

CURS AND LAPDOGS. THE WORLD OF DOGS IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

Amidst the density of the passions explored in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (WH) the casual reader might be excused for either ignoring or paying little attention to the "sub-world" of dogs which exists within the novel. On closer observation however, we cannot help but note that *Wuthering Heights* contains a multitude of references to all kinds of dogs.

The aim of this study is to look at the ways in which Emily Brontë uses dogs in the novel. Their physical presence throughout the work adds to its often underrated realism, and the rich lexical range used in the description of these animals highlights Brontë's power of observation. Apart from this obvious realistic use, which shows dogs as forming an integral part of rural life, the author also uses them as a way of provoking action, of developing and advancing the plot. Dogs are often the catalysts through which the dramatic changes take place within the novel. The third use of dogs is related to the poetic whole of the novel. Dogs help to define character through their physical and figurative presence. These three uses are often interrelated and together create moments of imaginative brilliance.

On a purely realistic level, dogs help to add to the vivid domestic detail present throughout the novel, suggesting part of the day-to-day running of a busy Yorkshire farming community. Used in much the same way as other aspects of domestic life, such as cooking, the lighting of fires, washing etc., the presence of dogs often helps the reader to "come down to earth" from the world of passion and excesses with which the novel presents us. Catherine Linton, for example, sits sadly before the fire at the Heights reading a book, pausing only to admonish a servant or to, "push away a dog, now and then, that snoozed its nose over-forwardly into her face." (WH 3: 72). A disconcerted Lockwood has seen Joseph "... bringing in a pail of porridge for the dogs" and Nelly (WH 15: 194):

... observed a large dog, lying on the sunny grass beneath, raise its ears, as if about to bark, and then smoothing them back, announced, by a wag of the tail that someone approached whom it did not consider a stranger.

The novel abounds with such domestic details which show how dogs form an integral part of daily life, both at *Wuthering Heights* and at *Thrushcross Grange*. These dogs are not, of course kept simply as pets. Except for the lapdogs associated with the Lintons, they are animals which are kept either for hunting or as guard-dogs, or for both purposes. The guard-dogs are used in order to preserve the intimacy both of the Heights and of the Grange. Their duty it is to keep intruders out, to maintain the inviolable separateness of the worlds of their masters. As Heathcliff tells Lockwood on his first visit to *Wuthering Heights*: "You'd better let the dog alone ... She's not accustomed to be spoiled — not kept for a pet." (WH 1: 48).

This first visit of Lockwood to the Heights can serve to illustrate some of the ways in which Brontë uses dogs in her novel. The new tenant arrives at his landlord's house, and among the culinary instruments, food and hunting paraphernalia in the parlour / kitchen, he observes:

... a huge, liver -coloured bitch pointer surrounded by a swarm of squealing puppies; and other dogs haunted other recesses. (WH 1: 47)

Lockwood, who is still under his initial misconception that Heathcliff is "as much a gentleman as any country squire" tries to caress the pointer bitch, and at once the dogs give the first intimation of hostility. Lockwood's failed attempts at endearing himself to the dogs emphasize the gulf that exists between the two men and gives Lockwood his first doubts as to the validity of his first impressions about Heathcliff. Lockwood's initial bravado starts to fail him - the "ruffianly bitch" is joined by "a pair of grim, shaggy sheep dogs", and, somewhat ridiculously, he tries to overcome his terror by making faces at them. The ensuing rumpus results in the first scene of violence in the novel. When Lockwood throws the bitch off his knee "the whole hive of four-footed fiends" rushes at him. Lockwood's foppish alliteration conjures up a comic vision of Hell which despite its humour gives us some idea of the visitor's very real fear. "The hearth", he tells us, "was an absolute tempest of worrying and yelping" and the "curs" are seen by Lockwood as being "a herd of possessed swine." Heathcliff's dogs are, as far as Lockwood is concerned, devilish creatures, and his fear is emphasized by his exaggerated language. In this his first appearance in the novel Heathcliff is immediately identified with his dogs. He himself says: "I and my dogs ... hardly know how to receive (guests)." This identification of the dogs, on the one hand with fiends and devils, and on the other with Heathcliff, anticipates the future unveiling of his character.

