

## A FIR-TREE AND A PEAR TREE: CRAFTSMANSHIP SHARED IN BOTH *WUTHERING HEIGHTS* AND *THE SOUND AND THE FURY*

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A fir-tree performs a few functions of importance in adding much to the harrowing pathos in some scenes in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*: the first shocker to the unprepared reader, where Heathcliff tries to invoke the spectral Catherine Linton, and the jailbreak scene, in which Miss Catherine Linton, daughter of the Catherine Linton above and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff now, succeeds in escaping from the detention caused by the diabolical Heathcliff and rushing to her father's deathbed. At the onset of the novel, Mr. Lockwood, the narrator and listener, on his first visit to Wuthering Heights, his landlord's dwelling, guesses "the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house."<sup>1</sup> The next day Lockwood calls at Wuthering Heights again and is forced by the heavy snow-fall to put up for the night. Zillah, the stout housewife, is kind enough to usher the unwelcomed guest to the chamber where her master has never let anybody lodge willingly. In the room Lockwood finds out a large oak case, "a singular sort of old-fashioned couch," or "a little closet."<sup>2</sup> He gets in and sees a name repeated in all kinds of characters on a few mildewed books piled up in one corner—Catherine Earnshaw, here and there varied to Catherine Heathcliff, and then again to Catherine Linton. The closet seems to belong to Catherine—Catherine who? Lockwood has yet to know. Lying in the oak closet he dozes and dreams: he remembers he hears the fir-bough repeat its teasing sound, which annoys him so much that he resolves to silence it, if possible. He rises, in his dream, and tries to unhasp the casement, but the hook has been soldered into the staple; so he knocks his knuckles through the glass and stretches an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which his fingers close on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand, which proves to belong to "Catherine Linton" who sobs in a most melancholy voice, "Let me in—let me in! I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!" He dreams he can discern the child's face looking through the window; unable to shake the child off, he pulls its wrist on to the broken pane and rubs it to and fro till the blood runs down and soaks the bedclothes. The child still maintains its tenacious gripe, and wails, "Let me in!" Lockwood says at length, "How can I? Let me go, if you want me to let you in!" The fingers relax and he snatches his through the hole, hurriedly piles the books up in a pyramid against it, and stops his ears to exclude

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1. Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: Everyman's Library, 1955), p. 2.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

the lamentable prayer. Still the doleful cry moans on; he shouts, "Begone! I'll never let you in, not if you beg for twenty years." The voice mourns, "I've been a waif for twenty years!" The pile of books moves as if thrust forward; he tries to jump up in vain; so he yells aloud in a frenzy of fright. The yell is not ideal: Heathcliff hurries to the chamber door and pushes it open, muttering, "Is any one here?" Lockwood thinks it best to confess his presence and opens the panels of the closet; the first creak of the oak startles Heathcliff like an electric shock. The former apologizes for disturbing the latter by screaming in his sleep; stepping out of the closet, Lockwood rebukes Zillah for trying to get another proof that the place is haunted, at his expense, and condemns the "hospitable" ancestors including the changeling named Catherine Linton, or Earnshaw, who confessed she had been walking the earth for twenty years, when Heathcliff, with savage vehemence, thunders out his anger at the condemner and strikes his forehead. Urged by the host to take the candle and go away, the tenant quits the chamber, but, ignorant where to go, he stands still as witness to a piece of superstition on the part of the landlord: Heathcliff gets on to the bed and wrenches open the lattice, bursting into an uncontrollable passion of tears. "Come in! come in!" he sobs. "Cathy, do come. Oh do—*once* more! Oh! my heart's darling! hear me *this* time, Catherine, at last!"<sup>3</sup> The first upbeat of tension in the novel is thus concluded in a shockingly pitiable denouement, and it is remarkable that it is the fir-tree that has set off the disturbing night by touching the lattice and rattling its cones against the panes, thus giving a tremendous tumult to Lockwood's dream.

