’s death is that the structure of the novel does not permit him to observe Cathy’s crisis. The narrative takes the reader to the beginning of Cathy’s change, but then, when the reader is most interested in understanding Cathy’s anger and remorse, Emily Brontë interposes the story of Heathcliff’s marriage to Isabella. As was noted in the case of Heathcliff’s change, the reader remains uninformed of the meaning of the crisis; moreover, with Cathy, the reader is not even permitted to observe the change. Again the novel forces him to infer a great deal. After her narration of the events of Heathcliff’s marriage, Nelly describes the new Cathy:

The flash of her eyes had been succeeded by a dreamy and melancholy softness; they no longer gave the impression of looking at the objects around her; they appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond – you would have said out of this world.

(ch xv p 131)

Thus Emily Brontë again presents us with a fait accompli. Although she per-
mits us to observe the beginning of Cathy’s change, we are not allowed to witness the process. This type of narrative structure is designed to invite reader-participation and interpretation.

That Cathy near her death understands more about the nature and implications of her relationship with Heathcliff than does Heathcliff is revealed during Heathcliff’s last visit to her at the Grange.27 After the first wild embrace, Heathcliff looks at Cathy, and sees that she is dying. He cries out: ‘Oh, Cathy! Oh, my life! how can I bear it?’ (ch xv p 132). Cathy, however, perceives at once that Heathcliff is concerned primarily, not with her death, but with his own coming separation from her. Unafraid of death, Cathy is angered at Heathcliff’s own selfish fears; she attempts to help him overcome his egoistic desires, and begs him to help her recapture their original feeling of oneness. When Heathcliff continues resentful, Cathy affirms that the ordinary, perceived world (including the phenomenal aspect of Heathcliff) does not interest her any longer:

‘That is not my Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me – he’s in my soul. And,’ added she, musingly, ‘the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I’m tired, tired of being enclosed here. I’m wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it. Nelly, you think you are better and more fortunate than I; in full health and strength. You are sorry for me – very soon that will be altered. I shall be sorry for you. I shall be incomparably beyond and above you all.’ (ch xv p 134)

Whereas Cathy understands that the earthly Heathcliff is not the real Heathcliff, and that later she will take the real Heathcliff to her ‘glorious world,’ Heathcliff at this point still believes that death will separate them forever and does not understand that he can follow her. This lesson he learns only at the end of the novel. Cathy’s highly mystical statement that the selfish Heathcliff, concerned only with his own suffering, is not the real Heathcliff, that the real Heathcliff lives in her soul, is clarified for the reader when Heathcliff, near the time of his death, finally realizes that he is united to Cathy in essence.

At the time of Cathy’s death, however, Heathcliff does not understand how he can be reunified with Cathy; therefore he believes that in her death

27 Frederick Flahiff has recently suggested the possibility that Cathy has been aware of the ‘substantial identification’ existing between herself and Heathcliff from the time she was a little girl. See introduction to the Macmillan edition of Wuthering Heights (1968) xxxiii. While I agree with Flahiff that Heathcliff becomes aware of his unity with Cathy only at the end of the novel, I find that Emily Brontë’s depiction of Cathy is much more complex than Flahiff concedes. Cathy, it seems to me, is quite capable of making mistakes in her assessment of what is important to her; clearly one such mistake is her marriage to Edgar in order to obtain conventional happiness.
he has lost all chance to satisfy his desires to be one with another person. Again Schopenhauer is astute in describing what will happen to a man of immense will who finds that all his longings for the infinite must remain unsatisfied:

If, now, a man is filled with an exceptionally intense pressure of will, – if with burning eagerness he seeks to accumulate everything to slake the thirst of his egoism, and thus experiences, as he inevitably must, that all satisfaction is merely apparent, that the attained end never fulfils the promise of the desired object, the final appeasing of the fierce pressure of will, but that when fulfilled the wish only changes its form, and now torments him in a new one; and indeed that if at last all wishes are exhausted, the pressure of will itself remains without any conscious motive, and makes itself known to him with fearful pain as a feeling of terrible desolation and emptiness; if from all this, which in the case of the ordinary degrees of volition is only felt in a small measure, and only produces the ordinary degree of melancholy, in the case of him who is a manifestation of will reaching the point of extraordinary wickedness, there necessarily springs an excessive inward misery, an eternal unrest, an incurable pain; he seeks indirectly the alleviation which directly is denied him, – seeks to mitigate his own suffering by the sight of the suffering of others, which at the same time he recognises as an expression of his power. The suffering of others now becomes for him an end in itself, and is a spectacle in which he delights...  

