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Story, plot, and narration

One fine summer morning – it was the beginning of harvest, I remember – Mr. Earnshaw, the old master, came down stairs, dressed for a journey; and, after he had told Joseph what was to be done during the day, he turned to Hindley, and Cathy, and me – for I sat eating my porridge with them – and he said, speaking to his oon,

“Now my bonny man, I’m going to Liverpool, to-day . . . What shall I bring you? You may choose what you like: only let it be little, for I shall walk there and back; sixty miles each way, that is a long spell!”

Hindley named a fiddle, and then he asked Cathy; she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip.

He did not forget me, for he had a kind heart, though he was rather severe, sometimes. He promised to bring me a pocketful of apples and pears, and then he kissed his children good-bye, and set off.¹

This is how the *story* of Emily Brontë’s novel, *Wuthering Heights*, begins. Like most stories, it begins with a beginning. This is a more important point than it may seem: all stories move only in one direction, forward through time. If there is a knowable beginning, that’s where they begin. If there is a knowable end, that’s where they end. The process of telling is the story’s *narration*, and at this point Ellen (Nelly) Dean, a servant in the household, is its narrator. This distinction between story and narration is also important. It is an implicit acknowledgment that a story is understood as having a separate existence from its narration. As such, it can be told in different ways by different narrators. Were Hindley or Cathy our narrator at this point, the narration of this story would be different, with different words, different emotional inflections, different perspectives, and different details. These narrators might even contradict each other. But the usual presumption is that there is a story to be told and that the story itself, going inexorably through time, can no more correct itself than can events in real life: Mr. Earnshaw goes to Liverpool and returns with a child he found on the streets there. The arrival of this child, who will be named Heathcliff, sets

off in turn a series of events with even further consequences, none of which can be altered by going back and changing or erasing them.

If you have read *Wuthering Heights*, you know that the novel itself does not start at the beginning of its story, but rather thirty years later with barely a year of the story left to go. There is a different narrator at this point, a vacationing Londoner named Mr. Lockwood, who is renting Thrushcross Grange from Heathcliff and whose narration is not told orally but recorded in his diary. Lockwood enters the novel's storyworld during a pause in the story's action. Through the narration of two visits to his landlord at Wuthering Heights, Lockwood introduces us to four characters and the possible ghost of a fifth, all of them mysteriously miserable and intently at odds. Brontë's decision to redistribute the order in which the story events are told is a *plot* decision. In this instance, it brings us in to a situation that is clearly charged with story, with only the tiniest scraps to indicate what the story is. It was a shrewd bit of emplotment, arousing in the reader, as it does in Mr. Lockwood, a keen desire to know how this bizarre collection of characters wound up together in an atmosphere of such hostility. The management of plot, in this sense of the word, is among other things the management of suspense, which in turn generates the energy that draws us through any well-constructed narrative. We want to know the story, which greatly adds to our pleasure when, after thirty pages, Nelly Dean begins telling the story from its beginning to a bedridden Lockwood.

The distinction between plot and story, like that between narration and story, is an implicit presumption that a story is separate from its rendering. Just as a story can be narrated in different ways, so it can be plotted in different ways. This analytically powerful distinction between story and its representation is, arguably, the founding insight of the field of narratology. If story, plot, and narration can be called the three principal components of the overarching category "narrative," the distinction between story and how it is communicated is so fundamental that scholars of narrative often bring narration and plot together under a single heading, narrative discourse. Over the last seventy-five years, the distinction between story and "story as discoursed"² has proven very helpful in understanding how narrative achieves its effects. But nothing is tidy in the study of narrative. This is largely because narrative happens in the mind, with its empirical components – words spoken or printed, pictures on a screen, actors on a stage – transformed by cognitive processes that are still largely mysterious. For this reason, the nature, necessity, and adequacy of these three enduring concepts – story, plot, and narration – have never been completely assured, however fruitful the controversies they have stirred up.

