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## ‘Not a country at all’: Landscape and *Wuthering Heights*

Sue Thornham

### **Abstract:**

This article explores the issue of women’s representational genealogies through an analysis of Andrea Arnold’s 2011 *Wuthering Heights*. Beginning with 1970s feminist arguments for a specifically female literary tradition, it argues that running through both these early attempts to construct an alternative female literary tradition and later work in feminist philosophy, cultural geography and film history is a concern with questions of ‘alternative landscapes’: of how to represent, and how to encounter, space differently. Adopting Mary Jacobus’ notion of intertextual ‘correspondence’ between women’s texts, and taking Arnold’s film as its case study, it seeks to trace some of the intertextual movements – the reframings, deframings and spatial reorderings – that link Andrea Arnold’s film to Emily Brontë’s original novel. Focusing on two elements of her treatment of landscape – her use of ‘unframed’ landscape and her focus on visceral textural detail – it points to correspondences in other women’s writing, photography and film-making. It argues that these intensely tactile close-up sequences which puncture an apparently realist narrative constitute an insistent presence beneath, or within, the ordered framing which is our more usual mode of viewing landscape. As the novel *Wuthering Heights* is unmade in Arnold’s adaptation and its framings ruptured, it is through this disturbance of hierarchies of time, space and landscape that we can trace the correspondences of an alternative genealogy.

**Keywords:** adaptation; feminist; genealogies; landscape; space; texture.

There was nothing but land; not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made. (Willa Cather, *My Antonia*)

The prefatory quotation to this article from Willa Cather’s *My Antonia* appears in Ellen Moers’ *Literary Women*, used by Moers to characterise the ‘personal landscapes’, the ‘natural and highly personal geographies’, that she finds in women’s

writing. Unlike the descriptions of cultivated gardens in the work of Cather and others, which are always ‘scenes of passion and cruel violence’, she writes, these other landscapes – ‘open lands . . . vegetated with crimped heather or wind-swept grasses’ – are spaces of ‘freedom and tactile sensation’ (1986: 260–3). Imaginary, abstracted from ‘real’ historical time and so in some sense ‘haunted’, these are landscapes that are at the same time insistently, physically, present. As Moers’ description makes clear, the moors of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* comprise one such landscape.

It is the persistence and intractability of landscape in Andrea Arnold’s 2011 *Wuthering Heights* that I explore in this article. It begins with an indication of how a concern with questions of ‘alternative landscapes’ runs through both early attempts to construct an alternative female literary tradition and later debates in feminist philosophy, cultural geography and film history about how to represent space differently. In this reflection, inspired by Arnold’s film, I seek to trace suggestive correspondences between Arnold’s approach and those adopted by other women in their writing, photography and film-making, represented here by Emily Brontë’s novel, Fay Goodwin’s photographs and Jane Campion’s films. The intention is not to impose concepts from feminist literary and cultural theory onto Arnold’s film, but to show how the reframings, deframings and spatial reorderings of her landscapes in *Wuthering Heights* challenge not only traditionally gendered notions of viewing landscapes but also any straightforward history of how women represent ‘the material out of which countries are made’ (Cather 1994: 7).

Like other feminist literary critics of the 1970s, Moers was concerned to counter both the assumption that women’s spaces are domestic and interior and the persistent reduction of women to landscape in the work of male writers. The gendering of space/place as feminine and time/narrative as masculine is one that has also been traced by feminist philosophers and geographers. Elizabeth Grosz, drawing on Irigaray (1993), links the gendered oppositions of time/space and movement/stasis to the pairings interiority/exteriority and subject/object. In both philosophical and fictional narratives, she writes, ‘space is conceived as a mode . . . of exteriority, and time as the mode of interiority’. Thus questions of space are also questions of subjectivity. Time and authorship belong to man, while woman ‘is/provides space for

man' (1995: 98–9). Geographer Gillian Rose similarly describes 'masculinist claims to know' as 'a claim to space and territory' (1993: 147). Both place and space are, she writes, gendered female. Place within geographical discourse is conceived 'in terms of maternal Woman', opaque and unknowable, while space is seen as transparent and knowable. Both underpinning imaginaries, however, 'depend . . . on a feminized Other to establish their own quest for knowledge' (ibid.: 62). Thus, in an echo of Teresa de Lauretis' account of cinematic narrative (1984), she argues that 'the image of landscape as a perspectival space centred on the hero . . . is a necessary part of the grandeur and authority of masculinity' (ibid.: 107).

