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Petted Things: *Wuthering Heights* and the Animal

Here’s a riddle: what invention of eighteenth-century England develops, in the course of the nineteenth century, into a major instance of and vehicle for the culture’s high valuation of sympathy and domestic life, and becomes known, worldwide, as a quintessential embodiment of English identity and a national self-image founded on an idealized vision of home? If the genre of the novel probably comes to mind, the modern domestic pet also fits the bill. If England became known as a nation of shop-keepers, it was also preeminently associated with long novels and beloved pet animals, two cultural forms which, I argue, developed not just in parallel but in tandem. Indeed, although the link has been little remarked, it seems fair to say that the history of English domestic fiction is deeply bound up with that of the domestic animal. In this essay I develop an argument about one aspect of that relationship through an analysis of the meanings of pethood, animality, and cruelty in the early novels of the Brontë sisters—*Wuthering Heights* in particular.

The governess narrator of Anne Brontë’s *Agnes Gray* discovers, to her dismay, that the favorite “amusement” of her young charge, Tom, is to mutilate and torture baby birds:

“And what do you do with them, when you catch them?”

“Different things. Sometimes I give them to the cat; sometimes I cut them in pieces with my penknife; but the next, I mean to roast alive.”

“And why do you mean to do such a horrible thing?”

“For two reasons: first, to see how long it will live—and then, to see what it will taste like.”

Agnes tries to convince Tom, on the basis of the claims of interspecies sympathy and compassion, of the evil of such behavior: “But don’t you know it is extremely wicked to do such things? Remember, the birds can feel as well as you, and think, how would you like it yourself?” Tom, however, rebuts her moral argument by denying that sympathy can occur beyond the boundary of species: “Oh, that’s nothing! I’m not a bird, and I can’t feel what I do to them.”

Driven by Tom’s continued sadism toward animals, and his parents’ toleration of his cruelty, Agnes finally performs her own act of violence against the set of baby birds she knows will be tortured if they live:
I got a large flat stone, that had been reared up for a mouse-trap by the gardener, then, having once more vainly endeavored to persuade the little tyrant to let the birds be carried back, I asked what he intended to do with them. With fiendish glee he commenced a list of torments, and while he was busied in the relation, I dropped the stone upon his intended victims, and crushed them flat beneath it.4

Anne Brontë here raises a set of ethical and representational questions concerning the limits and requirements of sympathy with animals, cruelty or violence to animals, and the depiction of such violence. We learn of Agnes’ character, her compassion, through her objection to, at once, the sadism of Tom Bloomfield—whose “face twisted into all manner of contortions in the ecstasy of his delight” as he plans his tortures—and to the cruel indifference and lack of compassion on his mother’s part: she views Agnes’s intervention with disapproval, concluding that “a child’s amusement is scarcely to be weighed against the welfare of a soulless brute.”5 That the very rock Agnes uses for her mission of mercy was to be used by the gardener as a mouse-trap suggests how thoroughly this society is suffused by violence to animals: this is not simply the quirk of a single family. The scene of animal cruelty becomes an ethical theater in which at least three roles stand out: the cruel sadist, who enjoys inflicting pain; the cruelly indifferent observer, who can witness the sadistic act and the animal’s pain without feeling; and the feeling observer who takes action in response to the abuse, or responds to it with strong compassion and sympathy. Yet the sheer power of the image of the stone crushing the baby birds produces an additional unresolved tension in this passage. If we respond with horror, at least we respond; it is difficult to cordon off a reader’s proper dismay at such a scene from an undercurrent of voyeuristic fascination.

**Agnes Gray**, along with its companion novels *Withering Heights* (with which it was issued in a single volume) and *Jane Eyre* (published a few weeks earlier), was published, in 1847, at a moment when a nascent “animal rights” movement—not yet called by that name—was taking its place as a powerful social force in England, twenty-three years after the founding of the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Animals.6 In this year, the Vegetarian Society of Great Britain was founded, and Marshall Hall published a controversial series of articles on animal experimentation and medical ethics in the medical journal *The Lancet*.7 In response to criticism accusing him of “unjustifiable cruelty,” Hall defended his approach to animal experimentation:

Is it right to “kill and eat,” to preserve strength and health; and is it not right to perform experiments, with all the precautions which I have laid down, to promote that very science, on which not only the preservation, but the restoration, of strength and health depend!

Or, if the animal is to be destroyed, is any more lenient mode of killing it known than that inflicted by asphyxia; and of the modes of inducing asphyxia, is any so proud
as strangulation, in which sensibility does not survive one second of time? May I ask the writer in the last number of the Medical and Chirurgical Review, how it will please him henceforth to dispose of superfluous puppies and kittens?8

Hall’s comments suggest how easily the language of medical ethics, on the topic of animal experimentation, can overlap with or cross into a discourse of “sensibility” we associate with literature and fiction. Both experimental physiology and the novel at this historical moment struggled to define the meaning of cruelty to animals, the limits of “leniency” toward other species, and the difficulty of ethical action in a world containing, perhaps, too many living objects of potential sympathy.9

I argue in this essay that the first novels of the Brontë sisters—Wuthering Heights in particular—were written in close relation to the emergent set of social, political, and philosophical questions typified by the events and developments of 1847. Even when the question of cruelty to animals is not an explicitly represented topic, as it is in this scene in Agnes Gray, a set of questions and issues surrounding human responsibility to animals structures the Brontës’ work more fundamentally than has been recognized. Emily and Charlotte Brontë in particular, I will suggest, understood the creative process by which an author gives or invests life in a fictional character as one fundamentally related to the imaginative act by which a human being grants ethical stature to the animal. It was therefore through the Brontës’ drawing on the discourse of animal suffering and of cruelty to animals, I argue, that Victorian narrative and characterization developed some of their signature techniques and tropes.

Pet Characters

When we think of animal characters, we probably think first not of realist fiction but of modern cartoons, comics, and children’s books. As soon as we consider the likes of such cartoon animals as Garfield, Marmaduke, and Heathcliff, however, we will notice a surprising connection to the realm of classic Victorian fiction. That one of the most famous characters in Victorian fiction somehow migrated into a popular 1970s American cartoon strip is not a meaningless echo, I suggest, but a link that can point us toward useful insights regarding the animality of Victorian fiction. The September 2001 London Guardian obituary for the cartoonist George Gately explains how, in 1973, Gately invented his most successful creation: “According to his brother, George was ‘toying around with something based on a household pet’ when he came up with a stylish cat and, rather incongruously, named him after Emily Brontë’s romantic hero.”10 We would probably all second the judgment that the cartoon cat Heathcliff’s name seems somewhat “incongruous,” but we can also notice the par-
allels that must have brought the name to mind for Gately. “The pug-nacious Heathcliff,” a “fat cat with attitude,” the obituary reminds us, was “nominally owned by the Nutmeg family . . . but was very much his own character . . . [S]elf-assertive . . . and underhand, he demanded the best food and the best seat in the house, then went out to terrorize the other pets in the neighbourhood . . . . But Heathcliff also had a gentle side, which he showed most willingly to a Persian cat named Sonja.”