Toward the end of Chapter Twenty-Eight, Miss Catherine Linton, daughter of Edgar and Catherine Linton and Mrs. Linton Heathcliff now, who has been forcibly detained for six days and nights in a little parlour at Wuthering Heights by the despotic Heathcliff, father of Linton Heathcliff, terrifies the younger Heathcliff into fetching the key, so that she can steal out before break of day to visit the other empty rooms, examine their windows, and, luckily, light on her mother's chamber to get easily out of its lattice and onto the ground, by means of the fir-tree close by. Catherine hurriedly reaches Thrushcross Grange just in time for bidding a final farewell to her dying father.<sup>4</sup> A tree used as a means of getaway from captivity may have been borrowed by another romanticist, William Faulkner, while he is striving to give shape to his extravagant *capriccio*, *The Sound and the Fury*. In the last chapter of *The Sound and the Fury*, "April Eighth, 1928," Jason Compson, incensed by Quentin, daughter of Caddy Compson, not coming down to breakfast despite repeated callings by Dilsey, springs up, his chair crashed over backward, falls to pawing at the pockets of the rusty black dressing sacque his mother wears, tugs a huge bunch of rusted keys on an iron ring, runs up to Quentin's room, opens the door, and finds her bed undisturbed, a soiled undergarment of cheap silk laid on the floor,

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3. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-23.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 243.

a single stocking dangling from a half open bureau drawer, and the window opened. A pear tree close against the house is in bloom and the branches scrape and rasp against the house and the myriad air, driving in the window, brings into the room the forlorn scent of the blossoms. Jason emerges out of the closet with a metal box, whose lock has been broken: the money Caddy, to support her child, Quentin, every month for fifteen years, has been sending to Jason, only to be swindled out of it, is now found purloined by the daughter. Luster, a nigger boy, witnesses to having seen, with Benjy, Quentin “clamb out de window last night,” adding, “We sees her doin hit ev’y night[—c]lamb right down dat pear tree.”<sup>5</sup>

Superficial similarities between the two episodes of elopement accomplished by young girls can easily be pointed out: (1) the young women climbing down a tree in an effort to free themselves; (2) the females locked up by their uncles, Heathcliff, though, being an uncle by marriage (he married Isabella Linton, aunt of the younger Cathy); (3) the damsels named after their preceding generation: one identical with her mother (Catherine), and the other with her uncle (Quentin); and (4) the presence of an accomplice or witnesses: Linton Heathcliff, in *Wuthering Heights*, helps Cathy to escape by fetching the key to unlock and re-lock the door without shutting it, and Luster and Benjy, in *The Sound and the Fury*, espy Quentin getting out of the window and onto the ground by means of the pear tree, letting nobody know about it. Is it not possible that William Faulkner was conscious that he was drawing on Emily Brontë’s craftsmanship when he was designing the flight of Quentin into a comic tit for tat? More importantly, is there not any deeper ties of literary kinship between the two great curiosities of literature on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean? Even in the eyes of a most inadvertent reader, yes.

During the class conferences at the University of Virginia in 1957, Faulkner, when asked if there were any women writers he esteemed, answered in the affirmative and referred to Brontë, Willa Cather, and Ellen Glasgow. Then a student asked, “Was *Wuthering Heights* one of your favorite books?” “I don’t really have favorite books,” the author replied. “I have books that I read many times over and over but it’s not for the book it’s for the people in it. There are certain people that I like to read about just as you like to go into a room and spend thirty minutes with an old friend, and *Wuthering Heights* is a book that I have admired for its craftsmanship but there’s nothing in it that I would ever read again probably, though some day I might.”<sup>6</sup> It may arouse more than passing interest to notice that on the same page a footnote has been attached to the above quote, that reads, “Mr. Faulkner read or reread *Wuthering Heights* in February 1958.”

5. William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, New, Corrected Edition (New York: Random House, 1984), pp. 279-287.

6. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner (eds.), *Faulkner in the University: Class Conferences at the University of Virginia, 1957-1958* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 202.

The writer may indeed have renewed a fresh interest in the work, perhaps instigated by that student's inquiry, for there is only one reference to the book to be found in the monumental two-volume edition of *Faulkner: A Biography* by Joseph Blotner (there is no reference whatever to the opus contained in the revised one-volume version of 1984), and that is a curt mention of the book being read by Faulkner at Charlottesville, Virginia, in 1958, who "went on riding, writing, and reading (*Wuthering Heights* just then) as the end of February approached."<sup>7</sup> My point is, although Faulkner himself apparently did not want to recognize much influence received from Emily Brontë, that comparison between *Wuthering Heights* and *The Sound and the Fury* would reveal some homogeneities characteristically inherited and nurtured by the "genuine romanticists," as the two authors would have to be called in the baldest sense of the words. Three basic resemblances between the two works, among others, may here have to be pointed out: (1) exquisite narrative techniques, (2) extravagance of the passion of love which transfigures and destroys, and (3) paranoiac pursuit and abuse inflicted on nieces by their uncles, in blood and by marriage.

First, the narrative structures. The plot of *Wuthering Heights* is developed and communicated to the reader in a complicated and sophisticated way of the tradition of Gothic romance—by means of two narrators: Lockwood, the outer narrator, and Nelly Dean, the inner one, as John Hewish puts it. Lockwood, Hewish goes on to say, is brought up to date by Mrs. Dean before temporarily leaving the scene. He returns to hear the conclusion and to experience for himself the concluding state of the novel's world. Both Dean's voice and Lockwood's pen are essential to the meaning of the book; she is more than a camera, something of Pandarus as well as being judge, interpreter, chorus, and attorney, while he not only reports events as an outsider, but also provides an important historical dimension as mediator between past, present, and future.<sup>8</sup> Turning now to *The Sound and the Fury*, it would seem at first glance that the first three sections are all examples of the stream-of-consciousness method. Yet, as Lawrence Bowling has well observed and Cleanth Brooks has agreed to, how different they are in movement, mood, and effect.<sup>9</sup> The novel's entangled contradiction and disorder displayed and conveyed in an apparently most sophisticated, modernistic skilfulness should actually be regarded and accepted as such from the view point of the rather traditional narrative structure, the one more distorted, it would have to be acknowledged, than that of *Wuthering Heights*. To be sure, the three different ways of narration or monologue, which disclose as many

7. Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 1974), Vol. II, p. 1685.

8. See John Hewish, *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study* (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 137-140.

9. Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963), p. 325.

different conceptions of love or persistence, are stupefying enough for the reader to be confused, baffled, and disoriented. Still, it is ascertainable that there is one crucially romantic feature perceptibly implied in different modes of presentation: love or persistent chase for a female absentee, one of the eternal motifs involved in various attributes of romantic dynamics. What is more, it is of some interest that implications of events are conveyed through indirect allusive utterances, as well as through direct explanations, of the narrator. Heathcliff, according to Nelly talking to Lockwood in Chapter Twenty-Seven, utters a seemingly kindly suggestion to his son, "Come, then, my hero. Are you willing to return, escorted by me?" He approaches and tries to seize his child; but, shrinking back, Linton clings to his cousin, Catherine, imploring her to accompany him with a frantic importunity that admits no denial.<sup>10</sup> Which shows, indirectly, how much the son dreads his father and how indisputably he believes he would be killed by his oppressive father if he failed to get Catherine to consent to marriage with him. Tragic effects of the situation are enhanced by Nelly's inability to discern the cause of Linton's fright: "What was filling him with dread we had no means of discerning."<sup>11</sup> Benjy's hankering after his absent sister Caddy, in the first section of *The Sound and the Fury*, is reflected on his own recordings of the remarks of his attending negro boy, Luster: "Shut up that moaning."<sup>12</sup> Implications of his feeling and behavior are manifested to the reader not through his direct descriptions of consciousness but through his own unconscious documentations of others' narratives concerning his own emotion and action. Benjy's utter ignorance of what the world means to him helps amplify the tragic effects derived from the idiot.