Both Grosz and Anne McClintock emphasise the difficulties that this gendered identification poses for women. Grosz writes of the 'little or no room' that such identifications leave for representations of space and time based on female subjectivity. McClintock is more emphatic. Linked symbolically to 'the earth that is to be discovered, entered, named, inseminated and, above all, owned', women have experienced, she argues, 'particular difficulties laying claim to alternative genealogies and alternative narratives of origin and naming' (1995: 31). For both, the possibilities for women's self-representation are bound up with questions of how to represent, and how to encounter, space differently. It is not surprising, then, that the feminist literary studies of the 1970s, whose aim was precisely to trace such 'alternative genealogies', drew attention to the 'highly personal geographies' that Moers describes. Moers, in *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) all discuss representations of space and place in the work of the women writers they discuss. As Nancy K. Miller, writing a little later, expresses it, such landscapes are claims to subjectivity and authorship, representing 'the iconography of a desire for a revision of story', for 'another logic of plot' outside male-centred narrative structures (1988: 87).

### **Lines of descent?**

'How do mothers and daughters, communities of women, "inherit" from each other under patriarchy?' The question is posed by Mary Jacobus (1981: 521), in her review of Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*, a book which appeared shortly after that of Moers and sought similarly to trace a history of English women's writing that would also be a genealogy of a specifically female tradition of authorship. Gilbert

and Gubar's book includes a 60-page reading of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, the longest analysis in the book. In it, they read Brontë's novel as a counter-myth, a feminist reworking of Milton's story of the Fall which reverses the terms of his mythic narrative (2000: 252) in order to produce its own origins myth. In their reading, the 'little Lascar' Heathcliff is Catherine's alter ego (ibid.: 281), 'the lover/brother whom she herself defines as her strongest and most necessary "self"' (ibid.: 273), and the embodiment of the rage which is repressed when Catherine herself is transformed by the Lintons into a conventional patriarchal figure of femininity. That is, Catherine, in a movement opposite to that of Milton's Satan, 'falls' from the 'hell' of a savage and free nature into the 'heaven' of femininity.

For Gilbert and Gubar this makes the novel part of a uniquely female tradition of writing, in which, through 'the violence of the double . . . the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male texts' (ibid.: 85). It is an interpretation, argues Jacobus, that sets out to produce its own mythical story: of the woman writer who must always defeat the internalised image of an ideal passive femininity (Virginia Woolf's 'Angel in the House' (1931)) in order to produce an account of women's lives that is truer to lived female experience. All of the writers discussed by Gilbert and Gubar repeat a version of this story. The result, as Jacobus argues, is a seductive but oversimplified alternative female literary genealogy which runs from Austen to the Brontës and on into the twentieth century. It is oversimplified, argues Jacobus, because the mother–daughter genealogy of wholeness that it constructs denies the multiformity and the complexity of women's texts and smoothes over the fractured nature of their heritage. Answering her own question in other essays, Jacobus concludes that there can be no simple, unbroken line of inheritance: 'The mother', she writes, 'is always lost' (1988: 105). Importantly, however, she also concludes that in the 'textual interchange or dialogue' between such (absent) mothers and their daughters (she posits Mary Wollstonecraft as the 'mother' of Luce Irigaray) it is actually possible to find 'a play of difference', a 'liberating intertextuality', 'a correspondence' (1986: 281–2).<sup>1</sup>

How, then, might we characterise such correspondences? The question is returned to in the 1990s, when, as Giuliana Bruno notes, a feminist interest in women film-makers produces a renewed theoretical interest in the issue of authorship. For Bruno,

and for Patricia Ticineto Clough, also writing in the 1990s, this renewed search for authorship in the face of inevitable loss and (mis)recognition (the mother ‘is always lost’) takes the form of what Bruno calls an ‘interaction’ and a ‘libidinal exchange’ (1993: 240)<sup>2</sup> and Clough a ‘rereading’. It is through these rereadings which are also rewritings, argues Clough, ‘that women textualise their fierce struggle with authorship’ (1998: 77).