Mutatis mutandis—the Earnshaws become the Nutmegs, Catherine grows claws as the Persian cat Sonja—perhaps this was the comic-strip Heathcliff 1970s America required or deserved.

So, Heathcliff becomes a household pet, a cat with attitude. (Is there really any other kind?) If we can accept Heathcliff’s pethood, then perhaps it will not take much of a leap to realize that Jane Eyre began as a dog: not Heathcliff’s Great Dane companion Marmaduke, but rather an ugly, ungainly, but passionately loyal dog named Clumsy. In her 1842 school notebook kept in Belgium, Charlotte Brontë sketched what seem to have been early notes towards Jane Eyre, the novel she would publish five years later. The outline for a story begins with a husband bringing his wife a puppy as a gift. As the puppy matures, he loses favor. “Tell how he grows ugly in growing up; . . . Madam’s disgust for him; the rebuffs he suffers . . . Clumsy, for that is what she calls him now, banished to the yard; his degradation; detail his privations, the change in food and company.”

We can read this as an early type of young Jane in Mrs. Reed’s home, enduring her disgust and rebuffs, then banished to the “privations” and “change in food and company” of Lowood. Next, a rival appears, a pretty poodle named Zephyrette, “a well-bred dog, placed above all animals of her kind.” This is, of course, the predecessor of Blanche Ingram, the embodiment of conventional—and shallow—female beauty and virtue. In the end, Clumsy, having suffered “privations” and “rebuffs,” demonstrates the superiority of loyalty and strength of character to superficial graces and appearance. When two robbers enter the house, the faithless Zephyrette flirts with them whereas Clumsy fights them to the death with all the persistent, fierce loyalty Jane would later show to Rochester. Charlotte ends her notes with a reminder of the central lesson to be learned regarding character: “At that sight the master’s regret over his conduct toward Clumsy and the preference given to the thankless Zephyrette.” When this story would become Jane Eyre, of course, Clumsy would achieve a more satisfying triumph over the Zephyrette character.

These unexpected links between the protagonists of two of the most famous Victorian novels and a pet cat and dog invite a more general consideration of the links between Victorian fiction and the history of English attitudes towards animals and pets. Of the major reformist social movements in Victorian culture, the one surely least
considered to date by critics and scholars of Victorian literature has been the political, social, and philosophical push to re-think the status of the animal and the meaning of human relationships to animals. One may think about this history as organized around such basic questions as: who is human? Who or what is a non-human, a thing or “animal”? What living things may be treated cruelly—or can a “thing” or “animal” be treated cruelly? (Does cruelty only obtain when the object is designated as human?) And how are “sympathy” and “cruelty,” as two manifestations of passionate affect, linked? The field of Victorian studies has had the benefit of many important analyses of the links between Victorian literature and natural history, biology, and particularly the work and influence of Darwin.13 Most scholarly thinking on Victorian literature and animals has been routed through a narrative in which the 1859 publication of The Origin of Species is the primary turning point.14 What seems to have been comparatively neglected is a somewhat different (if not, of course, entirely distinct) history in which the key date might be instead 1824, the year of the founding of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—or 1876, the year of the Cruelty to Animals Act. Within this “other history” of nineteenth-century animals and animality, questions of evolution and genetic linkage are subordinated to those of cruelty and sympathy, the spectacle of suffering, and the definition of the “human” as an ethical, rather than biological, category.

Jacques Derrida has recently posed some compelling questions along these lines by way of redefining Western metaphysics as characterized by what he calls “carno-phallogocentrism,” an ideology in which “carnivorous virility” defines powerful subjectivity.15 Such an ideology demands a category of the non-human living: that which is alive but can be objectified as consumable meat.

“Can the voice of the friend be that of an animal?” Derrida asks:

Is friendship possible for the animal or between animals? Like Aristotle, Heidegger would say: no. Do we have a responsibility toward the living in general? The answer is still “no,” and this may be because the question is formed, asked in such a way that the answer must necessarily be ‘no’ according to the whole canonized or hegemonic discourse of Western metaphysics or religions.16

Derrida goes on to argue that Western thought has always allowed “a place left open, in the very structure of these discourses . . . for a non-criminal putting to death.” The “carnivorous sacrifice” is fundamental to these discourses and cultures. This is to say that Western culture is fundamentally structured by the necessity for the sacrifice and execution of the animal, that which is both “living” and non-living, sentient yet a thing. Animals are like things or objects in that they may be owned, but unlike objects in that they can be killed; like human beings in that they are sentient, but unlike human beings in that they
may be killed. Derrida argues that we demand such (non)things, things permitted to be killed, in order to demarcate the human.\textsuperscript{17}

Such historians as Keith Thomas, Harriet Ritvo, Brian Harrison, and James Turner have vividly narrated the history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English attitudes toward animals—a history that permits us to test the more specific historical relevance of Derrida’s broad claims.\textsuperscript{18} A major transformation occurred around the turn of the nineteenth century as a country which had been strongly associated with sports involving cruelty to animals such as bull-baiting and cock-fighting, came increasingly to define itself—led by Evangelicals and middle-class reformers—by opposition to such cruelty.\textsuperscript{19} It would seem, however, that it was not simply that cruelty to animals became newly defined as particularly un-English, but that it became defined as particularly English—or rather, particularly bourgeois-English—to witness, with condemnation and sympathy, the spectacle of cruelty to animals. We might draw an analogy with Foucault’s famous argument about the history of sexuality and its supposed repression: here too, that which is apparently being repressed—cruelty to animals—becomes increasingly discussed, imagined, represented. The mistreatment of animals becomes charged with new energies as the object of a national discourse. A class relationship is routed through a species relationship, and vice versa, and the human and humane becomes defined not only against the animal, as in earlier centuries, but also in sympathy with the animal.

Ritvo bases her analysis of the history of the RSPCA in part on her interpretation of the society’s lavish annual reports, filled with narratives of cruelty to animals. “Lurid reports” of the torments of animals, Ritvo writes, “often provided emotional guidance by recording the reactions of upstanding witnesses.” Readers would, for example, “find a half-starved dog with an open wound drawing a cart ‘a most revolting spectacle,’” or “imagine themselves among the crowds that had gathered to cry ‘shame’ on a carman beating his horse with a shovel.”\textsuperscript{20} As Ritvo’s analysis suggests, these RSPCA reports, published annually from 1824, but especially influential from the 1840s on, typify a key genre of Victorian writing. To be a literate middle-class Englishperson by mid-century was to develop one’s sensibility and sympathy through the vicarious experience of reading narratives of animal suffering. The description and re-description of accounts of such suffering became a familiar discursive mode accompanied by characteristic tropes, metaphors, and characters.\textsuperscript{21} A response to Marshall Hall’s 1847 letter to The Lancet cited earlier, for example, offers a characteristic example of the antivivisectionist version of this rhetorical mode, which often would take the form of a re-citation of an experimenter’s description, one that frames it within a condemnatory commentary:
One would suppose, from the tone of that letter [Marshall Hall’s], . . . that the experiment which called forth our censures had been instituted upon an animal that was deprived of sensation. That such was not the case on the occasion referred to is abundantly obvious from the very terms in which Dr. Hall’s coadjutor has described the experiment in question:

“In a spaniel dog, a portion of the skull was removed by the trephine; . . . The immediate effect was paralysis of the opposite side of the body; the animal, when placed on the ground, falling on that side, and being unable to rise. It managed, however, to struggle to the wall and corner, when, on being raised, it supported itself by leaning the paralyzed side against it . . . .”

