Northumbria Research Link

Citation: Hoult, Elizabeth and Gibson, Mel (2023) The Education and Exclusion of Heathcliff: a lesson on ‘looked after’ and ‘previously looked after’ children in schools from nineteenth century literature. Pedagogy, Culture and Society. ISSN 1468-1366 (In Press)

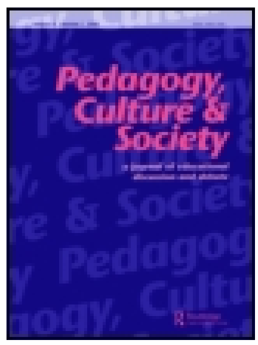
Published by: Taylor & Francis

URL: https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2177325 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2177325>

This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link: https://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/id/eprint/51330/

Northumbria University has developed Northumbria Research Link (NRL) to enable users to access the University’s research output. Copyright © and moral rights for items on NRL are retained by the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. Single copies of full items can be reproduced, displayed or performed, and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided the authors, title and full bibliographic details are given, as well as a hyperlink and/or URL to the original metadata page. The content must not be changed in any way. Full items must not be sold commercially in any format or medium without formal permission of the copyright holder. The full policy is available online: http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/policies.html

This document may differ from the final, published version of the research and has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies. To read and/or cite from the published version of the research, please visit the publisher’s website (a subscription may be required.)



Pedagogy, Culture & Society

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpcs20

The education and exclusion of heathcliff: a lesson on 'looked after' and 'previously looked after' children in schools from nineteenth-century literature

Elizabeth Chapman Hoult & Mel Gibson

To cite this article: Elizabeth Chapman Hoult & Mel Gibson (2023): The education and exclusion of heathcliff: a lesson on 'looked after' and 'previously looked after' children in schools from nineteenth-century literature, Pedagogy, Culture & Society, DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2023.2177325

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2177325

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 16 Feb 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 109

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rpcs20

PEDAGOGY, CULTURE & SOCIETY
https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2023.2177325

The education and exclusion of heathcliff: a lesson on 'looked after' and 'previously looked after' children in schools from nineteenth-century literature

Elizabeth Chapman Hoult and Mel Gibson

Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing, Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

ABSTRACT

Children who are currently, or were previously, 'looked after' by the state, are educationally disadvantaged, with exclusion rates historically higher than in other groups in the UK. A conventional way of thinking about these children is that they have been affected by trauma and attachment issues in their early years, and that they import their problems into a neutral educational space. A less conventional explanation would be that the school itself is a key player in the production of problematic behaviours and identities that individual children may exhibit. This article attempts to demonstrate how the identity of the excluded care experienced child is formed by the discursive practices of the learning community. We ask: what are the micro-processes and cultural assumptions that might contribute to the levels of exclusion? Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* provides an interrogative framework. It is argued that the learning environment is far from neutral, and that the young Heathcliff is framed by the discursive practices of those who tell his story, most notably those who teach him whether formally or informally. By presenting this stark, fictional example, it is hoped that the 'normal' practices of the contemporary school can be defamiliarized and reconsidered.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 17 May 2022
Accepted 23 January 2023

KEYWORDS
Looked after children; care experienced children in education; exclusion in schools; fostered children; heathcliff; Wuthering heights; Emily bronte; attachment and trauma in schools

Introduction

Children who are, or who have been previously 'looked after' by the state are among the lowest achieving and most frequently excluded groups in schools in the UK (Department for Education 2018) and elsewhere (Jackson and Cameron 2012; Cameron et al. 2012; Jackson and Cameron 2010). Empirical work has established links (although not causality) between being looked after, school exclusions and subsequent social exclusions, as indicated by the over-representation of young people who have had this experience in prison and mental health settings (see, for example, O'higgins, Sebba, and Luke 2015; Sebba et al. 2015). Whilst mainstream schooling can form an important factor in some looked after children's resilience, as Rees (2012) has shown, in other cases the experience of school can endorse and amplify patterns of exclusion. For example, binary behaviour

CONTACT Elizabeth Chapman Hoult elizabeth.hoult@northumbria.ac.uk Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing, Northumbria University, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, UK

© 2023 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

management systems (which characterise behaviours as either good or bad) can have deleterious effects on children who are more likely to have had adverse childhood experiences than the average child (Roberts et al. 2021), something we explore later.

In contextualising this article regarding education, it is important to note that there has been surprisingly little attention given to the social micro practices and cultural framing of care experienced children in schools that creates them as subjects in a homogenised and negative way, despite the diversity of their experiences. This conventional way of thinking about these children positions them as bringing their 'problems' with them into a neutral educational space. Another way to think about children who have been looked after, however, is to see the school itself as a key player in the production of any problematic behaviours and identities that individual children may exhibit. As Saul (2021, 9) argues, schools operate in ways that ensure that 'young people who exist in peril are in fact socialised in a system that nurtures their perilousness'. This article therefore attempts to demonstrate how the identity of the excluded looked after/previously looked after child is formed by the discursive practices of the learning community. We ask: what are the micro-processes and cultural assumptions about norms in an education setting that might be understood to contribute to the disproportionately high number of care experienced by children failing in school? In responding to this question, we draw on scholarship which takes literary study seriously as a form of educational enquiry and use literary analysis as a methodological approach. This means the article is intended to offer a complementary perspective to those offered in psychological and sociological literature.

In this article, we use a non-traditional lens and frame, that of a literary text, Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847), which is put to work as an interrogative framework. Fiction illuminates the human story and human issues in ways other discourses cannot, through holding up a mirror to everyday experience (Warner 2017). It also has the potential to endorse and magnify stereotypes which have real consequences in the ways the people are understood in the social world, as Pearse (2018) has demonstrated in her analysis of the representation of adopted adults in crime fiction. It is for these reasons that we contend that the literary analysis of the representation of care experienced children merits serious study.