However, it is Clough’s description of the (re)authored texts that might result which is most arresting in terms of *Wuthering Heights*. In them, she writes, we find a ‘ghosted or haunted realism’, a ‘perforated history’ (ibid.: 114, 125). The ‘authority of realist narrativity’ is disturbed, ‘sporadically ripped open’ by an embodied ‘physical intensity’ (ibid.:125). It is a description that recalls Moers’ account of the ‘personal geographies’ of women’s writing. These too are outside of, and interrupt, (realist) narrative progression. They resist temporal incorporation, they are material and they are characterised by ‘tactile sensation’. It also recalls more recent accounts of the work of women film-makers<sup>3</sup> who, it is argued, use a form of personal landscape in order to dislocate realist progression and refuse the reduction of space to narrative space. They too have been seen as deploying a form of ‘haptic visuality’ (Marks 2000) in an explicit critique of the kinds of visual mastery described by Rose and McClintock. For Laura Marks, who understandably resists the identification of the haptic with a naturalised femininity, this deployment is a strategy shared with ‘an underground visual tradition in general’ (1998: 337), but I want to suggest here that for women, who have been reduced to space, there is something crucial at stake in using it differently, in deploying its opacity and ‘physical intensity’ as a way of ‘ripping open’ the smooth fabric of narrative. And I want to suggest, too, that in tracing relationships between these resistant spaces – ‘not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made’ – we are also tracing the kinds of correspondences that Jacobus proposes. In what follows, then, I shall outline some of the intertextual movements – the reframings, deframings and spatial reorderings – that link Andrea Arnold’s *Wuthering Heights* to Emily Brontë’s novel and to the critical work that I have been outlining here.

### **Unframing *Wuthering Heights***

In the case of Arnold’s *Wuthering Heights*, the question of authorship is further

complicated by the fact that the film is explicitly an adaptation, and an adaptation of a novel which is firmly within not only the female counter-tradition proposed by Gilbert, Gubar and Showalter but also the masculine canon of literary 'greats' – as the work of one of 'the famous five women novelists' who constitute its exceptions (Spender 1986: 115).<sup>4</sup> Adaptations, once viewed as 'the appropriation of meaning from a prior text' (Andrew 1984: 97), have more recently been seen, in line with poststructuralist theory, in terms of a more general intertextuality: as 'tissues of anonymous formulae, variations of those formulae, conscious and unconscious quotations, and conflation and inversions of other texts' (Stam 2000: 64). If the first of these tends to see the text as a fixed object with set meanings, the second, dialogic interpretation, while helpful, is also problematic. As Christine Geraghty (2008: 4) comments, it denies the specificity of adaptation, of the 'correspondences' and 'play of difference' that I want to claim here. In this 'game of two women', as Bruno (1993: 240) calls her own search for female film authorship,<sup>5</sup> it is the precise nature of, and links between, these intertextual reimaginings that are important. It is here that we might perhaps glimpse that elusive 'alternative genealogy', however complex and interrupted, which for McClintock is an absence and for Jacobus an unfinished possibility.

Emily Brontë's novel is, famously, a highly 'framed' story (see, for example, Matthews (1985), Jacobs (1986) and numerous study guides to the novel). Its twin narrators, Lockwood and Nelly, prevent us from ever getting inside the experiences of Catherine and Heathcliff as we get inside, for example, those of Jane Eyre. As numerous interpreters have argued, its narrators 'measure, revise, and preserve' their narratives (Matthews 1985: 28) in an effort to impose meaning and causality. In so doing, they both construct and obscure the novel's central protagonists and its landscape, both of which remain persistently beyond the reach of the novel's multiple framings. Yet it is precisely this elusive 'inside of the inside' (Miller 2003: 362), with its suggestions of temporal and spatial disruption and the merging of human and animal, that has fascinated critics. In Brontë's novel, the Yorkshire moors elude direct description,<sup>6</sup> yet they constitute one of the 'personal landscapes' that Moers describes. It was the absence of framing that was most remarked upon in reviews of Arnold's film. It was seen as 'raw and impressionistic', 'elemental', 'stripped', 'visceral', an 'almost abstract flow of sounds and images that envelop the viewer like

sense memories' (Stevens 2012). For Peter Bradshaw in the *Guardian*, 10 November 2011, 'her film is not presented as another layer of interpretation, superimposed on a classic's frills and those of all the other remembered versions, but an attempt to create something that might have existed before the book, something on which the book might have been based'. Here, then, we find 'not a country at all, but the material out of which countries are made', a personal landscape that is both imaginary, 'haunted' and yet, at the same time, insistently, physically, present. The moors, which in Brontë's novel are 'something inherently unnameable' (Homans 1978: 16), are here rendered immediate and visceral, but still, as in the novel, resisting framing.<sup>7</sup> Such framings, conventionally arranged for 'the single point of the omniscient observer' (Rose 1993: 112), are bound up, at least since the emergence of landscape painting as a distinct genre of Western art in the late sixteenth century, with notions of knowledge, ownership or penetration, and national as well as gendered ideologies (Lefebvre 2006). In Arnold's film, and in the intertexts that lie between it and Brontë's own refusal of direct depiction, we can trace a genealogy of spatial imaginings that is a rejection of such identifications.