Can it be conceived that the infliction of such horrible suffering (for the animal, it would seem, was quite sensible at the commencement of the experiment) is necessary for the elucidation of any important truth . . . ?22

The shock and moral outrage raised by such narratives—describing both cruelty to animals on the streets and the horrors of vivisection and scientific experiment on animal subjects—became, I would even suggest, associated with the moral purposes of reading itself. Consider, for example, an 1836 letter by the young Quaker W.E. Forster describing his mother: “[S]he has been reading these dreadful things about galvanized frogs and impaled dogs, etc., till she is the same herself as if she had a continual shock of galvanism about her.”23 These are effective and affective narratives indeed, triggering forms of powerfully mimetic sympathy.

Victorian England, over the course of the nineteenth century, contained a growing and influential minority of citizens who cared about animals’ welfare, advocated against their cruel treatment, and chose not to consume animal meat. We can read the record of legislation from the 1822 Martin Bill to the 1876 Cruelty Against Animals Act as one of progress and effective reform. Derrida’s argument, however, asks us to supplement this narrative of reform and decreasing general abuse of animals with a recognition of the ways the nation may have repudiated its own continued investment in “carnivorous virility” through the definition of a special limited category of beloved animals, pets that were to be treated as human-like and in need of protection. Victorian culture, at the point that it has apparently achieved domination through industry and technology over the forces of nature, redefines itself through its protection of a category of “innocent” animals, animals associated with pastoral qualities who become the victims of unenlightened English people.24 This is still carnophallocentrism, then, but a carnophallocentrism that hopes to make up for killing and eating the living by protecting a symbolic subcategory of animals not to be eaten or mistreated: that is, the dogs, cats, and horses that received the lion’s share of the RSPCA’s attention, and that became increasingly vested with subjectivity in Victorian writing. Of these abused animals’ fate at the hands of cruel English people, the founder of the SPCA, Lewis Gompertz, wrote in 1824: “Their wants are disregarded,
their desires curbed or destroyed, and their bodies cut or disfigured, when it suits those persons’ purpose so to do.”25 The animal becomes newly defined as a being possessing “wants,” “desires,” and even rights, and the suffering or torture of animals become privileged occasions for the display of powerful affect—particularly sympathy—within narrative.

The narrative of animal suffering opens up at least three distinct subject positions: the sadistic perpetrator of cruelty, the feeling witness, and the cruelly indifferent bystander or witness.26 The narratives of animal suffering and animal rescue defined by the annual RSPCA reports set the agenda for new genres of Victorian writing investing privileged animals with subjectivity and the characteristics of human beings. These genres may be derived from earlier eighteenth-century depictions of animals, especially in children’s literature, but they also mark a new, distinctly Victorian routing of feeling through animal and pet characters. A subgenre of melodrama called the “dog drama” was a staple on the London stage from the early century through the 1850s.27 Joseph Taylor’s 1804 The General Character of the Dog was, Keith Thomas claims, England’s first sentimental book about dogs, but the category soon took off: Books filled with “heartwarming and enlightening anecdotes about dogs” became increasingly popular during the first half of the nineteenth century.28 The “dog anecdote” became a popular feature in a magazine like Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal—which both Brontë sisters read enthusiastically—through the 1840s. As I have already hinted, I want to argue that the work of Charlotte, Anne, and especially Emily Brontë might be considered as influenced by—and even perhaps as instances of—such a new Victorian genre of dog or pet narrative. Another way to say this would be that for the Brontë sisters, narrative and fiction itself raised the same questions of sympathy, antipathy, cruelty and scapegoating—and of the bounds of “the human” as defined by and against the animal—that RSPCA narratives of animal cruelty posed. Wuthering Heights in particular I see as underpinned by a framework of such issues, which were for Emily Brontë fundamentally linked to animals, pets, and the ethical problem and narrative resource of the suffering animal.

*A Carnivorous Race*

Charlotte was more than commonly tender in her treatment of all dumb creatures, and they, with that fine instinct so often noticed, were invariably attracted towards her . . . [S]he quickly noticed the least want of care or tenderness on the part of others towards any poor brute creature . . . . The feeling, which in Charlotte partook of something of the nature of an affection, was, with Emily, more of a passion. Some one speaking of her said to me, in a careless kind of strength of expression, said “she never showed regard to any human creature; all her love was reserved for animals.” The helplessness of an animal was its passport to Charlotte’s heart; the fierce, wild, intractability of its nature was what often recommended it to Emily.29
Elizabeth Gaskell begins her biography of Charlotte Brontë in ethnographic mode by defining the habits, practices, and qualities of the “interesting . . . race” of people out of which the Brontës emerged, a Yorkshire “race” which Gaskell defines in part by its investment in cruelty to animals.30 Gaskell’s invocation of the category of “race” seems linked to her vision of an eighteenth-century society in which divisions of class are trumped by the allegiances of species. She depicts a society organized around the “savage delight” of such spectacles as bull-baiting and cock-fighting. She describes, for instance, a local squire who went to amazing lengths to end his life as a spectator to animal suffering.

His great amusement and occupation had been cock-fighting. When he was confined to his chamber with what he knew would be his last illness, he had his cocks brought up there, and watched the bloody battle from his bed. As his mortal disease increased, and it became impossible for him to turn so as to follow the combat, he had looking-glasses arranged in such a manner, around and above him, as he lay, that he could still see the cocks fighting. And in this manner he died.31

Here we see one of the primary subject positions defined by the theater of animal cruelty: that of the cruel spectator who watches but does not intervene or sympathize. Yet the squire is far from indifferent: he is a fascinated voyeur, unable to tear his eyes away from the spectacle of murderous animal violence.

The Brontë sisters, in the midst of this culture of animal cruelty, appear strikingly eccentric and at odds with their surroundings, possessed of special deficiencies, virtues, and talents that some associated with their repudiation of carnivorousness. A family acquaintance commented: “[T]here never were such good children. I used to think them spiritless, they were so different to any children I had ever seen. In part, I set it down to a fancy Mr. Brontë had of not letting them have flesh-meat to eat . . . [T]hey had nothing but potatoes for their dinner; but they never seemed to wish for anything else.”32 (Patrick Brontë protested this detail in Gaskell’s biography, apparently afraid of being blamed for his children’s physical weakness, and it was omitted in the text’s third edition.) A classmate of Charlotte’s at Miss Wooler’s school observed, “She always showed physical feebleness in everything. She ate no animal food at school. It was about this time I told her she was very ugly.”33