Lockwood's second visit to Wuthering Heights is again marked by his confrontation with its canine inmates. His arrival is greeted by the howling of what he sees as the "wretched inmates" living in "perpetual isolation". The attack on Lockwood as he is leaving has a dual purpose within the framework of the novel. Firstly, it provides an excuse for Lockwood's over-night stay at the house which, through his reading of Catherine's diaries and the subsequent dream, will create an initial interest which will lead him, and through him the reader, to find out all he can about the story of Catherine and Heathcliff. The scene also provides, however, a sort of comic prelude to the incident at Thrushcross Grange when Catherine Earnshaw is attacked.

The comedy of the incident is enhanced by Lockwood's exaggerated terror - provoked to some extent by the names by which he hears Joseph call the dogs - "Hey, Gnasher - Hey, Wolf!" - and his subsequent realisation that the beasts were in fact: "... more intent on stretching their paws and yawning and flourishing their tails than on devouring me alive." The scene ends with Lockwood in typical self-ridicule uttering useless threats which "smacked of King Lear". Not much critical attention has been given to the comic relief provided by Lockwood's interventions in the novel. He often helps to relieve the tension in mo-

ments of excessive passion or violence, his dry self-ridicule performing a function similar to the homely good-sense of Nelly Dean.

As I have suggested, the incident referred to above anticipates and provides a comic prelude to the events at Thrushcross Grange when the young Catherine is set upon by fierce guard-dogs. This incident, which is central to both the action and to the main themes of the novel, is related to Lockwood by Nelly, who reproduces *verbatim* the story she had been told by the young Heathcliff over twenty years earlier. In this incident, the author uses dogs both to develop the action and to define aspects of character. Immediately prior to the children's visit to the house in the valley, Catherine has herself described the way in which her elder brother Hindley treated the two younger children, Catherine and Heathcliff, as if they were young dogs "picking them up by the collar". Hindley, shouting at Heathcliff cries "Off dog!". Emily Brontë identifies both Catherine and Heathcliff with dogs; we see them as young puppies, free and wild who care little about being rebuked by their "master". She carefully contrasts her "children of storm", Cathy and Heathcliff, with the soft and pampered Lintons from the very moment of their presentation in the novel.

The reader first sees Edgar and Isabella through the eyes of Catherine and Heathcliff, as they fight over a lapdog which seems to assume the main characteristics of its master and mistress, and which gives the reader an anticipation of their characters and weaknesses. The children from Wuthering Heights see the Grange children through the drawing-room window:

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! When would you catch me wishing to have what Catherine wanted? (WH 6: 89)

The Linton children are revealed as selfish, pampered brats through their pointless fight over a little lapdog. The incident helps to define their personality, but also gives the reader an image which contrasts Edgar and Isabella, spoilt lapdogs, with Catherine and Heathcliff, who have already been identified with young pups. The author asks us to make our initial judgments about the characters through her use of different types of dogs. Just as the adult Heathcliff has been presented and classified through his dogs, we are shown Edgar and Isabella through their relationship with the "heap of warm hair".

The image of the two rich children fighting over the lapdog in the comfortable drawing-room is also somewhat deceptive. It reveals only one side of the gentility of the Lintons, because behind the veneer there lies a cruel reality. The gentility of Thrushcross Grange has to be defended. Catherine, mistaken for a thief, is attacked by Skulker, the Linton's bull-terrier. The intense violence of the language makes the scene especially shocking. Heathcliff tells Nelly that:

The devil had seized her ankle ... I heard his abominable snorting. She did not yell out - no! She would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow.

The language is violent - "seized", "snorting", "spitted" etc. This is increased as Heathcliff continues:

The dog was throttled off, his huge purple tongue hanging half out of his mouth, and his pendant lips streaming with bloody slaver. (WH 6: 90)

This incident demonstrates an extremely powerful and suggestive use of violence, a subject which was so often taboo in nineteenth century English fiction. Such violence is augmented by the amount of vocabulary related to hunting; Mr. Linton "halloos", Catherine is "prey" which has been "caught", and Skulker, the dog, is urged to "Hold fast!, hold fast!" -all the speed and terror of the hunt is reflected in the language used.