### **Intertexts**

The conventional landscape image is what one might see in a sweeping look: a foreground, middle ground, background and a horizon neither too high nor too low. These elements orient the viewer and make the image a space that can be entered (Solnit 2003: 79).

If landscape, defined both as the visual representation of natural space and as the space thus represented, carries the connotations of mastery and possession that Solnit suggests and Lefebvre describes, then issues of framing quite clearly confront the female landscape photographer, and the work of Fay Godwin offers a striking genealogical intertext for the film. In 1979, Ted Hughes published his collection of poems about the Calder Valley, *Remains of Elmet*. Accompanying them were black-and-white photographs by Godwin and, despite the more usual attribution, it was, as Hughes' own preface makes clear, the photographs that came first.<sup>8</sup> It was to Godwin's vision of this landscape, the landscape of Emily Brontë, that Hughes' poems responded.



In most of the images, as so often in Godwin's later work, there are no people, 'only the traces of people, the remains of people', as Margaret Drabble (2011) wrote in her review of Godwin's retrospective exhibition. Within the collection we do find conventionally framed images, as with the closed and austere photograph of Haworth Parsonage, with its foreground of gravestones, in which the house is positioned mid-shot and framed symmetrically by the tall trees that rise above it. More often, however, mist and dark cloud seem to be in furious movement across the image-space, blurring the outlines of isolated walls and buildings, and the boundary line between hills and sky. And amid these landscapes 'marked by emptiness' (ibid.) and directly addressing Brontë (the photographs appear under the title 'Emily Brontë'), we find a sequence of quite different images: intense close-ups of ferns or twigs, of mossy rocks or icy webs, whose textures, intensely realised, may perhaps be those of moss or tumbling water, or may be fur or feather. In one particularly striking image, we see a skeleton lying on grass and earth, its outline blurring into the shapes and textures of twigs, heather and stones that surround it. In these photographs we are addressed tactually, through texture, touch and a form of intimate witnessing, rather than through the formal framings of landscape. Similar images can also be found elsewhere in Godwin's work. It is as if she is seeking to reach into, and rip apart, the smooth surface of the landscapes that are her subject matter, to highlight the visceral detail and non-human life, and death, that they conceal.<sup>9</sup> In their disturbance of the landscape frame, and their intense tactile detail, these images strikingly prefigure Arnold's cinematic rendering of Brontë's world.

In cinema, the most immediate precursor of Arnold's film is Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993), set at roughly the time that Brontë's novel was written and owing an explicit debt to it. Campion has talked of the influence on her film of Brontë's novel, with its atmosphere 'created out of the landscape, the bleakness, and the weather' (quoted in Wexman 1999: 169). Her own film sought, she said, to translate this to the New Zealand bush: 'It's a landscape that is unsettling, claustrophobic and mythic all at the same time' (ibid.: 106). In Arnold's film we return to this nineteenth-century Gothic story through another text in which sound, touch and texture pull askew (the phrase is from Virginia Woolf 1929) its period framing.

There are clear echoes of Campion's film in Arnold's. A shot of the adult Cathy

(Kaya Scodelario) looking out at the moor, her back to us and her hair tightly coiled behind her head, recalls a very similar shot of Ada McGrath (Holly Hunter) looking out from Alisdair Stewart's (Sam Neill) house to the bush. The young Cathy (Shannon Beer) and Heathcliff (Solomon Glave) run along the edge of the horizon, Cathy singing a folksong, as Flora McGrath (Anna Paquin) does in *The Piano*. More important in Campion's film, however, are the ways in which, first, the bush – 'enchanted, complex, even frightening' in Campion's words (1993: 139) – becomes a space without boundaries. Fluid, shifting, unmappable, we see it either vertiginously from above or as we move, like Ada, from within it. Equally important are those moments when, like rips in the fabric of the film's own narrative framing, the camera – in the cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh's words – 'go[es] places where the camera can't really go' (quoted in Gillett 1999): inside the piano, or into the folds of clothing, to follow the touch of finger on skin, so that what we seem to have is texture and touch rather than vision. Sue Gillett (1999) writes of Campion's 'attention to surfaces', an attention which 'precisely resist[s] and arrest[s]' the 'forward and throughmovement' of the film's narrative impulse.