So: the Brontë sisters, living amid a “race” of carnivorous virility, refuse to consume meat. We might even speculatively consider a link between the sisters’ social marginalization—due in part, apparently, to their eccentric relationship to a culture of carnivorousness—and their creation of such fictional characters as Clumsy the dog and, later, their better-known human characters. In such a figure as Clumsy or Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë invests life and sympathy into what had been viewed as dumb and unfeeling. The imaginative process of granting
subjectivity to an animal serves a compensatory function. Fictional characterization itself becomes associated with a larger project of giving life to the non-living, voice to “suffering dumb creation,” that might be understood as a negotiation with carnophalallocentrism. This is part of the process Richard French describes, within Victorian antivivisectionist politics and discourse, as an “attempt to infuse some kind of spirit into a materialistic . . . world.”34 While antivivisectionism only came fully into its own as a reform movement in the 1870s, English opposition to what was usually depicted as Continental physiology and animal experimentation was well established by the 1840s.35 If Yorkshiremen and rough cart-drivers take animal life, the Brontës (and their readers) give life, grant subjectivity to the animal or the non-living through fictional characterization. The Victorian creation of affective fictional narratives and sympathetic characters becomes deeply bound up with sympathetic, and sometimes anthropomorphic, thinking about animals. The fictional investment of “characters” with sympathy is part of a general attempt to “infuse life” into a “materialistic world,” to redeem a carnivorous and cruel society through feeling.

As Charlotte did, Emily Brontë too wrote an essay in Belgium on household pets. In it, she argues about feline character with a fine lady who insists that human beings are less cruel than cats:

“But,” says some delicate lady, who has murdered a half-dozen lapdogs through pure affection, “the cat is such a cruel beast, he is not content to kill his prey, he torments it before its death; you cannot make this accusation against us.” More or less, Madame . . . You yourself avoid a bloody spectacle because it wounds your weak nerves. But I have seen you embrace your child in transports, when he came to show you a beautiful butterfly crushed between his cruel little fingers; and at that moment, I really wanted to have a cat, with the tail of a half-devoured rat hanging from its mouth, to present as the image, the true copy, of your angel.36

In this almost Baudelairean prose fragment, Emily Brontë powerfully questions the distinctions Victorian society posits between different forms of the taking of animal life, and between the “human” and the non or in-human. She suggests that a shrinking from “a bloody spectacle” distinguishes modern Victorian society from its more openly brutal past, but questions whether more civilized forms of bourgeois violence against the animal can be in fact exempt themselves from the same category of cruelty. This delicate lady’s “affection” to her pets is itself murderous, and like Anne Brontë’s Mrs. Bloomfield, she encourages cruelty to animals in her child and thereby turns such cruelty into a national and familial inheritance. What is startling and slightly disconcerting in Emily’s passage is the final statement of desire for an “image” of cruelty to “present” to the woman. The cat with the rat in its mouth who is a “true copy” of the young boy is civilization’s guilty conscience, a reminder of the fundamental carnivorousness of
Englishness. Emily’s “image” has something in common with Anne’s of Agnes’s rock falling on the baby birds, crushing them in a blow: both images seem to share a reformist desire to reduce violence to animals, or induce some truer recognition of it, through the depiction of such an act. But whereas Agnes’s act of violence is clearly marked as regretful, a last-ditch emergency measure to forestall future torture, Emily seems to relish the picture she sketches of the cat with a tail hanging from its mouth as an image of a child’s violence. There is, one must admit, an aesthetic charge in such a scene or image, a representational force inherent in the depiction of violence to the animal. “Present[ed]” with such an image, we must respond emotionally; not to do so would be to fail a basic test of our fitness as readers.

Heathcliff-Animal

Emily’s essay invites a consideration of the ways her later novel Wuthering Heights is structured by similar questions of animality, cruelty, and pethood. Heathcliff in particular becomes, in the novel, the test case for the human treatment of animals. The question Isabella Linton asks, “Is Mr. Heathcliff a man?” seems to me to be one Brontë intends for us to consider with a certain literalness. Recent critical attention to Heathcliff has tended to focus on the ways Brontë depicts him as racially or ethnically “other,” pointing to such evidence as Nelly Dean’s attempt to reassure Heathcliff that

A good heart will help you to a bonny face, my lad . . . if you were a regular black . . . . 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 one week’s income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors, and brought to England (56).

Brontë’s insistent animalization of Heathcliff has received much less recent attention, probably because such a figurative strategy is often seen simply as a component of the dehumanization we associate with racism. Susan Meyer, for example, characterizes Heathcliff as “pronounced upon as if he were a specimen of some strange animal species,” but then immediately subsumes his animalization into the topics of race and ethnicity: “Heathcliff is subjected to the potent gaze of a racial arrogance deriving from British imperialism . . . . As the Lintons inspect the adolescent Heathcliff . . . they return him, with the power of the gaze of empire, to the status of racial property . . . and fix him into the role of inferior racial outsider.” The arguments of Meyer and other critics who have attended to the dynamics of race and imperialism in Wuthering Heights are convincing and necessary, but I want to think more literally about what it means that Heathcliff, whose hair is like “a colt’s mane” (57), is so forcefully associated with
animals; species seems as salient as race as a category by which to consider Brontë’s depiction of the character, and should not be reduced to or considered as a subcategory of race. Indeed, Nelly Dean’s musings on Heathcliff’s racial or ethnic origins can be seen as functioning as something of a red herring in the novel.40

Gaskell, in her biography of Charlotte, cites an 1840 letter in which Charlotte describes her own pleasure in imaginative creation: “It is very edifying and profitable to create a world out of your own brains, and people it with inhabitants, who are so many Melchisedecs, and have no father nor mother but your own imagination.”41 What I would underline here is Charlotte’s emphasis on the status of the fictional character as a kind of orphan, lacking father or mother, born ex nihilo: Melchisedec was a Biblical priest “Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life.”42 Heathcliff is such a Melchisedec. Whatever Nelly’s speculations about his origins and parentage, they cannot be known; within the world of the novel, he is a foundling, an orphan, an “unreclaimed creature” (102). As Nelly admits to Lockwood in a less whimsical mood on being asked what she knows of Heathcliff’s “history:” “It’s a cuckoo’s, sir—I know all about it; except where he was born, and who were his parents, and how he got his money” (33). To assign Heathcliff a “racial” status is potentially to attach him to human history, lineage, and parentage, but what seems fundamental to his being is precisely its failure to attach to such traditions or grounds for social identity. Heathcliff is a “cuckoo” or “animal” in his outsider status to human categories of being and belonging. As a Melchisedec, in Charlotte’s sense, his life stands as a testimony to the inevitable exclusions of such categories.

Heathcliff’s entrance to the Earnshaw household offers a preeminent instance of what Derrida calls the “deranged theatrics of the wholly other that they call animal.”43 Derrida argues that the very term “animal” is at once a logical and an ethical affront, a gross conceptual error: “They have given themselves the word in order to corral a large number of human living beings within a single concept: ‘the Animal,’ they say.”44 Thus the “deranged theatrics” to which Derrida refers: to be an “animal” is to be an other in the most fundamental way, to embody in one’s abjected body the “absolute alterity of the neighbor” and an utter lack of ethical or political recognition.45 Heathcliff, even as he becomes a human character, remains throughout the novel essentially such an “animal,” a being of “absolute alterity” and unsolvable lack of paternity or origins. Brontë defines Heathcliff as a feral pet, a resistant animal brought into the family circle who rebels against the hypocrisy of the boundary lines drawn to separate different forms of what Derrida calls “the living in general.” His body becomes an experimental object for investigation into pain and suffering, and the
suffering he and Catherine cause one another becomes a “spectacle” by which observers and readers may test their powers of sympathy. Finally, Heathcliff becomes, himself, a kind of vivisector, turned monstrously cruel in a demonstration of the corrupting effects of the abuse of the helpless animal body.