There are a few studies that provide a helpful lens into the unhelpful processes at work in the classroom, which mean that some learners are read in terms of their life experiences in ways that overshadow their learning potential. The work of Maggie MacLure et al. (2012) has used a Foucauldian methodology to demonstrate how some very young children are constructed as 'problems' in the earliest years of English schools. In addition, qualitative social research has highlighted the effects of negative positioning and labelling of care experienced children and young people in the education system in Wales (see, for example, Mannay et al. 2017). What is available, though, is a rich tradition of literary and cinematic texts which depict the education, formal or otherwise, of the foundling or adopted child. In this article, the literary text is understood as a representation of the teaching and learning scene, as it is by other scholars working in the interdisciplinary space between literary and media studies and education (Hoult 2012; Saul 2021). Taking our cue from Saul's (2021) exposition of the way that alienation, brutality, and exclusion are embedded in the structures and cultures of normalcy in many schools in his analysis of Backderf's (2012) graphic novel 'My Friend Dahmer', we turn to literature in order to understand how education constructs the care experienced child as a problem and

frames them in a trap, which appears impossible to escape. We take as our key object of study the portrayal of the young Heathcliff in 'Wuthering Heights' (Brontë 1847/1997), using a literary framework to observe the smaller actions that marginalise him. We juxtapose his treatment in fiction with what happens in schools now in the exclusionary practices that go into subject formation. In doing so we draw inspiration from the work of Lemn Sissay who connects deep understanding and personal experience with the appraisal of literary archetypes in his work, which he then applies to the social world via activism, such as the poem 'Superman was a Museum (2014) which is printed on the walls of The Foundling Museum's Study Studio and later inspired an exhibition held there entitled 'Superheroes, Orphans and Origins – 125 years in Comics' (2022).

In contextualising this article in terms of literature, we acknowledge that there are many examples of adoption and fostering in nineteenth-century texts. Charles Dickens, for instance, specialised in foundlings and abandoned, fostered, and adopted children – that being the main subject of 'Oliver Twist' (1838/2003), but also a major plot device in 'Great Expectations' (1861) and 'David Copperfield' (1850). Another example, Charlotte Brontë's 'Jane Eyre' (1847/1997), is a study of how an orphaned child can make their way in the world. This focus in fiction reflects and comments upon the social conditions of Victorian England – with the move from an agrarian society to an industrial one – which led to widespread poverty and mass movement to the cities. One consequence of these changes was that many babies were orphaned or abandoned. However, each novel can bring new insights beyond the nineteenth-century fictional milieu and in this case, we explore how the fostered child is constructed by other characters and relate this to pedagogical theory. Our interest is in how education positions, homogenises, and constructs these children in ways that lead to their exclusion, and we argue that Heathcliff can be seen as a dramatic example of what happens when exclusionary practices come into play, as he is made the outsider in family, education, and community.

The found child who is brought into an otherwise stable or happy family unit and who then goes on to destabilise that unit is a familiar trope in the literature of the foundling. In the story of 'Wuthering Heights' (Brontë, 1847/1997), a privileged country gentleman, Mr. Earnshaw, travels to Liverpool for business and, in an apparently kindly act, rescues a street child, whom he brings back to the family home and subsequently names Heathcliff. The rest of the story is about the unsuccessful attempts to assimilate Heathcliff into the family and his anger with several generations of the family, something expressed in increasingly violent acts.

Education is important in the novel as Heathcliff is initially taught by the local curate, along with Earnshaw's children, Cathy and Hindley, at Wuthering Heights. Thus, education is first located within the home and across perceived ethnic and class boundaries. However, Heathcliff is severely bullied by Hindley who resents his equal participation and his popularity with Mr. Earnshaw. The curate argues that Hindley should be sent away to college because of his bullying (a rare example of the bully being moved rather than the victim, albeit to a potentially superior education) whilst Heathcliff remains at home, remaining a favourite of Hindley's father. This brings resentment, and Hindley on his return home after his father's death insists that Heathcliff is treated as a servant, not family, sets him to labouring out of doors, and ensures that his education is stopped.

There is a further connection between care experienced children and education in the novel, as it is partly narrated by Nelly Dean, who is also brought into the household by

Mr. Earnshaw, so is in effect an adoptee like Heathcliff. In contrast to Heathcliff, however, Nelly's education is continued, and she uses it as an adult in her role as the first educator of the children who appear later in the novel, as well as being a servant. Throughout the novel, we see her make judgements of their behaviour, morality, and educational skills, much as a more formally placed teacher might, just as she had first done when judging Heathcliff. Both these aspects of the narrative establish a firm, if problematic, link between care experienced children and education.

The story of Heathcliff draws on earlier myths and tropes of the bad apple, the 'disastrous adoption story' (Novey 2007, 3) in which the child who is adopted wreaks havoc, disrupting the power structure and order. In this scenario their 'pathological, antisocial' nature (Novey 2007, 3) is irredeemable, essential, and contagious. Normative readings of Heathcliff have emphasised his violence and jealousy, which means taking the accounts of narrators Lockwood, and Nelly as more or less accurate, and seeing him as the source of the disruption in the household. Some of these readings allow for the damage of his early years in Liverpool, but even where poverty and damage are allowed for, his essential badness is seen as the locus of his status as anti-hero. The adoption as disaster trope is a strong, but not dominant, cultural script that continues to underpin some popular understandings of both adoption and foster care. However, to jettison this area of literature as out of date and unhelpful would serve to dismiss the way that this myth continues to have influence in the public and professional imagination, so impacting upon contemporary education. In the following analysis, we want to depart from normative, conservative readings of the found child as disaster story. We argue that, far from endorsing a familiar and popular trope in her masterpiece, Brontë is presenting us with what happens when such tropes go unchallenged and a character, or in the terms of this article – an educational subject, is created and boxed in by destructive and prejudicial readings, positioning that as the disaster.

In recent years, considerable attention has been paid to political and socio-economic readings of the novel. There is also a rich range of other readings of this novel and this article simply adds another reading to these pre-existing studies. Such readings, for example, emphasise the relevance of Heathcliff's portrayal to historical accounts of inland slavery and people trafficking. For example, Maja-Lisa von Sneidern and Christopher Heywood, quoted in Eamonn Delacy, view the novel through an historical understanding of the time in which it was set, noting that there were an 'estimated 15,000 enslaved persons to be found in England in the 1770s' (2018, 142–143). Other critics (for an overview, see Gilbert 2017) have drawn attention to the ways that the property inheritance laws of the eighteenth and nineteenth century create symbolic and literal violence in families and conspire to both lock Heathcliff out of the inheritance system and simultaneously allow him to take advantage of it.