These sensations, of a space without boundaries and of objects and non-human lives so intensely realised that they arrest narrative and produce a gaze that is so close that it seems like touch, are also those evoked by Arnold's moors. Most often what we see in her film is what Jonathan Bordo calls 'landscape without a figural witness': shots of the moors which are unmotivated by either narrative demands or a character's point of view. It is a kind of landscape that Bordo calls 'paradoxical' because 'the Western European landscape, at least as early as the fifteenth century, is enunciated as a witnessed landscape', a landscape marked by the signs of human presence that signal a process of 'capturing and laying claim' (2002: 297). When Cathy and Heathcliff do gaze outwards, it is at the sky and the lapwings wheeling in freedom above them, the film's 4:3 aspect ratio, as its cinematographer, Robbie Ryan, noted, simultaneously forcing the gaze upwards and preventing any distancing effect (see Harris 2012 and Thomson 2012). Elsewhere, the camera is often so close that we cannot read the shapes of things, only their texture. Cathy's finger enters the soft inside of her horse's ear, and Heathcliff's hand rests on its flanks as they ride; Heathcliff grasps the fleece of the rug on which he sits and Cathy his hair; and, as in *The Piano*, we feel the touch of skin – this time Cathy's tongue on Heathcliff's flayed back – as the camera's

closeness and the film's heightened sound create a sensation of touch rather than vision. Finally, we can note the points in the film where the frame disappears completely: into an intensity of texture – of fabric, gorse, feathers or fur – or into the opacity of a white or a black screen, and our reliance on vision is frustrated, leaving only sound.

Yet if, like *Campion*, Arnold can seem to tear open the framing of her landscapes, what is exposed is both less narratively motivated and often more violent than in *Campion's* films. The butterflies – beautiful and dying – that we see in close-up in the latter's *Bright Star* (2009) are nurtured by Fanny Brawne (Abbie Cornish) in her bedroom in Keats' (Ben Wishaw) absence, motivated by his wistful 'I almost wish we were butterflies and lived but three summer days.' The moths that appear three times in Arnold's film have no such narrative motivation.<sup>10</sup> Like the skull, the rotting apple, the spider's web, the black beetle, the snared rabbit and the skeleton – so like Godwin's photographs – that they disrupt the narrative frame with their visceral presence, more vividly there than any function as metaphor might suggest. It is a strategy used elsewhere by Arnold, most notably in her short film *Wasp* (2003) and in *Fish Tank* (2009). It is also used by Arnold's contemporary, Lynne Ramsay, in whose *Morvern Callar* (2002) we similarly find an apparently realist narrative punctuated by intensely tactile close-up sequences in which we see, and seem to touch, grubs and walls and insects. As Linda Ruth Williams writes of these sequences, they 'stick inside you like shrapnel, like repressed thoughts' (2002: 25).

### **'I like being dirty'**

It is tempting to see in both Brontë's novel and Arnold's film an embodiment of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection and to explain the world they depict in terms of a 'threatening sense of flux', 'the vulnerability of boundaries and the futility of attempts to regulate them' (Nestor 1995: xxiv–v). Abjection, in Kristeva's account, is 'the underside of a stable subjective identity, an abyss at the borders of the subject's existence'. Identified with dirt, defilement, birth and death, it is source of both fascination and repulsion, attesting to 'the impossibility of clear borders, lines of demarcation or divisions between the proper and improper, the clean and the unclean, order and disorder, as required by the symbolic' (Grosz 1989: 72–3). Famously, it is that which 'disturbs identity, system and order', signifying 'a world that has erased its

borders' and demonstrating the precariousness of the subject's grasp of its own identity (Kristeva 1982: 4).