Dogs Lost and Found

Kathleen Kete points to the importance, in mid-century thinking about pets, of the trope of the lost dog as a signifier of the dangerousness and cruelty of urban life and of modernity itself. Animal lovers advocated the creation of private refuges or homes for dogs as an alternative to the Parisian pound, established in 1811 and described as “the morgue for things” by the Revue Britannique. Dogs not claimed from the pound were hung or sold to the vivisectors who always needed animal bodies for scientific experiment. In England too, the figure of the lost or abandoned pet became a prominent indictment of modern urban life. “Professional dog stealers would abscond with a cherished animal, then offer to restore it for a price. In 1844 individual Londoners paid from £2 to £50 to ransom favorite pets.” (This was, of course, the fate famously endured by Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s spaniel Flush, as immortalized by Virginia Woolf.) In this context, the young Heathcliff, found by Mr. Earnshaw “starving, and homeless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool” (35) becomes an analogue for the lost pet, needing hospitality and offering human characters the opportunity to demonstrate their sympathy and kindness, or lack of those qualities. Mr. Earnshaw in effect gives (social) life to the nonliving by adopting Heathcliff from the streets as a pet. Nelly Dean immediately dehumanizes Heathcliff by referring to him as a thing, “it,” and tries to get rid of him by “put[ting] it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow.” Heathcliff’s adoptive brother beats him so badly his arm turns “black to the shoulder” and, underlining the implied metaphor, addresses him as “dog” (37) as he hits him with a heavy iron weight. As Terry Eagleton writes, “Heathcliff’s presence is radically gratuitous . . . . He is available to be accepted or rejected simply for himself, laying claim to no status other than a human one.” We might add that Brontë in fact problematizes the very category of “human status” in her depiction of the character.

Heathcliff had a real-world pet predecessor in the Brontë family—a dog owned by Emily named Keeper. Gaskell tells us that the dog was received as “a gift to Emily.” As Heathcliff does, Keeper enters the household as a gift, with the “radical gratuitousness” of the household pet whose body and existence are wholly at the mercy of his owners. “With the gift came the warning. Keeper was faithful to the depths of his nature as long as he was with friends; but he who struck him with
a stick or whip, roused the relentless nature of the brute, who flew at his throat forthwith, and held him there until one or the other was at the point of death.” Like Heathcliff, Keeper is both and alternately “friend” and “brute,” human and animal, subject of affection and bitter enemy, embodying the “absolute alterity of the neighbor” and the dilemmas of care, friendship, and kinship. The connection between the dog and fictional character suggests how for the Brontës, characterization itself was fundamentally linked to the conceptual processes by which “the living in general” becomes a pet, or by which different living creatures are sorted out into various categories: to be killed, to be allowed to live, to be loved. For the Brontës, both pets and literary characters are gratuitous, creative inventions, bestowals of subjectivity generating new responsibilities, debts, and emotions.

Gaskell relates the remarkable story of how Emily was forced to discipline Keeper for his habit of lying on the beds upstairs at Howarth parsonage: “He loved to steal upstairs, and stretch his square, tawny limbs, on the comfortable beds, covered over with delicate white counterpanes.” The dog violates domestic boundaries and threatens to allow dirt and natural disorder to mess the pure whiteness of an interior space defined by its exclusion of all that is “outside” a privileged human community. Emily finally announced that if Keeper once again violated the household arrangements she would punish him in such a way that he would never do it again. When the servant Tabby reported that Keeper was once more in his favorite spot, Emily’s face whitened and she headed upstairs:

Down-stairs came Emily, dragging after her the unwilling Keeper, . . . growling low and savagely all the time. The watchers [Tabby and Charlotte] would fain have spoken, but durst not, for fear of taking off Emily’s attention, and causing her to avert her head for a moment from the enraged brute. She let him go, planted in a dark corner at the bottom of the stairs; no time was there to fetch stick or rod, for fear of the strangling clutch at her throat—her bare clenched fist struck against his red fierce eyes, before he had time to make his spring, and, in the language of the turf, she “punished him” till his eyes were swelled up, and the half-blind, stupefied beast was led to his accustomed lair, to have his swelled head fomented and cared for by the very Emily herself.

“The generous dog owed her no grudge,” Gaskell explains, and “loved her dearly ever after.” This passage may be read as a scene of origin for the zero-degree emotions of Wuthering Heights, in which brutal or even sadistic punishment precedes loving treatment and care, not in the spirit of antithesis but necessary origin. Emily transforms the “half-blind, stupefied beast” Keeper into Heathcliff, defining this character as an animalized human being, a creature invested with all the contradictory and sometimes cruel emotions that go into the definition of the “pet.” Also important in this passage are the presence of “the watchers,” those who observe the scene of animal violence: they are
necessary players in any such scene, those observers who respond emotionally—or fail to do so—and turn the violence into reported narrative.

Emily Brontë foregrounds the category of the pet in the important scene where Heathcliff and Catherine spy on the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange. In ways too well known to need to be rehearsed at length, this scene at once posits and deconstructs the opposition between the natural and the cultural, inside and outside, uncivilized and civilized—distinctions on the border of which stands the figure of the “pet.” Heathcliff and Catherine are wild things, like animals, in their androgynous idyll in the moors. Peering into the Lintons’ home, they see a “civilization” that is most vividly defined by its abusive relationship to those pampered animals that define the “inside” of culture by their difference from “the living in general” or ordinary wild creatures:

[Guess what your good children were doing? Isabella . . . 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 begin to cry because both, after struggling to get it, refused to take it. We laughed outright at the petted things, we did despise them (46)!

Brontë suggests both that the Lintons are themselves “petted” or spoiled “things”—and that their brutal form of “affection,” like that of the lady in Emily’s essay, demands a non-human animal object or pet. If this is not quite a scene of carnivorous sacrifice of the sort Derrida defines, it resembles one in the way it defines the “human” in relationship to a suffering animal. Brontë seems to draw here on the discourse of cruelty to animals and of vivisection. In Heathcliff’s description of the Lintons at home, we have a “little dog” sitting in pain “in the middle of a table,” “nearly pulled in two.” The innocent dog was a stock figure in antivivisection literature, as when activist Frances Power Cobbe quotes from a physiology handbook recommending the sedation of dogs in order to plunge them “into a state of immobility which permits us to place them on an experimenting table without tying or muzzling them.” And although the tools of a vivisector, the “red hot needles” running into flesh, are displaced here into the metaphorical ones piercing the shrieking Isabella, they seem all too figuratively present as instruments of torture.