Second, extravagance of the passion of love that leads to self-destruction. "It is in accord with the high romantic aspect," as Hewish puts it, "that Heathcliff should die of love for Catherine, but he proceeds to a final (suggested) union with her in more than one sense; he takes over her role. The embodiment of vengeance loses interest in his worldly designs and his feeling for Catherine becomes mystical, and an annihilation of the body."<sup>13</sup> The extraordinariness of the wild rampancy of love and vengeance of Heathcliff has no parallel except for several of the greatest novels belonging to the tradition of romanticism. *The Sound and the Fury* may be counted in those several of the greatest romances in terms of outrageousness of the passions expressed by the two monologists, Benjy and Quentin, who provide two quite different modes of interpretation of feeling, based, though, on a common yearning for a sister who is not there. Benjy's love for Caddy is seemingly presented in its most childlike form—inarticulate and almost formless, but actually the expositions are offered by something of an intellectual disguised as an idiot.

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10. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 230.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

12. *The Sound and the Fury*, p. 4.

13. *Emily Brontë: A Critical and Biographical Study*, p. 153.

Quentin's affection or paranoiac attachment for Caddy is too self-conscious: he is only in love with a notion of virginity that he associates with her. He is really in love with death itself; his penchant for suicide is identical with Heathcliff's psychology in the last phase. Cleanth Brooks notes that both Benjy's and Quentin's sections are filled with poetry.<sup>14</sup> The comment is right on target. Benjy and Quentin can indeed be called innocent poets, who, unconsciously or consciously, are trying to give voice to their absurd passion of love or adherence to what has irrevocably been lost. Which, it would be safe to say, is the essence of poetry, the crucial core of romanticism for that matter. In other words, poetry is based on an irrational human desire to seek the impossible. The more tremendous the tension of a poet's longing is, the more luminously the poem begins to glow. Ahab goes for what is supposed to be behind the gigantic white whale. Heathcliff craves reunion with his love in the other world. In Chapter Thirty-Three he confides to Nelly: "I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it. They have yearned towards it so long, and so unwaveringly, that I'm convinced it *will* be reached—and *soon*—because it has devoured my existence: I am swallowed up in the anticipation of its fulfilment."<sup>15</sup> Heathcliff comes to realize that it is only in the grave that he can catch and embrace his loved one, the ever-haunting specter of Catherine. It may be that poetry comes up to its culmination when the unattainable goal is inexorably linked to potential self-annihilation. On the other hand, Quentin's poetical lamentation for his lost sister ever-living in his memory is fascinating enough to call tears, and a laugh, for its astoundingly unadulterated obsession expressed in modernistically free verse-style. He feels also that potential solution of his dilemma would be found only at the bottom of the Charles River. I cannot resist temptation to cite some dozens of lines from his soliloquy as an example of memorably heightened poetry.

do you remember the day damuddy died when you sat down in the water in your  
drawers  
I held the point of the knife at her throat  
it wont take but a second just a second then I can do mine I can do mine then  
all right can you do yours by yourself  
yes the blades long enough Benjys in bed by now  
yes  
it wont take but a second Ill try not to hurt  
all right  
will you close your eyes  
no like this youll have to push it harder  
touch your hand to it

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14. William Faulkner: *The Yoknapatawpha Country*, p. 326.