The events at Thrushcross Grange provoke the rupture between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. They are separated both physically, as Catherine spends her period of recuperation at the Grange, and spiritually, as she appears to succumb to the pleasures of gentile life. By the end of the chapter we see Catherine recovering from her wounds in domestic bliss. She sits beside the fire: "... dividing her food between the little dog and Skulker, whose nose she pinched as she ate." (WH 6: 92). She savours her first taste of bourgeois pleasure between the lapdog and the fierce bull-terrier - the dogs representing the two faces of gentility.

The Thrushcross Grange incident has, as we have mentioned, a central role in the novel. Catherine, or part of Catherine has been won over by the gentile lifestyle of the Lintons, and, at least superficially, her attitude towards Heathcliff changes accordingly. When she returns to Wuthering Heights, she sees Heathcliff as a "cur", he is ill-bred and surly. She admonishes him:

Don't get the expression of a vicious cur that appears to know the kicks it gets are its desert, and yet, hates all the world, as well as the kicker, for what it suffers. (WH 7: 98)

Heathcliff does not fit into the gentile world - he is neither a lapdog, a pleasant play-thing, nor is he a useful hunting dog.

When Heathcliff returns from his self-imposed exile, we see that the cur has been refined to some extent. Just before Catherine's death, however, Nelly Dean approaches Catherine and Heathcliff who are embracing, and the latter turns on her:

... he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy. I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species; it appeared that he would not understand though I spoke to him so ... (WH 15: 197)

The cruelty of this “mad dog” can be clearly seen in an incident involving a lapdog. Nelly discovers that Heathcliff and Isabella have eloped when:

... at a place where a bridle hook is driven into the wall, I saw something white moved irregularly, obviously by an other agent than the wind ...

which she discovers to be: “... Miss Isabella’s springer, Fanny, suspended to a handkerchief and nearly at its last gasp.” (WH 12: 167).

The modern reader may be unaware that a bridle hook, designed to subject a horse by its headgear, was at the approximate height of a horse’s head, and so the lapdog, Fanny, would be hanging from the handkerchief, obviously in great danger of asphyxiation. Nelly arrives just in time - she even hears the “... beat of the horse’s feet galloping at some distance”. The reader thus suspects, as does Nelly, that this has been Heathcliff’s doing. He himself admits this as much to Nelly later in the novel:

The first thing she (Isabella) 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 ... (WH 14: 187)

As Isabella has been constantly identified with her lapdogs, the reader has no difficulty in relating Heathcliff’s astonishingly cruel treatment of Isabella’s dog, Fanny, to what will be his treatment of the hapless Isabella. Brontë again makes use of a dog to anticipate the future development of the novel.

The second generation of characters in *Wuthering Heights* are also presented through the figurative and physical presence of dogs. Hareton Earnshaw, right from his first appearance is firmly identified with the type of “cur” through which we have previously seen the young Heathcliff defined. When we first meet Hareton in the novel, Lockwood takes him for Heathcliff’s son. Hareton is offended: ‘My name is Hareton Earnshaw,’ growled the other; ‘and I’d counsel you to respect it.’ (WH 2: 56). The use of the verb “growl” immediately gives the reader a clue to the young man’s character. We later learn that, as a child, he has been treated like a dog by his father, Hindley:

Unnatural cub, come hither! I’ll teach thee to impose on a good-hearted deluded father - Now don’t you think the lad would be handsomer cropped? It makes a dog fiercer, and I love something fierce. Give me a scissors - something fierce and trim! (WH 9: 114)

Hareton is, after his father’s death, raised by Heathcliff who tells Nelly that he has brought the child up to: “... scorn everything extra-animal as silly and weak.” (WH 21: 253). Although Hareton is variously described as “a mule”, “a cart-horse” and “a cow”, both Lockwood and Catherine Linton, for different reasons relate him to dogs. When Lockwood calls on Heathcliff at *Wuthering Heights*, Hareton seems no different to the rest of the master’s

dogs: "... he immediately flung down his tools and accompanied me, in the office of a watchdog, not as a substitute for the host." (WH 31: 330).

Catherine Linton, on the other hand, comments on his supposed boorishness to the ever-present Nelly Dean: "... he's just like a dog, is he not Ellen ... he twitched his shoulder as Juno twitches hers." (WH 32: 341).