This scene leads to Catherine being attacked and seized by the Linton’s bulldog Skulker, the necessary analogue to the petted poodle in the Lintons’ version of civilized domesticity. Little Isabella responds to the sight of Heathcliff by saying: “Frightful thing! Put him in the cellar, papa. He’s exactly like the son of the fortune-teller, that stole my tame pheasant” (48). Brontë defines the Lintons’ domestic space as a
sorting-house for animals: some are thrown in the basement, some are “petted” and domesticated as useless pets, others are positioned as sentinels and guards against any uninvited creatures around the premises. The sorting of animals into pet and non-pet is in fact a fundamental gesture of the world of *Wuthering Heights*, beginning with one of Heathcliff’s first utterances, advising Lockwood to take care: “You’d better let the dog alone . . . She’s not accustomed to be spoiled—not kept for a pet” (5).53

*The Mourning Dog*

Brontë associates Heathcliff with a certain type of pet, a familiar Victorian icon of loyalty. In his extravagant mourning for Catherine, Heathcliff closely resembles a stock figure of Victorian magazine writing, the faithful dog whose loyalty exemplifies passionate attachment and presses against the boundary dividing everyday life and death. *Chambers Edinburgh Journal*—one of the Brontë sisters’ favorite magazines—contains numerous anecdotes in the early and mid-1840s of dogs who mourned their masters so intensely that they would refuse to leave the gravesite. In an 1846 article, for example, we hear of a “dog which I knew, . . . which attended every funeral that took place in that village and neighborhood . . . . he would look anxiously on while the body was being interred; and that melancholy duty over, he would immediately trot away home, or set off for another funeral.”54 And in an 1844 issue we are told of a woman whose dog disappears soon after the death of her child. One day she

with a mother’s feelings went to take a mournful look at her child’s grave. On going to it, she found to her great astonishment her lost dog. It was lying in a deep hole which it had scratched for itself over the child’s grave, probably hoping to get a little nearer to the object of its affection. It was in an emaciated state from hunger, but neither hunger, cold, nor privation had expelled its love, or diminished the force of its attachment.55

The figure of the dog in such magazine writing stands for a persistent loyalty and a fierce “force of . . . attachment” that refuses to respect the niceties of human ceremony or the dividing-line between the everyday world and the grave. Brontë depicts Heathcliff as, among other things, such a creature. He keeps vigil over Catherine’s body: “Mrs. Linton’s funeral was appointed to take place on the Friday following her decease; and till then her coffin remained uncovered, and strewn with flowers and scented leaves, in the great drawing-room . . . . Heathcliff spent his nights, at least, outside, . . . a stranger to repose” (167). And he finally, like the dog who dug into the child’s grave, “hoping to get a little nearer to the object of its affection,” digs into Catherine’s coffin: “I got a spade from the toolhouse, and began to delve with all my might—it scraped the coffin; I fell to work with my
hands; the wood commenced cracking about the screws, I was on the point of attaining my object” (289). Gaskell’s biography contains a very similar account of the reaction of Keeper to Emily’s death: “As the old, bereaved father and his two surviving children followed the coffin to the grave, they were joined by Keeper, Emily’s fierce, faithful bull-dog. He walked alongside of the mourners, and into the church, and stayed quietly there all the time that the burial service was being read. When he came home, he lay down at Emily’s chamber door, and howled pitifully for many days.” Keeper, we might finally say, is Heathcliff, and vice versa. In creating this character, Emily mobilized a set of both personal and cultural associations linking pet dogs with a force of attachment transcending usual human limits and culminating in a state of absolute, inconsolable mourning for the dead.

Animal Pain and Vivisection

Brontë associates Heathcliff with animality in his introduction to the family as a rescued creature, a lost animal reclaimed from the urban streets, and in his resemblance to the iconic figure of a loyal dog in his mourning for Catherine. She further does so by defining Heathcliff at once as a sufferer and inflictor of pain. Heathcliff’s body, in Brontë’s narrative, becomes the testing-ground for the effects of physical pain, his response to pain offering a rebuke to the failures of a social system that mistreats the unwanted or unvalued creature. “He seemed a sullen, patient child,” Nelly observes unsympathetically, “hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley’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” (36). James Turner has argued that for the Victorians, “the suffering animal was the avatar of pure, simple, unmitigated pain.” The first effective application of nitrous oxide as an anesthetic in the late 1840s was thus greeted with particular enthusiasm by early antivivisection activists. Turner’s analysis suggests how closely such issues became bound up with the very questions of sympathy and imaginative projection fundamental to Victorian fictional narrative:

Animal experimentation became the principal focus for the anxiety and dread stirred in Victorian minds by the thought of pain. The common use of dogs as experimental animals only made matters worse. One could all too readily imagine oneself in the place of a pet who shared hearth and home. Even easier was to picture oneself in the shoes of the fellow human being doing the vivisecting, knife in hand poised over the trembling pet.

Turner’s language recalls the scene from Agnes Gray where the young torturer Tom Bloomfield rejects Agnes’s demand that he attempt to imagine and sympathize with the sufferings of a bird: “I’m not a bird,
and I can’t feel what I do to them.” If we see Tom’s response as blithely stupid and unimaginative at best, monstrously cruel at worst, we can also admit that imagination and sympathy beyond the species barrier may not be quite as simple or natural as either Agnes Gray or James Turner imply.60 But what seems incontrovertible is Turner’s point that the Victorians were increasingly inclined to attempt such sympathy, and to relish narratives that promoted or enabled such imaginative acts.

Heathcliff’s relationship with Catherine becomes overdetermined by the experience of pain and suffering, which we should read in the context of the 1840s’ particular structure of thinking about the witnessing of the suffering of living creatures. “I shouldn’t care what you suffered,” Catherine tells Heathcliff. “I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn’t you suffer? I do!” (158) Nelly adds: “The two, to a cool spectator, made a strange and fearful picture,” saying of Heathcliff, “[H]e gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog . . . I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species” (159–160). Brontë has defined Nelly, in effect, as an excessively “cool spectator,” far too quick, in her dismay at Heathcliff’s behavior, to other him as inhuman—in effect, to brand him as a “brute.” If she is not like the Yorkshire squire Gaskell described, who spent his last moments on earth peering at a cockfight through his looking glass, neither is she a sufficiently sympathetic onlooker. In our own emotional response to this scene, we distinguish ourselves as being in that category of affective readers who shrink from brutality and suffering. As narrator, Nelly comes to play the role of unfeeling witness who sees suffering but fails to understand it, and who is quick to draw distinctions of “species” to distance herself from pain.61 Heathcliff’s pain thus invites our pity and curiosity (along with our disapproval of his own cruelty), as well as our judgment of Nelly’s failure to experience such feelings as strongly as we do.