A brief explication of concepts

Of these three key concepts, story is the sturdiest. Scholars may not agree that a story must have a beginning or an end, but there is little dispute that a story is composed of action (an event or events) and characters (more broadly existents or entities) and that it always proceeds forward in time: Heathcliff arrives, Mr. Earnshaw dies, Edgar courts Cathy, Heathcliff disappears, Cathy marries Edgar, Heathcliff returns, he elopes with Isabella, Cathy dies giving birth to Cathy Linton, Linton Heathcliff is born, Heathcliff kidnaps young Cathy, she marries Linton, Hindley dies, Edgar dies, Linton dies, Heathcliff dies. Story was first analytically set off from the manner of its rendering in the wake of Saussure's distinction in linguistics between the signified and the signifier. The spade work for this adaptation was performed by Russian Formalists, who, in the 1920s, introduced the distinction of *fabula* (story) and *sjuzhet* (its rendering). Tzvetan Todorov gave these terms their rough equivalents in French, *histoire* and *discours*, and Gérard Genette greatly elaborated the distinction in his landmark narratological reading of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*.³ From there, thanks in part to Seymour Chatman's foundational work, the corresponding distinction of story and discourse made its way into English where it is now widely deployed.

Two notable controversies have attended this basic distinction. One is the question of whether it is a real distinction at all since all we ever know of story is what we get through discourse. Story *seems* to pre-exist its rendering (note how often stories are narrated in the past tense) yet, as Culler argues, the rendering also *seems* to generate the story, which would make it follow rather than precede the discourse.⁴ The other controversy is closely related to the first and involves the repeatability of story. If a story has a separate existence such that it can be rendered in more than one way and even in more than one medium, how do we know it is the same story when we see it again? What is necessary for us to recognize it as such? Or is it always a new story in every rendering? Some narrative scholars (Barthes, Chatman, Abbott) have attempted to distinguish between those events that are essential for the story to be the story that it is (nuclei, kernels, constituent events) and those that are expendable (catalyzers, satellites, supplementary events),⁵ but choosing which events fall in which categories can be a vexed enterprise.

The term narration is a little more slippery than story, having been used in some mutually contradictory ways. It has been used as a synonym for narrative, it has been used more narrowly by some film critics to mean most of the narrative discourse,⁶ it has been used still more narrowly to mean the production of narrative by a narrator, and in its most restricted sense it has

been used to mean the narrator's words exclusive of all *direct discourse*, that is, recorded speech or thought (dialogue, monologue, interior monologue). Distinguishing the third and fourth of these usages can involve some stubborn entanglement, since direct discourse is often rich with narration. For example, Nelly Dean's narration is, technically, direct discourse, recorded by Lockwood in his journal, yet it bears most of the narration in Brontë's novel. Nelly's narration in turn includes much quoted dialogue and monologue, which in their turn include vital pieces of narration. In short, these two functions are not mutually exclusive. The distinction is still important, but it is a distinction of emphasis: discourse as expression or discourse as narration. In the excerpt above, for example, Mr. Earnshaw's words in quotation are direct discourse, but within them one might focus on the expression of his hearty good nature ("Now, my bonny young man . . .") or on his narration of what will come to pass ("I shall walk there and back").