Readings of Heathcliff as a victim and mirror of white privilege emphasise the way that his violence is inevitable, given the colonialist treatment of him. This is an emerging theme in popular culture as well as in literary analysis and this reading is central to Arnold's (2011) film of the book and Valerie Brown Lester's 'The West Indian' (2019). There is much to be said in support of a critical race reading of the novel. Nelly describes Heathcliff repeatedly as 'a gypsy' (and see 'his own black father', 175) and historical accounts of the port of Liverpool in the 1830s and 1840s attest to the atrocious effects of the slave trade in the city and the fact that children and adults of colour were

established in the city. Critical race readings of Emily's sister Charlotte's book, 'Jane Eyre' (1847), and the presentation of Mrs. Rochester, have been well-established parts of the literary theory canon since the 1990s. In his analysis of post-colonial readings of Heathcliff, Delacy notes that the theories of Heathcliff as victim of the English Imperialist gesture to both Ireland (as explored in depth by Eagleton 1996) and other colonised populations, converge on the consideration of Heathcliff's 'body as a primary canvas for the socio-political undercurrents of the work' (2018, 140). In this way, Heathcliff is both victim and avenger on account of the evils of colonialism. He is 'a stand-in for the colonised mimic of Bhabha or the vengeful ghost of the Emerald Isle' (Delacy, 142). His vengeance on the family and society which uses, abuses and expels him renders him an oppressed subject, the othered product of patriarchy and imperialism, who returns to his oppressors to wreak revenge. The greatest revenge he enacts is through his mimicry of their whole persona and privilege. Here, we acknowledge the significant body of work which convincingly reads Heathcliff as a critique of colonialism and violent imperialism (see, for example, Eagleton 1996; Delacy 2018; Medoro 1996) and draw on the methodologies of such work to develop a framework through which to understand Heathcliff's formation as a disinherited, othered subject in the text.

Attachment-based reading of Heathcliff

Before turning to our educational and literary analysis, we firstly acknowledge another reading, which is omitted from the tradition of literary analysis of 'Wuthering Heights', that of Heathcliff as care experienced child. Before we analyse the subject formation processes that go to creating Heathcliff as a problem – to put it mildly – we want to read him in a straightforward way as a care experienced child, a found, foster child. The book lends itself to such a reading and the reason there are so few analyses employing this lens is linked to Marianne Novey's point (3) about the dearth of later critical readings in Victorian literature, per se. A key scene in the book is the presentation of Heathcliff by his carer – old Mr. Earnshaw. In the structure of the book, though, we are introduced to Heathcliff the adult by Nelly's account of him as 'a cuckoo' (35) and from this point on, his otherliness is tied inextricably from his badness. She describes his character as 'rough as a saw-edge, and hard as a whinstone!' and warns Lockwood to keep a distance from him, 'The less you meddle with him, the better' (35). His predicament as a cuckoo, i.e., an outsider who is brought into the family 'nest' and takes it over, is qualified by a description of his early life that testifies to the damage of poor fostering practice. When Lockwood asks Nelly what she knows of his history, Nelly demonstrates a candid ignorance about his life as well as the arrogant assumption that she has the right to tell his story, 'I know all about it: except where he was born, and who were his parents, and how he got his money at first' (35). Despite her cosy rhetoric of familiarity, her underlying hostility always informs her actions, but also serves to further other Heathcliff, whilst protecting herself from criticism or being similarly judged as a cuckoo. A psychoanalytic reading might call this projection (Hinshelwood and Fortuna 2018) or scapegoating.

She knows, in short, nothing of Heathcliff's circumstances at all, and yet presumes to tell his story as if it were hers. In part, it is, as she too is brought into the family, but she retains her name and her history as her mother had nursed Hindley and so she grows up playing with him and Cathy as well as helping with household jobs, in effect both within

and outside the family. Research in the last two decades has emphasised the importance of life story work with children who are taken into the care system (Watson, Hahn, and Staines 2020; Watson, Eleanor Staples, and Riches 2021) and attention to the development of biographical narrative through later life letters and life story books is standard practice in adoption and fostering social work in the UK. It is widely acknowledged that damage because of early attachment issues is compounded and made much more extreme when there is a deficit in the understanding of identity as well. Sissay's (2020) autobiography 'My Name is Why' provides a searing account of what happens in the care system when an identity is erased. Heathcliff does not have the advantages that Nelly has, despite similarities in their position, and Sissay's experience emphasises the violence that is done to a sense of self. Heathcliff is in some ways typical of the care experienced child, as he is assimilated into a new family and given a new name and identity without anyone bothering to help him to integrate what he already knows of himself.

A reading of Heathcliff that applies the ideas of the specific, attachment-based theories of Bowlby (1977/2005) and, to a certain extent, Winnicott (1964/2021), is possible and, to a certain extent, fruitful. Bowlby argued that there are four types of attachment: anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, disorganised, and secure. Such a reading uses the evidence base around damaged and disordered attachment between parent and child to explain the difficulties that Heathcliff has in receiving care and, in turn, being able to assimilate and to function within a normal emotional repertoire. Briefly, the argument is that the bond between the primary caregiver (normally the mother) and the infant is the basis on which the infant's burgeoning understanding of security and place in the world is based. The mother becomes the primary object on which the blueprint for relationships with all other objects is constructed. The child who has suffered extreme deprivation, or abandonment by the caregiver, (as we must assume Heathcliff has because he is a street child) is likely, therefore, to suffer emotional and cognitive damage for the rest of his life. Only with significant and highly skilled reparation work can the child who has suffered broken and damaged attachments ever recover to lead a fully functioning emotional life. This is the familiar, homogenising and gloomy prognosis for children in the care system and the optimistic justification of adoption and good quality fostering: repair is possible, redemption is possible. This is also important because attachment theory, combined with new understandings of the effects of trauma on the infant brain, remains the main theoretical framework around which funding, and training, is allocated in the UK. There has been significant public investment in the upgrading of professional expertise in schools in the last 5 years and much of this has been around the development of a professional knowledge base around attachment and trauma (see, for example, Department of Education 2018). In addition, interventions which train teachers in trauma and attachment awareness are being measured for impact using that lens (as discussed by, for example, Harrison and Trivedi 2020; Dingwall and Sebba 2018).