Nelly is eventually moved to tears by Heathcliff’s reversion to thing-hood. As he stands, soaked through, leaning against an oak tree, mourning Catherine, a pair of birds regard “his proximity no more than that of a piece of timber” (166). Now at last Nelly weeps: “we do sometimes pity creatures that have none of the feeling either for themselves or others.” Nelly continues to set the standard by which we will measure our own response as superior. She can only blame Heathcliff for his own capacity for pain, can only misunderstand him as anaesthetized or feelingless, rather than as extravagantly feeling. Finally, in a culminating moment in the novel, Brontë defines Heathcliff explicitly as an animal suffering abuse at the hands of man: “He . . . howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears” (167).62 Heathcliff may seem here more a bull in a pre-Victorian bull-baiting than a dog in a modern vivisection—
yet the force of antivivisectionist discourse was precisely to deny the ethical difference between such two forms of cruelty to animals.

At least since Hogarth’s 1751 *Four Stages of Cruelty* prints—showing the progress of a boy who begins by torturing cats and dogs and ends at the gallows for murder—it had been a truism of English culture that cruelty to animals led to cruelty and violence against human beings. Heathcliff becomes a perfect test case of this belief in his figurative transformation into that dreaded figure in Victorian culture, the vivisector. Nelly has commented that Hindley’s early treatment of Heathcliff “was enough to make a fiend of a saint” (65). Heathcliff hangs Isabella’s pet dog; more than this, however, he very explicitly describes himself as a kind of physiologist, an *experimenter* on the living. Seeing Isabella as herself a stand-in for her pet dog he has already killed, Heathcliff complains “I've sometimes relented, from pure lack of invention, in my experiments on what she could endure, and still creep shamefully cringing back!” (151)

Brontë characterizes Heathcliff as at once subject and object of vivisection, as suffering animal and sadistic scientist. Described by Catherine as a “pitiless, wolfish man” (102) who would “crush” Isabella “like a sparrow’s egg,” Heathcliff becomes inhuman both in his own animality and in his cruelty to animals. Observing Cathy Linton and his own son Linton Heathcliff, Heathcliff reflects on his own penchant for cruelty: “It’s odd what a savage feeling I have to anything that seems afraid of me! Had I been born where laws are less strict, and tastes less dainty, I should treat myself to a slow vivisection of those two, as an evening’s amusement” (270). “I have no pity! I have no pity!” he has earlier pronounced. “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 of pain” (152). When he “stare[s] hard at the object of discourse, as one might do at a strange repulsive animal” (105), he seems to have taken the position of the Yorkshire squire who watches the animals maul one another through looking-glasses on his own deathbed. Having once occupied the position of object of torture, Heathcliff has eventually taken up the instruments himself.

“As we read of these horrors . . .”

Victorian antivivisectionism was, like so many other nineteenth-century reform movements, to a significant degree a print-culture phenomenon. As Frances Power Cobbe reminisced in her autobiography of the early days of the movement, “our society from the first issued an almost incredible multitude of pamphlets and leaflets.” The horrors of vivisection would be met with texts and images that decried
these horrors in part by reproducing them, exposing them through publication:

Sometimes it would appear as we read of these horrors—the baking alive of dogs, the slow dissecting out of quivering nerves, and so on—that it would be a relief to picture the doer of such deeds as some unhappy, half-witted wretch, hideous and filthy and mien or stupefied by drink, so that the full responsibility of a rational and educated human being should not belong to him, and that we might say of him, “He scarcely understands what he does.”

We are reminded of the letter describing a woman’s reaction to reading antivivisectionist literature: “[S]he has been reading these dreadful things about galvanized frogs and impaled dogs, etc., till she is the same herself as if she had a continual shock of galvanism about her.” Taken to a limit, the end point of such a discourse is to place the reader herself on the operating table. Animal cruelty discourse defines the sensitive reader as one who feels in her own body the shocks and pains of the helpless animal subject. In these animal narratives—melodramas of beset animality—readerly subjectivity and middle-class “humanity” are defined according to a logic of cruelty and sympathetic witness that requires a suffering creature. Offering the reader at once the opportunity for vicarious sympathy at his sufferings, and appalled dismay at his cruelties, Brontë’s depiction of Heathcliff produces a “continual shock” in the outraged reader, for whom the very experience of reading the novel becomes something like that “slow vivisection” Heathcliff yearned to perform on his enemies. In this way Wuthering Heights defines the humane reading subject as he or she who can most strongly feel the pain of the animal on the operating table, most powerfully respond to the force of that “bloody spectacle.”

Notes

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1 Deidre Lynch argues that “the simultaneous emergence of author-love and pet-love exemplified eighteenth-century Britain’s development of a public culture of private affect” (“Love As Usual: Cowper and White, ‘Still at Home’,” paper delivered at the MLA, December 2000). My thanks to the author for permission to cite.


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid., 44.

5 Ibid., 44, 45.

6 On the relation between the modern “animal rights” or “animal liberation” movement, often seen as finding its voice with the 1975 publication of Peter Singer’s Animal Liberation, and the nineteenth century antivivisection and anti-cruelty movements, Coral Lansbury writes that “the modern animal liberation movement, characterized by the works of Stephen Clark, Peter Singer, Tom Regan, and Mary Midgley, . . . bears only occasional reference to the anti-vivisection movement of the nineteenth century. . . . The debate be-
Ritvo and other historians emphasize the important distinctions between RSPCA narratives of the suffering of animals—usually dogs, cats, and horses abused in the streets—and the antivivisectionist denunciations of medical experiments. The latter genre was much...
less fully developed until the 1870s, since the early- and mid-century RSPCA made an
implicit tactical decision to turn a blind eye to the suffering of animals at the hands of
middle-class scientists. For my purposes, however, I am considering both modes of dis-
course as distinct but related elements within a single larger genre of nineteenth-century
anti-cruelty discourse.