Two aspects of narration that always have significant consequences are the sensibility of the narrator and his or her distance from the action. Narrators can be brilliant, dumb, deranged, passionate, or cold as ice. They are as various, in short, as we are, and how they are constituted inevitably inflects how they mediate the story. They are also variously close to or distant from the action. In a valuable distinction, displacing the much less useful distinction between first-person and third-person narration, Gérard Genette identified homodiegetic narrators as those who are also characters in the storyworld (or diegesis) and therefore necessarily closer to the action than heterodiegetic narrators, who stand outside the storyworld.⁷ The latter tend to have greater reliability, inspiring more confidence in the information and views they convey and often deploying third-person narration throughout. This is not always the case. Some heterodiegetic narrators have clearly developed personalities, refer to themselves in the first person, and even raise suspicions regarding their reliability. But, by and large, heterodiegetic narrators are less personally invested in the story they tell than are homodiegetic narrators, though among these latter, too, personalities and personal investment range widely. Both of the principal narrators of *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood and Nelly Dean, are homodiegetic, but their personalities and involvement in the action are very different. Lockwood is an imperceptive, shallow, somewhat dimwitted man. And though he is a character in the world of the novel, he comes into the isolated, rural setting of the story from the city and never becomes a part of the action except in one instance and that through sheer inadvertence. Nelly Dean is more perceptive, less self-absorbed, with a good enough heart and a sufficient enough supply of common sense to give her greater reliability than Lockwood. Yet she is much closer to the characters, having lived with them all her life; she has distinct

hopes and fears on their behalf and from time to time even plays a role in the action.

Plot is an even slipperier term than narration, both more polyvalent and more approximate in its meanings, indeed so “vague in ordinary usage” that narratologists often avoid it altogether.⁸ In common English usage, plot is often identical with story (“it was boring; there was no plot”), yet in the discourse on narrative, the term has been deployed in at least three distinguishable ways. Perhaps most frequently, plot is understood as a type of story – as in E. M. Forster’s use of plot to indicate a story that is not merely one thing after another but events connected by cause. Vladimir Propp, Northrop Frye, and Joseph Campbell all developed anatomies of plot types that provide a finite number of story frameworks underlying the infinite variety of narrative. This use of the term, as Hilary Dannenberg has pointed out, also appears in feminist accounts of the ways a culture can limit the roles of women in fiction to certain plot types. All of these usages of plot feature the term as a skeletal story, either universal or culturally fabricated, which performs its psycho-social work while cloaked in a diversity of narrative dress.⁹

Plot is also used to refer to that combination of economy and sequencing of events that makes a story a story and not just raw material. In this sense, it is often used as a value term. Thus Aristotle’s concept of “*muthos*,” often translated as plot, is the fashioned story, shaped with a beginning, middle, and end. Brian Richardson has summarized this general usage of plot as “a teleological sequence of events linked by some principle of causation; that is, the events are bound together in a trajectory that typically leads to some form of resolution or convergence.”¹⁰ Plot in this sense is a device that brings the story to its fullness and authenticity as story. In Ricoeur’s words, plot is “the intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in a story . . . A story is made out of events to the extent that plot *makes* events *into* a story.”¹¹

A third use of the term plot, modeled on Genette’s work and often deployed by narratologists writing in English, features the way plot serves a story by departing from the chronological order of its events, or expanding on some events while rushing through others, or returning to them, sometimes repeatedly. This use of plot is close to the Russian Formalist “*sjuzhet*” with its analytical attention to the ways in which the plot re-arranges, expands, contracts, or repeats events of the story. By such temporary delays, concealments, and confusions, plot enriches the experience of what would otherwise be just a story. If in Ricoeur’s terms the stress is on plot as the artful *construction* of story, in these terms the emphasis is on plot as the artful *disclosure* of story.

Each of these three uses of the term plot can be seen as different perspectives on the same overarching issue of the distribution of narrative parts. As such, these uses are distinguishable from the common use of narration as the manner in which those parts are delivered, the analysis of which tends to feature such issues as voice, focalization, feeling, judgment, mood, distance, and tone. If the first of these uses of plot comes closest to the way in which we use the term in English, the second and third, with their emphasis on the art by which a story is delivered, might more accurately be referred to as “*emplotment*.”

An art of opening and closing gaps

Emily Brontë’s plot decision (in the third sense above) to start her narrative close to the end of her story opened up an enormous gulf. The intensity of the characters Lockwood describes and the oddness of their behavior beg for a narrator to recover the story lurking in that gulf and give plausibility to what now looks so strange. Fortunately there is a narrator at hand. But Nelly’s narration, like all narration, is only and inevitably a partial recovery. Here is another important point about narrative. It at one and the same time fills and creates gaps. This is an insight that first received extended development by Wolfgang Iser and Meir Sternberg in the 1970s. As Iser wrote, “it is only through the inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism.”¹² He was thinking particularly of critical gaps, but if you look closely at the sentences of any narrative, you will find gaps everywhere.