When, after some years, Nelly again meets the lad she had looked after as a baby, the presence of his fierce dog presents a barrier which thwarts her efforts to renew an affectionate relationship:

'Shall you and I be friends, Hareton?' was my next essay at conversation. An oath and a threat to set Throttlar on me if I did not 'frame off' rewarded my perseverance. 'Hey, Throttlar, lad!' whispered the little wretch, raising a half-bred bull-dog from its lair in the corner. 'Now, wilt tuh be ganging?' he asked authoritatively. (WH 13: 174)

Throttlar is later revealed by Isabella to be:

... the son of our old Skulker; it had spent its whelphood at the Grange, and was given by my father to Mr. Hindley. (WH 13: 181)

The fact that Hareton's dog had connections with both the houses, with both the conflicting worlds of the novel is perhaps significant in that it anticipates the role that Hareton will later play with Catherine Linton in the reconciliation of these two conflicting worlds. It is also significant to note that when the young Catherine is at Wuthering Heights, a visit provoked by the fight between her dogs and those of Heathcliff, she offends Hareton by referring to him as a servant. He offers her as a peace-offering a young puppy:

Hareton, recovering from his disgust at being taken for a servant, seemed moved by her distress; and having fetched the pony round to the door, he took, to propitiate he, a fine crooked-legged terrier whelp from the kennel; and putting it into her hand, bid her wisht; for he meant naught. (WH 18: 31)

Catherine Linton arrives at Wuthering Heights for the first time on the day of her "pilgrimage" to Penistone Crag. As we mentioned above, this visit was brought about by the accidental incursion of Catherine's dogs into the territory of the dogs from the Heights. Lockwood tells us that:

... she arrived without adventure to the gates of the farmhouse, when Hareton happened to issue forth, attended by some canine followers who attacked her train. They had a smart battle, before their owners could separate them: that formed an introduction. (WH 18: 232)

Again in this incident we see how dogs have been used to advance the plot, as well as providing a subtle commentary on the initial conflict between the characters of Hareton and Catherine.

ine which is to be further developed in this last third of the novel. Catherine is seen with her “caravan” of: “... a horse and three camels, personated by a large hound and a couple of pointers ...” (WH 18: 227) at one with the animals that surround her. Two years later, Nelly tells us that:

She bounded before me, and returned to my side, and was off again like a young greyhound; ... (WH 21: 247)

These highly positive references are contrasted with the treatment of her cousin, Linton Heathcliff. Heathcliff and Isabella’s son has clearly inherited many of the characteristics of his mother, and on her death, when he goes to live with his father at Wuthering Heights, we see him as a lapdog who has been thrown into the savage world of cruel wild hounds.

When Linton is taken to Wuthering Heights for the first time, his father, Heathcliff, refers to him as a “pulling chicken” and a “whelp” and when Nelly slips out leaving the child to his new life, we see him: “... timidly engaged in rebuffing the advances of a friendly sheep-dog.” (WH 20: 244).

Mark Schorer suggests that:

... the domestic and gentler animals are generally used for purposes of harsh satire and vilification. (The Metaphors in *Wuthering Heights*. > *The World we Imagine*, New York 1968)

This is certainly true in the case of the “lapdog” characters such as Edgar, Isabella and Linton, although it must be borne in mind that in the case of the latter, there is also a cruel streak in his nature which reminds us of his father, as well as a certain cowardliness which Heathcliff does not possess, and an extreme selfishness. We learn from Heathcliff that Linton:

... can play the little tyrant as well. He’ll undertake to torture any number of cats if their teeth be drawn and their claws pared. (WH 27: 306)

Despite this, however, Linton is shocked by Heathcliff’s cruelty: “I wink to see my father strike a dog, or a horse, he does it so hard ...” (WH 28: 312).

The author distinguishes between the “curs” and “lapdogs” in her novel, although the former can at times adopt certain characteristics of the latter and vice versa. When Isabella tells Heathcliff: “... if I were you I’d go stretch myself over her grave, and die like a faithful dog” (WH 17: 214), the image is all the more effective because we have already become accustomed to seeing the characters defined through a multitude of references to dogs right from the beginning of the novel.

Emily Brontë lived surrounded by dogs, both in the rectory at Haworth and in the nearby farms. A famous anecdote tells of how she thrashed her huge mastiff, Keeper, after pulling it downstairs, because it had been sleeping on a bed. In her only novel, she uses her knowledge

and powers of observation in order to create a “sub-world” of dogs which enables us to see more vividly her imaginative world of human passion and pain.

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