15. *Wuthering Heights*, p. 278.

but she didnt move her eyes were wide open looking past my head at the sky  
 Caddy do you remember how Dilsey fussed at you because your drawers were muddy  
 dont cry  
 Im not crying Caddy  
 push it are you going to  
 do you want me to  
 yes push it  
 touch your hand to it  
 dont cry poor Quentin  
 but I couldnt stop she held my head against her damp hard breast I could hear her  
 heart going firm and slow now not hammering and the water gurgling among the  
 willows in the dark and waves of honeysuckle coming up the air my arm and  
 shoulder were twisted under me  
 what is it what are you doing  
 her muscles gathered I sat up  
 its my knife I dropped it  
 she sat up<sup>16</sup>

Third, paranoiac chase and persecution which uncles inflict on their nieces, in blood and by marriage. Heathcliff has some attributes of the Satan-figure: as has already been referred to, he is the embodiment of vengeance upon all the members of both the Earnshaws and the Lintons. He threatens his son with death to force the younger Catherine to consent to coming to Wuthering Heights as his wife. Although she comes unwillingly to the mansion, she is firmly reluctant to accept marriage. As a result, she has been forbidden to leave for home and detained for six days in a parlour by the fiendish Heathcliff, as has been mentioned earlier, until the youth helps her to escape and hurry to her father's deathbed. As for *The Sound and the Fury*, it may be relevant to note that the peculiarly multiple personality of the hero of *Wuthering Heights* can be seen as divided into two aspects of consciousness: Benjy and Quentin represent the romantic side of the passionate yearning, thus trying to conjure up an illusive image of their lost sister, Caddy, and Jason stands for the cynical phase of persecution and abuse, thus swindling his niece out of what she should have had and trying to stick to her to the end. Jason certainly emerges as an equivalent to the Satanic Heathcliff in terms of cynicism and paranoia. Only Jason lacks such intense feeling of revenge as Heathcliff has. While the latter appears to be a man of great tragedy stuck in an insoluble contradiction and disorder, the former, who has no love for anyone and looks only for money, seems to be only a comical paranoiac involved in self-inflicted sound and fury.

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16. *The Sound and the Fury*, pp. 151-152.

What label is the most suitable for William Faulkner, one of the greatest writers of the twentieth-century American fiction? A realist, romanticist, naturalist, modernist, regionalist, Southerner, Gothicist, imagist, fantasist, stream-of-consciousness technician, Southern liberal, states' righter, or nigger lover? A certain Japanese scholar calls him "a naturalist,"<sup>17</sup> the sobriquet that baffles our general impression of the author. On the other hand, Cleanth Brooks aptly suggests that Faulkner be called "a romantic": "Faulkner ... began as a romantic, and a romantic he remained to the end, though a reformed or foiled or chastened romantic."<sup>18</sup> I have no hesitation about agreeing. It is also advisable to be informed of the claim of Phil Stone, Faulkner's famous mentor and long-standing adviser and critic, that reference to him as "a realist" be corrected to "a romanticist." Again I do not recoil from agreeing. When Faulkner was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1949 belatedly in November 1950, The Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, one of the favorite newspapers for the population of the northern part of Mississippi, printed "Appraisal of Faulkner," its editorial, as a tribute of praise on the November 10, 1950, issue, in which the newly crowned Nobel prize laureate was classified as "a photographic realist." Phil Stone took issue with the classification, sending a letter to the editor, which, published on November 19, 1950, runs as follows: "'FAULKNER CLASSIFIED' / To The Commercial Appeal: / In your leading editorial on William Faulkner in your issue of Nov. 10, you refer to him as 'a photographic realist.' How anybody can think that Faulkner is a realist, must (*sic*) less a photographic realist, is far beyond me. He is obviously a romanticist, sometimes almost Gothic. It is a civilization that is gone for which he mourns. / PHIL STONE, / Oxford, Miss."<sup>19</sup> No question, Phil Stone, a lawyer, has shown his impregnable critical eye, which he rightly deserves respect for, although most of professional critics and scholars hardly dare to give definitions or classifications to literati. No other portrayals seem to me to fit in more accurately. (28/9/1991)

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17. 細入藤太郎『アメリカ文学史』培風館、1960年初版、p. 410.

18. *William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country*, p. 51.

19. "Letters to the Editor," The Memphis *Commercial Appeal*, November 19, 1950, Section V, p. 3.