One urgent question evoked by the gap Lockwood opens up is what type of story (what plot in the first sense above) is in this gap? Lockwood makes a series of conjectures, all of them, as it turns out, comically in error. But the account he gives of his reading on the night he spends at Wuthering Heights and the fearful dream he has of a waif wandering in exile for twenty years suggest that this plot might at least have something to do with exclusion and punishment. As far as it goes, this turns out to be true, though, as we eventually learn, there are actually two major plots still in progress in this huge gap – a tragic love story (Cathy and Heathcliff’s) and a revenge tragedy (Heathcliff’s) – and another kind over and done with – that of a girl’s entry into society and womanhood (Cathy’s) – and still one more – a romance involving young lovers (Cathy Linton and Hareton Earnshaw) – just about to blossom.

In addition, it is important to keep in mind that crowded into the space we are looking into are not just events and the characters involved in them, strung along the armature of their plots, but an entire storyworld, which may, for that matter, even include an entire metaphysical universe. Recent

work by Lubomír Doležel, David Herman, Alan Palmer, Marie-Laure Ryan, and others has foregrounded just how much in the way of worlds, inner and outer, actual and possible, material and immaterial, is comprised in a story.¹³ Finally, in seeking to fill the gaps of what happens in the storyworld we must cope not only with what is left out of the narration but also with what is given. This is because the narration is inflected everywhere by our sense of who is narrating. We offset for perceived biases – self-interest, love, hatred, envy, fondness, immaturity, personal agenda – that may affect the reliability of the narration, not so often regarding the facts, which we usually (though not invariably) accept, but frequently regarding the emotional and evaluative coloring of those facts.

Plot, narration, and character: trying to understand Heathcliff

Edgar Linton's sister, Isabella, barely two months into her elopement, writes to Nelly asking: "Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? . . . I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married" (*Wuthering Heights*, 134). A lot in this novel rides on the question of what Isabella has married, but note that our narration in this instance, nested in the more reliable narration of the older and wiser Ellen Dean, is delivered by a passionate, somewhat spoiled, immature, inexperienced reader of popular romances who had, two months before, slotted Heathcliff in the wrong romantic role of the wrong romantic plot, with herself cast as romantic heroine. Later Heathcliff will rub this in: she stubbornly pictured in him "a hero of romance," despite all evidence to the contrary, including his "hang[ing] up her little dog" as they set out on their elopement (*Wuthering Heights*, 148–9). She has in a short time fallen a long way, which no doubt lends its own emotional excess to her narration.

As a plot decision, the narration of Isabella's mistake helps Brontë's readers grasp the originality of her work by helping them to avoid making the same mistake of importing the wrong plot. By way of reinforcement, Cathy has already tried to disabuse her sister-in-law: "don't imagine that he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! He's . . . a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man . . . and he'd crush you like a sparrow's egg, Isabella, if he found you a troublesome charge" (*Wuthering Heights*, 102). Yet what kind of lover is this, for he is a lover – Cathy's –, and what kind of romance plot is it where the hero can crush young women like sparrow's eggs? Or does the value of this metaphor lie not in its narration of possibilities but in its function as direct discourse, telling us more about Cathy than Heathcliff? For that matter, how reliable is she as a narrator? If what she says turns out to be in part prophetic ("he couldn't love a Linton; and yet, he'd be quite

capable of marrying your fortune, and expectations”), the motivation she invokes (“Avarice is growing with him a besetting sin”) is paltry, given what we learn.