The world of Brontë's novel, according to Pauline Nestor, is one whose transgressions of identity, sexuality and taboo recall the dream state, an 'uncensored realm' (1995: xxiii) more usually repressed, to which the 'civilised' world of Lockwood and the Lintons is at once attracted and repulsed and by which it is constantly penetrated. In the visceral sequences in Arnold's film human boundaries are similarly absent, the borders between life and death blur, animal and vegetable merge, and sex and birth take place in the fields among the animals and moorland. The boundary between Cathy's and Heathcliff's identities dissolves ('He's more myself than I am'), and Heathcliff's world is identified with the body, violence, death and dirt ('I like being dirty'). His expulsion is demanded both by Hindley (Lee Shaw), when he returns as the now 'civilised' master of Wuthering Heights, and, repeatedly, by the Lintons (Oliver Milburn and Emma Ropner) from Thrushcross Grange.

This is not, however, the reading I wish to make. The equation it suggests, of Heathcliff's blackness with dirt, of the order of Thrushcross Grange with stable subjectivity, and of the unreadability of landscape with the abjected Other of the symbolic, is one that the film is concerned to critique. As Bradshaw indicated in his *Guardian* review quoted above, its cinematic world evokes 'something that might have existed *before*' Brontë's novel (my emphasis), something 'on which the book might have been based'. In Arnold's cinematic landscape, boundaries between inside and outside, human and non-human, life and death, violence, freedom and beauty are not vulnerable to penetration so much as are oppressive and arbitrary. These things *are* entangled. Cathy pulls out a tuft of Heathcliff's hair and, as it swirls in the wind and then settles, it becomes first bird and then butterfly. When Cathy and Heathcliff wrestle in the mud, the camera cuts from a close-up of bloodied flesh to one of moss and twigs. The white geese that waddle through the farmyard recall the geese that we see flying: they are plucked and eaten, and their feathers used. The feathers that Cathy collects and strokes, and which she offers to Heathcliff, signify death as well as life and freedom. Later, in her frustration at Thrushcross Grange, she will rip apart the pillows, but as their white down floats into the air it is the scene of Nelly's plucking that they recall. That Heathcliff kills both rabbits and sheep was much commented

upon by reviewers, but his casual brutality is as much a part of elemental life as repairing the drystone walls or digging peat. The fleece that forms the farmhouse rugs on which sleep both dogs and humans, and whose texture the camera captures in such close detail as first Heathcliff and then Cathy caress it with their fingers, is from the sheep that Heathcliff kills.

These, then, are not abjected bodies, actions or places, existing at, and threatening, the borders of the symbolic, despite the fact that, looked at from elsewhere – the world from which the Lintons came, or the Liverpool, with its tradition of slavery, from which Earnshaw brings Heathcliff – this is what they might seem to be. Rather, in the film they constitute an insistent presence beneath, or within, the ordered framing which is our more usual mode of viewing landscape. They are the material – visceral, multiple, in constant movement – out of which the countries – territories – of the symbolic are made. In *For Space*, Doreen Massey has suggested that rather than thinking of space (or landscape) as emptiness, stasis, the exterior to a heroic subject's interiority, we should imagine it as presence, as 'co-existing multiplicity . . . a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (2005: 54). These, she suggests, are not only the historical stories of people, but also 'the history, change, movement, of things themselves' (ibid.: 12). Perhaps, then, another way of viewing Arnold's teeming, borderless landscape, with its abundance of lives and deaths glimpsed vividly for a moment, is to see it as a space of multiple narratives, in which our sense of time as well as of space is disrupted. The film's two presents are frequently intercut, to create a sense not of flashback or flash-forward so much as of multiple temporalities. And although the film is focalised for much of the time through Heathcliff, we learn nothing of his life outside this world of the moors. In the novel, this is an effect caused by the framing narrators, with their limited knowledge; in Arnold's film it is an effect of space. What we know, or feel, is this space, with its multiple intersecting, temporally uncertain narratives of life and death.

### **Window/frames**

As if to point up this difference of vision, with its rupturing and destabilising function, Arnold's film also includes shots that *are* framed within the traditions of European art. When Heathcliff watches Cathy as she begins her transformation into an image of conventional femininity, we see her framed and lit like any conventional

painting of a feminine object of the Western gaze. As Elly (Simone Jackson) fastens Cathy's stays in the weak light falling from the small farmhouse window, the limited palette of greys, the camera's low angle and 4:3 framing, and Cathy's glance back over her shoulder at Heathcliff all suggest the domestic interior scene of a Vermeer. Later, this more formal framing is repeated as the adult Heathcliff returns to find Cathy at Thrushcross Grange.