It is not difficult to read Heathcliff – the child and adult – as the child who is suffering from broken and disordered attachments if we adhere to a narrow understanding of Bowlby's ideas. It should be noted that attachment theory itself can be used as a reductive reading of children's behaviours because it downplays other kinds of non-parental relationships (such as peer and sibling attachments) which may be profoundly important to the child. Heathcliff's attachment to Cathy (and her attachment to him) is so strong that it excludes any other character, for example, which makes it rather difficult to read him as

a character who has trouble attaching to other people. Still, a traditional Bowlbian reading would notice his apparent inability to connect with Nelly, after she tends to him when he is 'dangerously sick' (38) with the measles. There is a reading of this passage that could easily be attributed to a pattern of disordered attachment. Nelly recalls:

> . . . and while he lay at the worst he would have me constantly by his pillow: I suppose he felt I did a good deal for him, and he hadn't wit to guess I was compelled to do it. However, I will say this, he was the quietest child that ever nurse watched over. *(38)*

Nelly also notes that Heathcliff was much easier to care for than Cathy and Hindley. Her tenderness and conscientiousness are noted by the doctor who attributes a good deal of Heathcliff's survival to Nelly's care (38). Nelly, however, is perturbed and hurt when the bond and gratitude that she perceived in Heathcliff at his most vulnerable is discontinued by him when he recovers. She notes that she, '. . . softened towards the being by whose means I earned (the doctor's commendations)'. However, shortly afterwards she attests that 'still I couldn't dote on Heathcliff, and I wondered often what my master saw to admire so much in the sullen boy; who never, to my recollection, repaid his indulgence by any sign of gratitude' (39).

Nelly demonstrates the dilemma of a caregiver for an attachment disordered child – she is confused when the 'normal' mechanics of giving, and the receipt of love are disrupted. She acknowledges that her own part is 'paid for' and is not offered through the altruistic love of a parent, biological or otherwise. She is, in effect, a paid foster carer/ nurse and yet she does not apply the same logic of exchange to her charge. She expects gratitude and displays of affection in return. Herein lies the dilemma of many professionals who encounter looking after children who are still working through the throes of attachment issues. Models of attachment theory based on Bowlby's (1977/2005) suggest that some care-experienced children cannot and will not perform the rituals of the giving and taking of love in the way that other children do; there is a different logic to their love. This is not to homogenise care experienced children as there are many routes into the care system, they do not all demonstrate the same behaviours, and many have no problems at all in receiving care. It is, however, to suggest that the caregiver (or teacher) who takes disordered responses personally (as we assume that Nelly does, projecting her hurt outwards) is doomed to a problematic and painful relationship with those children who exhibit the effects of trauma.

Attachment difficulties are a running theme in the novel and not just located in the person of Heathcliff. Mrs. Earnshaw dies, leaving her two children in the care of Mr. Earnshaw who dies soon after his wife, and Nelly. In later years, Nelly is a primary attachment figure for the infant Hareton but she is wrenched away from that relationship to accompany Cathy to her new home. Nelly's account of the shattered attachment with the five-year-old indicates her mixed feelings of guilt, loss, and anger towards those who ordered her away from the child. She speaks of the rage that foster carers who love their children must feel when a decision is made that they know to not be in the child's best interest.

> Much against my inclination, I was persuaded to leave Wuthering Heights and accompany her here. Little Hareton was nearly five years old, and I had just begun to teach him his letters . . . I kissed Hareton, said good-by; and since then he has been a stranger: and it's very

> queer to think it, but I've no doubt he has completely forgotten all about Ellen Dean, and that he was ever more than all the world to her and she to him. *(89)*

In fact, broken attachments and projected shame runs through the narrative of childcare throughout the novel. Almost everybody is the recipient and inflictor of the same malaise. Nelly describes herself as the 'foster sister' of Hindley (66) and she is also the foster mother of Hareton, as described above. Loss and damaged attachments float freely around the characters. It is not the case that some characters are fully attached and that all the problems are located with Heathcliff. Nelly's narrative framing him as bad, may, then, be a displacement of her own fears of rejection and exclusion given her insider/outsider position in relation to the Earnshaw family. Only through rejecting and excluding him can she fully be an insider. In a similar dynamic, Saul's (2021) demonstrates that exclusion in secondary schools means some children have to be positioned as outsiders, which harms them, but also that it damages those positioned as insiders, who effectively come to police acceptable childhood behaviours and other children on adults' behalf. Within the harsh binary moral universe of Wuthering Heights, everyone becomes a victim of the brutality of normalcy, just as in the classroom just as Saul's (2021) suggests.

When Nelly is reunited with Hareton ('*my* Hareton', 109) 10 months later her account is infused with the superiority of the foster carer who thinks she could have done a better job at childrearing combined with the guilt of a foster mother who knows that she has abandoned her charge to an abusive biological father. Heathcliff has stopped Hareton receiving formal education from the curate and instead taught him to swear and be violent, using teaching as revenge. Further, Heathcliff's exclusion from formal education by Hindley is, in effect, re-enacted here. Nelly struggles with the actions of the traumatised child when he throws a stone at her head (109). As she cannot understand these feelings and actions as the effects of trauma and severed attachment, she attributes them to an evil impulse emanating from the child, as she had with Heathcliff, and sees in the five-year -olds face not trauma but 'a shocking expression of malignity' (109).