All of which is to say that determining the character of Heathcliff and what plot he belongs to is at the mercy of a host of conflicting passions and personal agendas. Readers of the 1850 posthumous edition of *Wuthering Heights* would have found the novel framed by a preface written by Emily’s sister Charlotte, at that point a respected novelist in her own right. In this paratext they would have encountered a clear and decisive answer to Isabella’s question. Heathcliff is “a child neither of Lascar nor gypsy, but a man’s shape animated by demon life – a Ghoul – an Afreet.” As such there is only one way to read him: “unredeemed; never once swerving in his arrow-straight course to perdition” (*Wuthering Heights*, xxxvi). Yet Nelly, reflecting in the final pages of her narration on what the entire story might say of Heathcliff, provides an eerily prophetic rebuttal to Charlotte:

“Is he a ghoul, or a vampire?” I mused. I had read of such hideous, incarnate demons. And then, I set myself to reflect, how I had tended him in infancy; and watched him grow to youth; and followed him through his whole life course, and what absurd nonsense it was to yield to that sense of horror.

“But where did he come from, the little dark thing, harboured by a good man to his bane?” muttered superstition, as I dozed into unconsciousness. And I began, half dreaming, to weary myself with imagining some fit parentage for him . . .

(*Wuthering Heights*, 327)

Though Nelly rejects the idea that Heathcliff is somehow nonhuman, fearful “superstition” prods her to try to narrativize his origins and thus normalize him by establishing his type – a wearying task because of its impossibility. Heathcliff’s origins are, in Sternberg’s term, a “permanent” narrative gap.¹⁴ All we have to go on are Heathcliff’s swarthy complexion, his first appearance alone on the streets of Liverpool, and the “gibberish” he spoke at that time. All three are troubling enough for the characters of this novel and no doubt for much of Brontë’s audience. As marks of the invasive non-English “other” they signify mystery and danger. But they could for that matter signify something wonderful, as Nelly suggests to a young, downcast Heathcliff: “You’re fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian Queen, each of them able to buy up, with a week’s income, *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange together?” (*Wuthering Heights*, 57). Yet, again, the same narrator, at another point, could imagine Heathcliff as an “evil beast . . . waiting his time to spring and destroy” (*Wuthering Heights*, 106). To go back to

the distinction developed above between direct discourse as expression and direct discourse as narration, what we observe in these instances is reliability in the expression of feelings about Heathcliff but unreliability in rendering what actually constitutes his character.

But what if we looked to Heathcliff's own words for answers to the enigma of who or what he is? After all, there are numerous instances in which he narrates his own actions, as in the following passage: "The first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog, and when she pleaded for it, the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her, except one. . . ." (*Wuthering Heights*, 149). It is hard to see this as a case in which personal feeling undermines reliability of narration, yet the cruelty of the action is so gratuitously excessive that readers have been tempted to put it in brackets by seeing in it, not Heathcliff, but authorial excess. This is basically what Charlotte did when she wrote that her sister, "having formed these beings, did not know what she had done" (*Wuthering Heights*, xxxv). But if you don't finesse the text in this way and read Heathcliff's actions not as the author's loss of control but as the product of her intentions then this preternatural ferocity must be accepted as part of Heathcliff's character.

But what does it tell us? The association of little dogs and Isabella goes way back for Heathcliff, back to the first time he saw her, peeking with Catherine through the window of the Grange.

Isabella – I believe she is eleven, a year younger than Cathy – lay screaming at the farther end of the room, shrieking as if witches were running red hot needles into her. Edgar stood on the hearth weeping silently, and in the middle of the table sat a little dog, shaking its paw and yelping, which from their mutual accusations, we understood they had nearly pulled in two between them. The idiots! That was their pleasure! To quarrel who should hold a heap of warm hair, and each beginning to cry because both, after struggling to get it, refused to take it!
(*Wuthering Heights*, 48)

This is also the moment childhood ended for Heathcliff, when Cathy began to fall away from him, staying for six weeks among the Lintons and returning a young woman with a veneer of new interests and new values. Does this trauma, the greatest of his life to this point, help explain Heathcliff's cruelty toward Isabella's dog? Is the little dog a kind of memorial trigger? If so, such an understanding of Heathcliff might lighten our assessment of his ferocity.