Schopenhauer’s description helps us to understand Heathcliff’s violence; it is the result of his immense will that cannot find an object.

The extent of Heathcliff’s absorption in his own ego causes his violence against other people, especially Linton and Catherine. His violence offers proof that he has not understood the basic identity of his own nature with that of others. Yet he is dimly aware that some sort of reunion with Cathy would be possible if only he could find the means. It will be recalled that at Cathy’s death he had cried: ‘Not there – not in heaven – not perished – where?’ (ch xvi p 139). In a vague, intuitive way, Heathcliff understands that Cathy has not been annihilated; 29 yet he cannot understand in what way she still exists. Ironically, all the time Heathcliff implores Cathy to come in to him, and he attempts to go out to her, he denies such a union by continually asserting his will over other people.

Heathcliff’s awareness of his unreadiness to join Catherine is implicit in his much misunderstood explanation for his cruelty to Isabella. He says: ‘It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain’ (ch xiv p 128). Morality is usually associated with actions done for the benefit of others. But Heathcliff does not want to go to the

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28 The World as Will and Idea 1470 (bk iv sec 65)
29 Compare Heathcliff’s threat to Nelly: ‘You shall prove, practically, that the dead are not annihilated!’ (ch xxxiv p 263).
orthodox heaven, and therefore does not attempt to lay up good works. For Heathcliff, to be moral means to realize fully his innermost being, that is, to achieve a state of mind in which he can be unified with Cathy – a state of grace that has no connection with good works. As Schopenhauer comments:

In the might with which the bad man asserts life, and which exhibits itself to him in the sufferings which he inflicts on others, he measures how far he is from the surrender and denial of that will, the only possible deliverance from the world and its miseries.\textsuperscript{30}

His cruelty to others does not, of course, make Heathcliff worthy of Cathy; it simply shows him the distance he has to travel to attain the ideal of willlessness.\textsuperscript{31} In a similar way, Baudelaire was to develop his perversities to feel their human significance, to discover in a negative fashion the humanity he was abusing. For a person such as Heathcliff, the greatest danger is to abandon the search for his own higher self in the pursuit of social relations and personal happiness.

This Schopenhauerian account also makes sense of the puzzling dual ending of \textit{Wuthering Heights}. It will be recalled that although Lockwood feels that Cathy, Heathcliff, and Edgar are at peace in the grave under the benign sky, the local people do not agree. The shepherd boy claims to have seen Heathcliff and a woman wandering the moors at night. G.D. Klingopulos has suggested that the ending of the novel is ambiguous, leaving the reader uncertain which interpretation to accept.\textsuperscript{32} Indeed, Allan Brick has asserted that Lockwood’s statement is merely another instance of his naiveté.\textsuperscript{33} Yet there is no reason why these two endings should be contradictory. Both accounts are true. Lockwood is correct if one assumes that as object, Heathcliff and Cathy are dead; their phenomenal existence is completed. But their noumenal existence can never be finished. As people, they were simply the objectification of the universal will which is the eternal force of the universe. Their intrinsic ‘other’ selves – manifestations of the eternal will – are still alive vitalizing the world.

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\textsuperscript{30} The World as Will and Idea \textit{1} 474 (bk iv sec 65)
\textsuperscript{31} The crucial point is that Heathcliff comes to understand his own life force in relation to the world order. The novel does not show, as J.H. Miller contends, ‘that the suffering sin brings will be sufficient expiation for that sin’ and will allow the sinner ‘to escape to heaven’ (\textit{The Disappearance of God}, 200). For Emily Brontë, suffering does not create expiation; it may, however, be the precursor to an individual’s awareness of his proper relation to the noumenal world, which would then show the individual the way to achieve his intrinsic immortality.

\textsuperscript{32} ‘The Novel as Dramatic Poem (m): “Wuthering Heights’” \textit{Scrutiny} \textit{xiv} (1946–7) 85
\textsuperscript{33} College English \textit{xxi} 226