The arrival of the baby Catherine ('a puny, seven months' child', 166) is similarly inflected with projections of loss and rejection. The 'feeble orphan' is an 'unwelcomed infant' whose 'beginning was as friendless as its end is likely to be' (166). Again, the abandoned child becomes, for Nelly, the container for her own feelings of badness and rejection. Later in the novel again she abandons Linton, just as she abandoned Hareton, and shields herself from his desperate cries,

> '. . . as I closed the door, I heard a cry, and a frantic repetition of words –
>
> 'Don't leave me! I'll not stay here! I'll not stay here!'
>
> Then the latch was raised and fell – they did not suffer him to come forth. I mounted Minny, and urged her to a trot; and so my brief guardianship ended' (210).

Nelly, who presents herself as so kind, in fact is a serial abandoner. She shuts off feelings of guilt and projects the badness she must feel about leaving these children onto the children themselves.

Psychoanalytic and attachment-related readings of the novel are rich and important, and this article's reading is intended as a complementary one, not a replacement. Psychoanalytic readings of the novel might also focus on the damaged early childhoods

that almost every character in the book has experienced. Isabella, for instance, cannot be in the same room as a distressed baby and her panic mounts when she tried to tell Nelly about her predicament with Heathcliff, 'Listen to that child! It maintains a constant wail – send it out of my hearing, for an hour; I shan't stay any longer' (173). Thus, banishment is the only way that adult characters seem able to deal any infant who reminds them of their own pain.

The escalation of violence and destruction in Heathcliff's actions, then, are all traceable to his disturbed and distorted relationships with early caregivers and his broken attachments. We must assume that his identity as 'street child' is the result of some sort of severance – death, abandonment, or forcible removal. The attachment narrative therefore becomes a story of origin, a single reading which provides a simple explanation of harm and disturbance. The events in the story that we, as readers, are invited to witness provide us with ample evidence of the effects of trauma and broken attachment on this particularly disturbed subject: he kills a puppy, he hurts other children, and he wilfully destroys the life of a young woman. All of this, the theory would suggest, is evidence of a broken relationship to objects (Hinshelwood and Fortuna 2018) which his environment does nothing to heal. Such readings, we would suggest, are like the current ways that fostered children are sometimes understood in schools. The increasing understanding of problematic attachments on infant brains, might, ironically have the effect of closing the readings of the vulnerable child, even though the impulse to understand comes from a place of compassion. As we argue below, in fact, whilst the attachment-based reading is undoubtedly more helpful than earlier readings of vulnerable children's behaviour as being a sign of delinquency or wilful naughtiness, there is a danger that they trap children in a different, but equally limiting reading which still sees them as damaged.

So, given the framework of attachment disorder set out above, it is relatively easy to read all of Heathcliff's behaviours – as a child and as an adult, as evidence of that dynamic. As we said earlier, though, we want to do something else here in a complementary reading which absolutely acknowledges the attachment dynamic in the text but argues that there are other understandings of what happens. Here, the key dynamic is the way that the other characters form their reading of Heathcliff in ways which acknowledge his behaviours but do not in any way reflect on their own parts in the story or their own feelings in response to his actions.

Heathcliff as 'Constructed'

Drawing on the work of MacLure et al. (2012), we want to argue that Heathcliff can be understood as a discursively constructed subject. In this reading, he is understood as 'bad' from the beginning and, as we shall demonstrate, despite his best efforts, he cannot be understood as anything other than that once the judgement has been formed. In their seminal paper 'Becoming a problem: Behaviour and reputation in the early years classroom' MacLure et al. deploy a Foucauldian framework to explore and explain how children, even by the age of four, are already discursively constructed within a narrow framework of normativity. Using discourse analysis techniques, they demonstrate how some children's behaviour is understood as problematic and, crucially, once this judgement has been formed, how subsequent behaviour is seen as metonymic for those problems. As they argue, 'Securing a successful reputation as a "good" pupil or acquiring

a negative one as a "problem", is never the sole responsibility of one child' (MacLure et al. 2012, 447). In their analysis, suspected psychological conditions are used as framing devices to explain behaviour that does not conform to the relatively limited emotional repertoire, one that jettisons darker emotions, of what is permissible in the early year's classroom (including edicts such as 'be kind' and 'always tell the truth'). Other framing devices include the family backgrounds of some children which are seen as problems in themselves, a position likely to be communicated to the children and their peers. As MacLure et al. (2012) demonstrate, a vicious circle is established between the framing narrative and the action, so that the action is understood by teachers, ancillary staff, parents and other children through the lens of the narrative frame (for example, the child is suspected of having ADHD or autism) then, once that is understood, it becomes an interpretative device that is applied to all the child's subsequent behaviour. This denies the child the freedom to have their actions read plurally in the way that other children benefit from. Examples would be violent or apparently sexualised behaviour in the early years. Once the framing device is set up, it is very difficult for the child to escape being a problem. Further discursive framing and actions then serve to re-emphasise that identity. So, the 'problem' child might be removed from the mainstream classroom and taught in a corridor (Blatchford et al. 2004) for example, further endorsing their identity as different and problematic. In this way difference and the problematic identity is layered onto the understanding of the child from an early stage. This is also seen in the labelling of children and young people as Looked After Children (LAC). Care-experienced young people have rejected LAC, explaining that they do not like being 'referred to as "LAC" as they are not "lacking" in anything' (Children's Commissioner for Wales 2016).

In the following section, we will attempt to explain how this process is realised in the case of Heathcliff.

A 'Foucauldian' reading of heathcliff (after Maclure et al.)

MacLure and her colleagues argue convincingly that a child is formed as a subject by the social education setting in which they find themselves. Judgements are made immediately and all the time. As they put it, citing Walkerdine, the child 'is not discovered but produced in the regimes of truth created in those very practices which proclaim the child in [their] naturalness' (Walkerdine 1999, p.13). As such, the day-to-day practices of the early years' experience function as ways of understanding children in their essence. From an early point in the process, educational identities are formed and from that point on, they crystallise. As MacLure et al. 2012 state 'The processes that produce winners and losers in the reputational stakes happen behind the backs and the best interests of the individuals involved' (466). As such, the children involved cannot influence the professional and community judgements that are made of them. The professional judgements are neither confidential nor contained as a discourse among staff. The prevalence of exemplary discipline in schools (as is common practice in the UK and elsewhere) – where children's names are publicly put on the 'good' or 'bad' list, usually represented visually on a smiley face/sad face or sunny/rainy sky picture – means that other children quickly realise which children are the 'naughty' ones. In addition, that care experienced children and young people are taken out of class for in and out of school interventions (for example to attend social care meetings) marks them out as different (see Mannay et al.