But if we focus on the child Heathcliff's words, not so much as the narration of an event that prepares for and to some extent explains a later event,

but rather as the direct expression of his feelings in the moment, there is less to leaven our judgment. The child Heathcliff gives vent to his disgust and the pleasure he took in tormenting these coddled children: “We laughed outright at the petted things, we did despise them! . . . The Lintons heard us, and with one accord, they shot like arrows to the door . . . ‘Oh, mamma, mamma! Oh, papa! Oh, mamma, come here. Oh, papa, oh!’ They really did howl out, something in that way. We made frightful noises to terrify them still more . . .” (*Wuthering Heights*, 49). For the adult narrator, this is still where the emphasis lies: “I never, in all my life, met with such an abject thing as she is – She even disgraces the name of Linton; and I’ve sometimes relented, from pure lack of invention, in my experiments on what she could endure, and still creep shamefully cringing back!” (*Wuthering Heights*, 149). Reading Heathcliff’s narration thus, it appears that it is Isabella’s human weakness itself, “abject” and “cringing,” that rouses in him a power of evil that grows more terrible as his victim grows more pathetic: “I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething, and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase in pain” (*Wuthering Heights*, 150). A demon? Perhaps, but if he is, he is still human enough to wonder, as we do, just what he is.

However great our own wonderment, both the cruel energy of Heathcliff’s words and his ability to reflect on that energy are immediate and undeniable. As direct discourse, they give evidence of what constitutes Heathcliff that is more reliable than, say, his description of the Linton children. This difference between direct discourse as personal expression and direct discourse as narration can be critical. Heathcliff, for example, tells how he was once on the point of opening Cathy’s coffin when “it seemed that I heard a sigh from some one above, close at the edge of the grave,” and then again

There was another sigh, close at my ear. I appeared to feel the warm breath of it displacing the sleet-laden wind. I knew no living thing in flesh and blood was by – but as certainly as you perceive the approach to some substantial body in the dark, though it cannot be discerned, so certainly I felt that Cathy was there, not under me, but on the earth. (*Wuthering Heights*, 286–7)

Taken by themselves, the words are reliable evidence not of spiritual contact but of Heathcliff’s state of mind as it expresses both the recollection of an experience and a conviction about its cause. As to what really happened in the story he tells, well, maybe he heard something, maybe he only imagined it, maybe Cathy was present, maybe she wasn’t.

Shortly after Heathcliff himself is buried beside Cathy, Nelly encounters a terrified boy. The narrative shifts for a moment to direct discourse:

“What is the matter, my little man?” I asked.

“They’s Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t’Nab,” he blubbered, “un’ Aw darnut pass ‘em.”

I saw nothing; but neither the sheep nor he would go on, so I bid him take the road lower down. (*Wuthering Heights*, 333)

The boy’s words are the boy’s words. They tell us how he is troubled. But as narration, they do not give us enough to rely on them as reporting a real event in the storyworld of *Wuthering Heights*. In this way and a great many others, the narration of Brontë’s novel sustains not just Heathcliff but also the world to which he belongs as a collection of narrative gaps.

Adaptation: reconfiguring narrative gaps

In the 1939 film version of *Wuthering Heights*, it is not a little shepherd boy who reports seeing the apparitions of Heathcliff and a woman, but a much more reliable witness, Dr. Kenneth, the man of science. He comes running in, interrupting Ellen Dean who is just concluding her narration to Lockwood. He saw them, he exclaims, “as plain as my own eyes,” and points at his eyes for emphasis. As narrator, Ellen (not diminished as “Nelly”) is also coded with greater reliability: white-haired and grave, she is played with authoritative dignity by Flora Robson, whose narrowed eyes seem continually to gaze on the unseen. “Under a high rock,” she says, and Dr. Kenneth, surprised, confirms. “It was Cathy,” she declares. And when Lockwood objects that he doesn’t believe in ghosts, she fine-tunes her analysis with the same reassuring gravitas: “Not a ghost, but Cathy’s love, stronger than time itself.” In short, the metaphysical gap that Brontë’s narration and plotting carefully left open is in this version filled decisively. The storyworld of the film includes both this world and the next, so that what looks like an ending is actually the beginning of a whole other life where death doesn’t exist. They are “not dead,” says Ellen, “not alone. . . . They’ve only just begun to live.”