23 Qtd. in Richard D. French, Antivivisection and Medical Science in Victorian Society (Princeton
24 See Thomas, 14: “As the factories multiplied, the nostalgia of the town-dweller was re-
flexed in his little bit of garden, his pets, his holidays in Scotland or the Lake District.”
25 Lewis Gompertz, Moral Inquiries on the Situation of Men and of Brutes. On the Crime of Com-
mittting Cruelty on Brutes, and of Sacrificing Them to the Purposes of Man; with Further Reflections
(London: Printed for the author, 1824), 7. It should be noted, however, that Gompertz
himself did not limit the category of protected animals. He went so far as to suggest that
drinking milk should be avoided, and that destroying tiny animals when drinking water
could not be considered an entirely innocent activity. Gompertz represents an early, rad-
cal road not taken for the English animal-rights movement. He was eventually purged as
head of the RSPCA and replaced by a less radical leader. See James Turner, Reckoning with the
Beast: Animals, Pain, and Humanity in the Victorian Mind (Baltimore and London: Johns
26 The dynamic I discuss could be seen as a particular manifestation of the Victorian “scene
of sympathy” as defined by Audrey Jaffe as marked by “a confrontation between a specta-
tor ‘at ease’ and a sufferer” in which “the sufferer is effectively replaced by the spectator’s
image of him or herself” (Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction
[Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000], 2). Jaffe defines Victorian sympathy as fundamen-
tally visual and middle-class. The normative sympathetic subject is a middle-class observer,
the object of sympathy a “deserving ‘victim’” who “displaces attention from the destruc-
tive consequences of industrialization and the rise to power of the middle class” (21).
27 See Turner, 164.
30 Ibid., 60.
31 Ibid., 68.
32 Ibid., 87.
33 Ibid., 130.
34 French, 383.
35 An English doctor recollected attending lectures delivered in Paris by the French physi-
ologist François Magendie: “In 1837 I attended . . . the class of Magendie . . . The whole
scene was revolting, not the cruelty only, but the ‘tiger-monkey’ spirit visible in the de-
moralized students. We left in disgust, and felt thankful such scenes would not be tolerated
in England by public opinion” (qtd. in French, 20). A small number of English scientists
did, however, support limited forms of animal experimentation. Marshall Hall, in both
1831 and 1847, published controversial essays in England in which he “carefully outlined
the circumstances and conditions under which he regarded experiments upon living ani-
mal to be justified” (French 21).
36 Charlotte and Emily Brontë, The Belgian Essays, 56.
Subsequent references will be indicated parenthetically in the text.
38 Barbara Munson Goff asserted in 1984 that “virtually all critics of Wuthering Heights have
addressed themselves to the rhetoric of animality in the novel” (“Between Natural The-
ology and Natural Selection: Breeding the Human Animal in Wuthering Heights,” Victorian
Studies [Summer 1984]: 479), a claim that does not hold true for criticism published since
the emergence of postcolonial theory shifted attention towards Brontë’s racial and ethnic
exoticization of Heathcliff. She adds that few critics have been willing to “grant animality
more than a metaphorical status.” Goff argues that “studying Brontë’s work in the context
of contemporary natural science confirms what had formerly been only an intuitive re-
sponse to Wuthering Heights: that the novel is a hypothetical experiment in the breeding of
human beings, conducted to suggest how the breed has been corrupted from its ‘native state’” (480). Her focus on breeding and cultivation differentiates her arguments, notwithstanding some overlapping concerns, from my own attention to animal suffering and cruelty. See also J. Hillis Miller’s chapter on Brontë in *The Disappearance of God*, where he argues that “the animal imagery used throughout *Wuthering Heights* is one of the chief ways in which the spiritual strength of the characters is measured” and that “the characters in *Wuthering Heights* have returned to an animal state” (*The Disappearance of God; Five Nineteenth-Century Writers* [Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975], 167–168). Miller points out that Heathcliff is not the only character compared to animals in this novel: “Edgar Linton is a ‘sucking leveret,’ and Linton Heathcliff is a ‘puling chicken.’ Such figures are more than simple metaphors. They tell us that man in *Wuthering Heights* . . . is part of nature, and no different from other animals” (167).


40 It needs to be kept in mind, however, that the anti-cruelty and antivivisection movements, and much of their strategies and rhetorics, were heavily indebted to the earlier abolitionist movement. For this reason, my emphasis on the ways Brontë animalizes Heathcliff is not entirely incompatible with other critics’ attention to her depiction of him as racially or ethnically other.

41 Gaskell, 201.


44 Ibid., 400. Henry Salt addresses this problem in his 1892 *Animals’ Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*: “Even the term ‘animals,’ as applied to the lower races, is incorrect, and not wholly unobjectionable, since it ignores the fact that *man* is an animal no less than they. My only excuse for using it in this volume is that there is absolutely no other brief term available” (Henry Salt, *Animals’ Rights: Considered in Relation to Social Progress*, intro. Peter Singer [Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania: Society for Animal Rights, 1980], 18–19).


47 Ritvo, 86.


49 Gaskell, 268.

50 Ibid., 269.

51 See Salt, 42–3: “It may be doubted, indeed, whether the condition of the household ‘pet’ is, in the long run, more enviable than that of the ‘beast of burden.’ Pets, like kings’ favorites, are usually the recipients of an abundance of sentimental affection but of little real kindness; so much easier is it to give temporary caresses than substantial justice . . . . The injustice done to the pampered lap-dog is as conspicuous, in its way, as that done to the overworked horse.”


53 Marc Shell writes that “pethood derives its power from its ability to let pet owners experience a relationship ever-present in political ideology—that between the distinction of those beings who are our (familial) kin from those who are not, on the one hand, and the distinction of those beings who are our (human) kind from those who are not, on the other” (*The Children of the Earth: Literature, Politics, and Nationhood* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 148). See, also, Deleuze and Guattari, who discuss the category of “individuated animals, family pets, sentimental, Oedipal animals each with its own petty history, ‘my’ cat, ‘my’ dog. These animals invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation, and they are the only kind of animal psychoanalysis understands, the better to discover a daddy, a mommy, a little brother behind them (when psychoanalysis talks about animals, animals learn to laugh): anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool” (Gilles Deleuze...


56 Gaskell, 358.

57 Turner, 82. On the imagination of pain more generally, see Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Lucy Bending on pain, vivisection, and anaesthesia in Victorian literature and culture. While revising this essay I discovered that Bending, within a fuller analysis of Wilkie Collins’ 1883 antivivisection novel *Heart and Science*, comments that “Emily Brontë, writing *Wuthering Heights* in 1847, at the same time as vivisection was coming very much to the fore in French medical schools, makes the links between cruelty, vivisection, and savagery very clear in her portrayal of Heathcliff” (*The Representation of Bodily Pain in Late Nineteenth-Century English Culture* [Oxford: Clarendon, 2000], 128).

58 Also see Richard Menke, “Fiction as Vivisection: G.H. Lewes and George Eliot,” *ELH* 67 (2000): 620, on the use of ether, chloroform, and chloral hydrate in 1840s experimental medicine. Menke analyzes George Eliot’s fiction alongside George Lewes’ writings on physiology, experimentation, and vivisection, arguing that as “Lewes devotes his physiological research to studying the nerves and the mind, and Eliot represents the representation of moment-to-moment thought in her late fiction, their shared task becomes the vivisection of consciousness” (619). Menke provides a very rich analysis of the 1870s discourse of vivisection and of the location of Eliot’s fiction within it.

59 Turner, 88.

60 See Jonathan Lamb for a fascinating analysis of the problem of cross-species sympathy. Lamb offers a valuable overview of the analysis of the problem of sympathy in the work of Locke, Hume, and Smith, and concludes darkly that sympathy for animals—and animal sympathy for humans—may be little more than a comforting but dangerous illusion: “only by means of the grossest delusion is it possible to make such sentimental equations between the lives of humans and animals” (“Modern Metamorphoses and Disgraceful Tales,” *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 [Autumn 2001]: 166).


62 Heathcliff’s animalistic howl resembles that uttered by a vivisector in Marie-Espérance von Schwartz’s 1887 German novella *Gemina, or Virtue and Vice*. As he dies of madness, von Schwartz’s villain hallucinates all the animals he has tortured “coming at me in mobs, in legions of all kinds, all breeds, those accursed beasts!” Finally, “thus ranting, he collapsed and uttered a howl that would have frightened and terrified even the wild beasts in the desert” (qtd. In Dolf Sternberger, intro. Erich Heller, *Panorama of the Nineteenth Century* [New York: Urizen, 1977], 68). The “howl” is at once the signature of the tortured animal and the nonlinguistic speech uttered by the inhuman torturer.

63 See Thomas, 151.


65 Ibid., 606.

66 Qtd. in French, 24.