2017). Paradoxically, these practices which are intended to support can have a damaging nature for care experienced young people in education. MacLure et al. (457) argue that '"Exemplary" discipline helps to form a crowd of children into a class. However, it also works to marginalise some children. Indeed, it could be said to work *by* marginalising a minority, so that the "normal" children can recognise themselves in their difference'. Parents too endorse these reputations as do the ancillary staff and others working in the school. In this context, gossip matters. As MacLure et al. state 'Once reputations have begun to circulate in staffrooms and dinner halls, it may be very difficult for a child's behaviour not to be interpreted as a "sign" of a more pervasive problem' (2012, 455).

The important thing to understand about this analysis is the way that it works with what Ball (2013), in his book on Foucault and Education, calls 'a set of effective tools for intervening within contemporary discourses of power' (4) to reveal how the view of the child as 'problem' is created, and how it is sustained. This happens in a process that the authors align to metonymy. 'problem' children are read through a particular lens and judgements are made as a consequence, for as MacLure et al. say, 'Within a discursive frame individual actions come to be read as "signs" of a more enduring condition or disposition' (454). In other words, once the reading of the child has become formed and confirmed by others, any subsequent reading of the child is constrained by that reading. Once the cycle is established, it becomes very difficult for the child to escape it.

All of this is a useful way of understanding Heathcliff. Drawing on MacLure et al'.s framework requires us to shift our understanding of him as a stable, essential core of character (one that is either 'bad' or 'damaged', depending on whether the liberal humanist or psychoanalytic lens is applied) and to see him, instead as a person who is constructed on the page by the discourses running through him, and the readings projected onto him by other characters. This post-structuralist reading of Heathcliff as a character means that he does not exist in and for himself. The character called Heathcliff only becomes Heathcliff in the making of him in language. Read in this way, the book is not a transparent account of a character whom we must understand as either irrevocably damaged or just plain 'bad', but a mirror which exists to provide a critique of the horrors of the work of patriarchy and imperialism (Delacy 2018). In this case, the 'mirror' is placed straight into the house, Wuthering Heights. However, instead of seeing the mirror as a complete object, we want to explore what happens if we consider the mirror to be broken. Firstly, instead of one, smooth but destructive single reading of Heathcliff's character, we are able to access plurality, and in doing so, are able to liberate him from the prison of the single story (Adichie 2009). Secondly, this broken mirror enables us to see all the other characters in similar ways – not as more or less sympathetic, but as equally complex and 'written through' as Heathcliff.

Further, we cannot leave behind the post-colonial reading of him as subjected and enslaved other. Assumptions about heritage are still relevant. Delacy (2018) notes that 'Heathcliff's indeterminate origin serves as a guiding signifier to his debased status in the novel, excluding him from the legal system of inheritance and forcing him to labour (sic) in the fields' (144). He is both outsider then, in terms of his heritage as well as the racialised specifics of his background.

Medoro (1996) explores the way that Heathcliff's 'racial alterity' works in relation to the other characters, noting how his subjection to the 'colonising gaze of the two narrators' (Medoro 1996, 269) continually constructs and reconstructs his actions and presence as

subjugated but dangerous other. We argue here that a similar mechanism is at work in relation to his adopted/fostered position in the family. It is interesting that Nelly, herself a foster child who becomes the first teacher to generations of the family, provides the most violent representations of the newcomer. As noted earlier, as Medoro states, her status makes her a 'threshold figure' in the household – 'both inside and outside of the family' (1996, 273). In her aim to escape the challenges surrounding her own position, Nelly herself makes cruel assumptions around birth, property, and patriarchy. Instead of going with her instinct to nurse the foster child, as she does when he is ill, she otherwise gives in to a binaried understanding of him as either good or bad, with her judgement being that he is essentially bad. Her narrative combines with that in Lockwood's diary in a way that locks Heathcliff into an identity and reading that he cannot escape. We argue that the same thing can happen in school communities where the care experienced child, irrespective of the diversity of these children, cannot escape the identity set out for them in the early years, given that the expression of trauma, where it exists, may mean that they may fall foul of exemplary discipline from the outset. Medoro notes how this happens in the context of racism in the novel. Here, we work with a similar framework to argue that this also happens in relation to his 'adoption' into this dysfunctional and violent family.

From the outset, Heathcliff's experience at Wuthering Heights is marked by rejection and violence. The fact of his 'rescue', which is actually an act of capture, sets up a chain of violent actions and reactions throughout the book. As Gilbert (2017, 76) argues, real and brutal violence defines Heathcliff's experience, so that 'From his first night at the Earnshaw home, what should have been a welcome was instead an abusive rejection by the Earnshaw's biological children … Mrs. Earnshaw calls him a "gipsy brat" and "was ready to fling it out of doors" (51). The Earnshaw children imitate their mother's reaction. Catherine spits on him. Hindley beats him. They both refuse to let him spend the night in their room'. This actual violence is amplified by countless acts of symbolic violence which define Heathcliff's relationship with the family. He is brought to the house by Mr. Earnshaw as if he has no history. Identity and name are wiped clean as Earnshaw exercises his patriarchal privilege in the act of naming and the rest of the family follow suit. This idea of wiping clean and erasing the biography of the orphan is also apparent in Walkerdine's (1997) reading of Shirley Temple and 'My Fair Lady' (Cukor 1964). As Delacy puts it, 'Heathcliff, though their gaze and through their naming, is a commodified thing rather than a person; for Earnshaw and Linton both, he is more of a body than a human being' (2018, 145). There is no attempt to allow Heathcliff himself to participate in the act of identity creation.