Of course, when you think about it, there is a puzzle in what Ellen actually means when she says that they are “not dead” or that what Dr. Kenneth saw was “Cathy’s love.” There’s also the question of whether Cathy and Heathcliff constitute a special case, earning a reward that is not open to the rest of us. But the film does not invite the viewer to dwell on such questions. Rather it turns in its final moment to the immediacy of sight and sound. In film, though there are almost always, as above, fragments of verbalized narration scattered everywhere, much of the burden of narration is non-verbal, borne largely by the camera (the angles, duration, and sequencing of what it sees) and not uncommonly by music. Now the scene shifts, the music

swells, and the camera reveals a high rock. Charles McArthur and Ben Hecht in their screenplay for the film had at this point prescribed two birds flying off together. But this was not unambiguous enough for Samuel Goldwyn, who replaced the birds with a double exposure of Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon walking hand in hand under the rock.

In managing the narration and emplotment of the story for film, Goldwyn, his director (William Wyler), and his screenwriters had to deal with constraints that Brontë never had to. They had to deliver an entire story in under two hours; they had to do this clearly enough for a captive audience to grasp it in one sitting; and they had to move the audience sufficiently to bring in enough viewers to cover the film's considerable costs and make a profit. To do this, they pared Brontë's story down, eliminating the whole eighteen-year stretch between Cathy's death and Heathcliff's. With it went Heathcliff's elaborate machinations of revenge and the love story of the second generation. Cathy does not give birth, so there is no Cathy Linton, nor is there Heathcliff's and Isabella's son, Linton Heathcliff, nor does Hindley marry Frances, so she and their son, Hareton, are also gone. The film-makers did keep Brontë's plot decision to begin with Lockwood's visit to Wuthering Heights, but this scene comes, in the adjusted story time, on the heels of Cathy's death and within hours of Heathcliff's. The narrative trigger is Lockwood's dream encounter with Cathy's apparition, and Ellen's voiceover narration follows as an explication of what he saw and what it means. The film was a remarkable feat of restructuring, but the result was a closing of narrative gaps on almost every level – moral, psychological, social, and, as we noted above, metaphysical. It follows a much more conventional romance plot than Brontë did, and Heathcliff plays a more conventional lover, marrying Isabella out of a jealous desire to hurt Cathy, a point he rams home with such plaintive force that the impact appears to be Cathy's deathblow. But this is about as rough as Heathcliff gets in the film, and the fault for this tragic outcome lies clearly with Cathy. The moral is equally clear: don't trade love for wealth and status.

What I hope to have shown in this brief look at the way story, plot, and narration interact is that narrative is an art of the opening and closing of gaps, and that in those gaps lie whole worlds that the art of narrative invites us either to actualize or leave as possibilities.

NOTES

1. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 36.
2. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1978), pp. 19–22.

3. Tzvetan Todorov, *Littérature et signification* (Paris: Larousse, 1967), and Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. Translated by Jane E. Levin (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980).
4. Jonathan Culler, "Story and Discourse in the Analysis of Narrative." In *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 169–87.
5. H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 20–2; Roland Barthes, "Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narratives." In Susan Sontag (ed.) *A Barthes Reader* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982), pp. 295–6; Chatman, *Story and Discourse*, pp. 53–6.
6. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Edward Branigan, *Narrative Comprehension and Film* (London: Routledge, 1992).
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