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*Northanger Abbey* by Jane Austen (1818):

The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author, -and the her treatment of the subject I will only add in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms, there is a portion of them too reasonable and too well informed themselves to desire anything more in woman than ignorance. But Catherine did not know her own advantages—did not know that a good-looking girl, with an affectionate heart and a very ignorant mind, cannot fail of attracting a clever young man, unless circumstances are particularly untoward. In the present instance, she confessed and lamented her want of knowledge: declared that she would give anything in the world to be able to draw; and a lecture of the picturesque immediately followed, in which his instructions were so clear that she soon began to see beauty in everything admire by him, and her attention was so earnest, that he became perfectly satisfied of her having a great deal of natural taste. (Austen 81).

*Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte (1847):

In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropists' Heaven—and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow? He little imaged how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name.

“Mr. Heathcliff?” I said.

A nod was the answer.

“Mr. Lockwood, your new tenant, sir—I do myself the honour of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you by my perseverance in soliciting the occupation of Thrushcross Grange. I heard, yesterday, you had had some thoughts—”

“Thrushcorss Grange is my own, sir,” he interrupted, wincing, “I should not allow anyone to inconvenience me, if I could hinder it—walk in!”

The “walk in” was uttered with closed teeth and expressed the sentiment, “Go to the Deuce!” Even the gate over which he leant manifested no sympathizing movement to the words: and I think that circumstance determined me to accept the initiation: I felt interested in a man who seemed more exaggeratedly reserved than myself (Bronte 1).

### The Narrative Voice

Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* was published in 1818 at a time when the printing press had revolutionized the country. Books, novels, and printed literature were consistently read by the general public. One of Austen's intentions in writing *Northanger Abbey* was to point out that in a time where books and novels were everyday objects, the increase of language was still not enough to fully communicate with other people. Twenty-nine years later Bronte wrote *Wuthering Heights* where she also emphasized language's inability to communicate effectively, but from a different angle. [Thesis] Both authors not only used different characters and a sound storyline to portray their themes, but they also used similar narrative techniques to communicate the lesson almost directly to the reader.

In Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* the character Catherine is portrayed as a naïve young girl who falls victim to the dangers of language. She is ignorant to the possible existence of different truths in language and unable to understand that words may have a different meaning apart from a literal definition. Catherine constantly mistakes what people say and what they actually mean. While riding with John Thorpe Catherine listens to his accounts of James' gig with "astonishment; she knew not how to reconcile tow such very different accounts of the same thing; for she had not been brought up to understand the propensities of a rattle" (Austen 46). Isabella also confuses Catherine with different reactions to men. In the Pump-room Isabella complains about two young men who are consistently looking at her and urges Catherine to get away from them. However, when Catherine tells her that the two young men had just left, Isabella goes running after them. Catherine doesn't realize what Isabella's true intentions are nor does she understand that John simply rattling away without any real weight behind his words.

In examining Jane Austen's passage from *Northanger Abbey* it is easy to notice just how strong the narrative voice is. Jane Austen's presence in the passage is so powerful it almost feels like she is providing a commentary to the reader as he/she reads the novel. For example, in the passage from above "The advantages of natural folly in a beautiful girl have been already set forth by the capital pen of a sister author, -and the her treatment of the subject I will only add" Jane Austen directly puts down a personal comment into the very narrative (Austen 81). The narrative structure that she uses is very different from other novels where the authors try to erase their presence as much as they can so that the readers will not be distracted from the story. Jane Austen does the opposite. She consistently reminds the reader that this is just a novel; that this is a story that was just thought up and written down; that the reader should not be tricked by the novel. She does not try to hide her presence at all. Her intention is not to convince the reader the authenticity of her story, but to make the reader understand the inadequacies of language for proper communication. She tries to inform the reader that language does not always tell the truth. That language is not enough for the truth. Just like Henry instructs Catherine on the dangers of language, so does Austen instruct her readers.

In Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* the author is telling a similar story with the failure of language to convey the truth from one person to another. In the beginning of the novel, Mr. Lockwood is completely oblivious to the real character of Heathcliff. When Lockwood greets Heathcliff he get answered with a rough "walk in" where "The "walk in" was uttered with closed teeth and expressed the sentiment, 'Go to the Deuce!'" (Bronte 1). Although Lockwood himself recognized the contempt coming from Heathcliff, he doesn't seem to understand what is really happening because he already had a preconceived notion of the way Heathcliff was, or was supposed to be like. In Lockwood's eyes Heathcliff was "A capital fellow" and the two of them

were “such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us” (Bronte 1). Heathcliff was very rude to Lockwood; he did not shake hands with him, nor cared much when Lockwood was almost attacked by the dogs in the kitchen. Despite all this, and despite direct use of rude language and vulgar statements, Lockwood could not come to understand that Heathcliff was actually a very harsh person who was not looking for company. In Lockwood’s case, language was definitely not enough to understand the other person.

Emily Bronte, similarly to Jane Austen, also uses an interesting narrative structure to enhance the communication of her theme. The novel is told to the readers by Mr. Lockwood who is a stranger to Wuthering Heights and comes from the city. Mr. Lockwood hears most of the story himself from Nelly, the housekeeper. Parts of the story that Nelly tells are simply accounts of what other characters told Nelly. Interestingly enough there is no first-hand account of the novel at all. Most of the story is filtered through Nelly, which in return is filtered through Lockwood, and finally filtered through Bronte. Nelly herself admits that she withholds important information on a given circumstance which makes her an unreliable narrative. Lockwood is also an unreliable narrative simple because he doesn’t seem to comprehend the situation as it really is which gives a possible that he might be misinterpreting certain events and also misunderstanding the words that are spoken. Lastly, Bronte wrote a fictional novel which means that the entire story was just made up in the first place.

In using such an interesting narrative structure, Bronte is illustrating that there is a possibility that not everything that is read may be true, similar to Jane Austen’s approach. She is saying that the truth can be manipulated by language depending on who is telling the story. Nelly manipulates the truth by either withholding information or telling Catherine/Lockwood/Cathy what they really want to hear. Lockwood manipulates the truth simply by his very ignorance of

what is going on. Bronte emphasizes the manipulation of language by using such unreliable sources such as Nelly and Lockwood to make the reader doubt whether or not the account may be trusted.

The difference between the two authors is in their use of extremes. Jane Austen writes her novel trying to make her readers doubt the stories that were written in books so that they don't end up like Catherine; mistaking people for murderers. Bronte, on the other hand, goes even further. She tries to make the reader understand the existence of multiple truths and in return doubt everything that is both written and said, whether it is in a book or not. Austen criticizes people for believing in made-up novels, but she establishes herself as a reliable narrative that can be trusted giving worthy comments such as "I will only add in justice to men, that though to the larger and more trifling part of the sex, imbecility in females is a great enhancement of their personal charms" (Austen 81). Bronte doesn't establish herself as a reliable narrative, but instead uses herself as another example of truth manipulation and tries to make the reader doubt even the real author of the novel. She even states this through Nelly when she says "But you'll not want to hear my moralizing, Mr. Lockwood: you'll judge as well as I can, all these things; at least, you'll think you will, and that the same" (Bronte 163). In other words Bronte is telling the reader to judge for themselves what they believe, but be wary that they have already been manipulated by language.

Both Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* and Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* examine that failure of language to represent the truth. Austen's Catherine became a victim to the novels that she read and confused real life with the imagination. Bronte's Lockwood became a victim of his personal experience and upbringing in language without realizing the existence of multiple truths. In addition to this, both authors use their narrative structure to parallel the themes they are

trying to get across in their novels. Austen's Catherine had confused novels with the actual truths that existed around her so Austen used a narrative structure where she consistently reminded her reader's not to commit the same mistake that Catherine had done. Lockwood failed to recognize multiple truths so Bronte used a narration from different perspectives to inform the reader of the multiple truths that existed within the story and that could possible exist outside the novel as well. Bronte goes farther than Austen by making the reader question both novels and conversations. Believing in made-up novels is no longer the most dangerous thing, but sometimes believing what other people say can also lead to manipulation by language.

Works Cited

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