This key arrival scene is particularly important, both in terms of the aforementioned act of naming and because it demonstrates a kind of patriarchal fantasy of reproduction. Poteet (2018) puts it starkly:

> Brontë … characterizes Catherine's bond with Heathcliff as something divine. Heathcliff, the foster-brother pulled fully formed from Mr. Earnshaw's great-coat, as if metaphorically creative from the ribs of her father, and given the name of a dead son … *(253)*

Poteet argues that on the grander scale, Brontë has created her own response to the creation myth in Genesis in her novel. She creates a 'new Eden' for Catherine and Heathcliff. For him, it is one that partially escapes the horrors and limitations of the origin story, where all the cards are stacked against him (2018, 263).

This could be considered similar to the way that many care experienced children have large parts of their identities shut off or shut down as they move placements and schools. The situation is complicated as their histories become public (in the sense that their stories are legal and professional documents), they are also considered tabula rasa, blank slates to write upon, and in addition their narratives are assumed to be tragic. Heathcliff's story operates in the same way. This story of the 'making' of the care experienced, adopted or foster child in real life, as well as in literature, is a common one.

In another key scene in 'Wuthering Heights', Heathcliff saves the life of the baby Hareton. This marvellous act is one that other characters, who have the luxury of inclusion, would be praised for. Instead, the 'notoriously unreliable' narrator, Nelly (Medoro 1996, 267), reconstructs the scene as one, not of kindness or nascent parental responsibility, but instead of animal instinct. As Delacy puts it, 'Tellingly, Nelly relies on the cues of Heathcliff's body to make her assumption, seeing the action as a 'natural impulse' based on his 'blank (er) countenance' (2018, 147). Here, as elsewhere, we can read Nelly as embodied representation of the education system. The cruelty of her single reading of Heathcliff is double-edged – when he errs it is seen as evidence of his badness and even when he does good it is disbelieved and understood to be an error or an accident. Poor Heathcliff cannot escape the badness assigned to him. Taussig and Roberts (2022) identify a similar dynamic in relation to the way that care-experienced young parents continue to experience the stigmatising effects when they, in turn, become parents. The other notoriously unreliable narrator is, of course, Lockwood himself. From the first, he conflates illegitimacy with evil. With such prejudice locked in the minds of people, it is impossible for the care experienced children in this novel to escape the gaze which labels them as evil before they have acted. The 'fostered' nature of Heathcliff is inextricably bound up with his badness in the account of the narrator. When Lockwood asks Nelly what happened to Heathcliff, he asks if he was able to, for example, 'escape to America, and earn honours by drawing blood from his foster country?' (92), thus conflating fostering and inherent evil in ways that extend beyond the personal to his assumed relationship with the nation state.

To conclude, 'Wuthering Heights' can be read as an account of what happens when a social group uses discursive framing to create a person as a problem. Brontë shows us the power of a kind of de-historicising and re-naming practice which robs people of their own stories and makes them the cipher for those of other people. This is a bleak and extreme example of a historical, fictional interaction between the care experienced child, education, and family. We have sought to demonstrate how the formation of such children as educational subjects is achieved by placing them in a binary in which they are inherently problematic and therefore they are subject to different and more extreme forms of discipline than other children. To put it in other terms, they are used as a warning to other pupils, rather than valued as learners in their own right. Whilst MacLure et al. (2012) talk more generally about several categories of children, we have decided to emphasise that care experienced children may be one group who are particularly vulnerable to processes of hostile pedagogical subjectification. This article has attempted to provide a new reading of Heathcliff and his education which complements the psychoanalytic, post-colonial and liberal humanist readings of the novel.

It also, we suggest, provides a way of defamiliarizing what are seen as 'normal' pedagogical practices in relation to care experienced children given that they tend to

be dramatically over-represented in exclusion rates from schools. Despite significant funding and policy intervention in the UK, the situation remains stubbornly unresolved. Here, we have attempted to demonstrate through the lens of literary analysis how regimes of truth and the people who reproduce them continue to collude with exclusionary practices despite their protestations that systems are inclusive and that they wish to support the care experienced child. They, like Nelly, employ pedagogical discourses that oppress and exclude.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Elizabeth Chapman Hoult http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0627-3005
Mel Gibson http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8155-3560

References

Adichie, C. N. 2009. *The Danger of a Single Story*: TED lecture. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9lhs241zeg accessed 29/4/2022.

Arnold, A. [dir.] 2011. *Wuthering Heights*. Film 4/Curzon Artificial Eye.

Backderf, D. 2012. *My Friend Dahmer*. New York: Abrams ComicArts.

Ball, S. 2013. *Foucault, Power and Education*. New York: Routledge.

Blatchford, P., A. Russell, P. Bassett, P. Brown, and C. Martin. 2004. "The Role and Effects of Teaching Assistants in English Primary Schools (Years 4 to6) 2000– 2003: Results from the Class Size and Pupil-Adult Ratios (CSPAR) KS2 Project."*British Education Research Journal* 3(1): 5–26.

Bowlby, J. 1977/2005. *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*. London: Routledge.

Brontë, C. 1847/1997. *Jane Eyre*. *The Brontë Collection*. Chatham: BCA.

Brontë, E. 1847/1997. *Wuthering Heights*. *The Brontë Collection*. Chatham: BCA.

Cameron, C., S. Jackson, H. Hauari, and K. Hollingworth. 2012. "Continuing Educational Participation Among Children in Care in Five Countries: Some Issues of Social Class." *Journal of Education Policy* 27 (3): 387–399. doi:10.1080/02680939.2011.644811.

Children's Commissioner for Wales. 2016. *The Right Care: Children's Rights in Residential Care*. Swansea: Children's Commissioner for Wales.

Cukor, G. 1964. *My Fair Lady*. dir.: Burbank, California: Warner Brothers.

Delacy, E. 2018. "Wuthering Heights Must Be Defended!: Heathcliff and the Necropolitics in the Yorkshire Moors." *Victorians, A Journal of Culture and Literature* 134 (1): 139–150. doi:10.1353/vct.2018.0014.

Department for Education. 2018. "Promoting the Education of Looked-After and Previously Looked After Children: Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities". Accessed 29/4/2022 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/683556/Promoting_the_education_of_looked-after_children_and_previously_looked-after_children.pdf

Department for Education [DfE]. 2018. *Outcomes for children looked after by LAs: 31 March 2017* Outcomes for children looked after by LAs: 31 March 2017 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk), accessed on 12/05/2022.

Dickens, C. 1838/2003. *Oliver Twist*. London: Penguin Classics.

Dickens, C. 1850/2004. *David Copperfield*. London: Penguin Classics.

Dickens, C. 1861/2003. *Great Expectations*. London: Penguin Classics.

Dingwall, N., and J. Sebba. 2018. *Evaluation of the Attachment Aware Schools Programme Final Report*: Oxford: The Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education.

Eagleton, T. 1996. *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture*. London: Verso.

Gilbert, K. A. 2017. ""I Wish I Could Annihilate It from the Face of the earth": Property Law, Bodies, and Acts of Marking in Wuthering Heights." *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 131 (1): 68–81. doi:10.1353/vct.2017.0007.

Harrison, N., and H. Trivedi. 2020. *The Impact of Attachment and Trauma Awareness Training: Pre-COVID-19 Results from 24 Primary Schools*. Rees Centre Webinar. 15/12/2020.

Hinshelwood, R. D., and T. Fortuna. 2018. *Melanie Klein: The Basics*. London and New York: Routledge.

Hoult, E. C. 2012. *Adult Learning and La Recherche Féminine: Reading Resilience and Hélène Cixous*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Jackson, S., and C. Cameron. 2010. *Final Report of the YiPpee Project WP12: Young People from a Public Care Background: Pathways to Further and Higher Education in Five European Countries*. London: Thomas Coram Research Unit.

Jackson, S., and C. Cameron. 2012. "Leaving Care: Looking Ahead and Aiming Higher." *Children and Youth Services Review* 34 (6): 1107–1114. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.041.

MacLure, M., L. Jones, R. Holmes, and C. MacRae. 2012. "Becoming a Problem: Behaviour and Reputation in the Early Years Classroom." *British Educational Research Journal* 38 (3): 447–471. doi:10.1080/01411926.2011.552709.

Mannay, D., R. Evans, E. Staples, S. Hallett, L. Roberts, A. Rees, and D. Andrews. 2017. "The Consequences of Being Labelled 'Looked-after': Exploring the Educational Experiences of Looked-After Children and Young People in Wales." *British Education Research Journal* 43 (4): 683–699. doi:10.1002/berj.3283.

Medoro, D. 1996. ""This Thing of Darkness I / Acknowledge Mine": Heathcliff as Fetish in Wuthering Heights." *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 22 (3): 267–381. doi:10.1353/esc.1996.0017.

Museum, F. 2014. *Superman Was a Foundling*. London.

Museum, F. 2022. *Superman, Orphans and Origins: 125 Years in Comics*. London.

Novey, M. 2007. *Reading Adoption*. Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA: University of Michigan Press.

O'higgins, A., J. Sebba, and N. Luke. 2015. *What is the Relationship Between Being in Care and the Educational Outcomes of Children? An International Systematic Review*. Oxford: Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education.

Pearse, J. 2018. 'What About the 84%?' https://www.careexperienceandculture.com/post/what-about-the-84-by-josie-pearse accessed on 01.12.2022

Poteet, C. 2018. "Restored by God, Restored as God: An Exploration of the Genesis Myth in Wuthering Heights and Jane Eyre." *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature* 134: 250–264. doi:10.1353/vct.2018.0022.

Rees, P. 2012. "The Mental Health, Emotional Literacy, Cognitive Ability, Literacy Attainment and 'Resilience' of Looked After Children: A Multi-Dimensional Multiple-Rater Population Based Study." *British Journal of Clinical Psychology* 52 (2): 183–198. doi:10.1111/bjc.12008.

Roberts, L., D. Mannay, A. Rees, H. Bayfield, C. Corliss, C. Diaz, and R. Vaughan. 2021. "'It's Been a Massive struggle': Exploring the Experiences of Young People Leaving Care During COVID-19." *YOUNG* 29 (4): 81–99. doi:10.1177/11033088211025949.

Saul, R. 2021. "The Brutality of Normalcy: Schooling in My Friend Dahmer." *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 1–13. doi:10.1080/14681366.2021.1938187.

Sebba, J., D. Berridge, N. Luke, J. Fletcher, K. Bell, S. Strand, S. Thomas, I. Sinclair, and A. O'higgins. 2015. *The Educational Progress of Looked After Children in England: Linking Care and Educational Data*. Oxford/Bristol: Nuffield Foundation.

Sissay, L. 2020. *My Name is Why*. Edinburgh: Canongate Books.

Taussig, H., and L. Roberts. 2022. "Early Parenthood for Males and Females with Foster Care Experience: An Exploratory Study of Predictive Factors at Entry to Care During Preadolescence." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 39: 657–668. doi:10.1007/s10560-022-00852-6.

Walkerdine, V. 1997. *'Little Girls as Heroines and stars' in Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture V. Walkerdine*. London: Macmillan.

Walkerdine, V. 1999. “Violent Boys and Precocious Girls: Redulating Childhood at the End of the Millennium' Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood.” 1 (1): 3–23.

Warner, M. 2017. “The truth in Stories’ Given in University College Dublin on the 7th of December 2017 as Part of ‘Truth to Be Told: Understanding Truth in the Age of Post-Truth Politics.” *Marina Warner - the Truth in Stories - YouTube*.

Watson, D. L., E. Eleanor Staples, and K. Riches. 2021. “‘We Need to Understand What’s Going on Because It’s Our life’: Using Sandboxing to Understand Children and Young People’s Everyday Conversations About Care.” *Children & Society* 35 (5): 663–679. doi:10.1111/chso.12432.

Watson, D., R. Hahn, and J. Staines. 2020. “Storying Special Objects: Material Culture, Narrative Identity and Life Story Work for Children in Care.” *Qualitative Social Work: Research and Practice* 19 (4): 701–718. doi:10.1177/1473325019850616.

Winnicott, D. 1964/2021. *The Child, the Family and the Outside World*. London: Penguin.