Famously, Brontë's novel itself makes use of these devices, preoccupied, as Dorothy van Ghent first pointed out (though see also Matthews 1985), with the 'treacherous transparency' of the windowpane (1961: 161), which functions at once as framing for its idealised interior images (when Cathy and Heathcliff as children gaze in at Thrushcross Grange) and as barrier or means of separation. In Arnold's film, as Monika Pietrzak-Franger (2012) has argued, windows and doorways similarly serve as a way of foregrounding our position as viewers, never quite able to see clearly or get inside the characters, and constantly made aware of the double function – as window and barrier – of the screen itself. With Heathcliff we strain to see what is just beyond our reach, to get beyond the frame to the moor outside and to Cathy, and we are reminded constantly of the texture of the window's curtain or glass screen, at once blurring and irretrievably separating inside and outside. As the young Heathcliff gazes out through a window at Wuthering Heights, the figure of Hindley seated on the low wall outside blurs into a whorl within the texture of the glass itself. Both block Heathcliff's access to the world outside, both limit and define him. Later in the film, when Heathcliff is positioned outside gazing in at the Lintons, we find a much more conventional framing, very different from those which elsewhere the film ruptures or dissolves. Here, when Heathcliff's return positions him as voyeur and separates him from touch, the domestic scene is ordered, clean, conventional, and our – and Heathcliff's – gaze is distanced. But, at the end, we lose Heathcliff's viewpoint as the frame disappears completely: into an intensity of texture – of fabric, gorse, feathers or fur – or into the opacity of a white or a black screen when our reliance on vision is frustrated, leaving only sound.

### **Alternative genealogies?**

If the gendering of space is fundamental to the construction of subjectivity, knowledge, heroism and narrative itself, then shifting this identification is a task that

faces generations of women, as it does postcolonial writers, visual artists and film-makers.<sup>11</sup> Feminist theorists have persistently sought to do this, describing other spaces and topographies where margin and centre are reversed, ‘situated knowledges’, a ‘politics of location’, and a ‘nomadic’ female subject (for example Rich 1989; Haraway 1988; and Braidotti 1994). Such spaces, however, are metaphorical. For visual artists and film-makers, the challenge is more acute: the personal landscapes that they construct must be concretised and made visible.

Landscape, argues W. J. T. Mitchell, is ‘integrally connected with imperialism’ (2002: 9, my italics). The most remarked upon aspects of Arnold’s film, the casting of a black Heathcliff who has clearly been subject to slavery (we see the brand on his shoulder), and her depiction of overt racism in Hindley and the Lintons, constitute its clearest critiques of the power structures within which Brontë’s world is embedded.<sup>12</sup> But in its refusal and tearing of the framed landscape of Brontë’s moors, in the close and intensely tactile nature of its cinematic gaze, a gaze which, as Arnold herself has noted, is always with rather than at her subjects,<sup>13</sup> we can read, I argue, a more sustained cinematic critique of a process of Othering that operates through the distanced gaze at a feminised space. In her discussion of the film world of Agnès Varda, Kate Ince insists, against more general characterisations of haptic visuality, that Varda’s ‘personal geography’ and embodied gaze must be understood politically, as a distinctively feminist intervention into cinema. Andrea Arnold’s cinema, I argue, constitutes a similar intervention, which engages a specifically British tradition of cinematic realism<sup>14</sup> and a specifically British political history. But it engages, too, another tradition that I have tried to suggest here, that of the construction of a ‘personal geography’ that is, in Miller’s words, ‘the iconography of a desire for a revision of story’, for ‘another logic of plot’ (1988: 87). As such, Arnold’s *Wuthering Heights* can be seen in terms of a women’s tradition of ‘rewriting’, as Liedeke Plate describes it, ‘confronting questions of cultural memory from the perspective of women’ (2011: 3). But this is not the unified tradition constructed by feminist literary critics of the 1970s, although it echoes some of their claims about space. The line of descent it embodies, as Plate herself suggests, is always both ‘interrupted’ (ibid.: 122) and fractured. The ‘personal landscape’ is always constructed against more dominant traditions, including those that have worked to absorb Brontë’s novel. If Arnold’s ‘personal geography’ links her film genealogically to the novel, it is not in a

straightforward way. The novel has to be unmade, ripped open, its famous framings, with their masking of the ‘inside of the inside’, disturbed or destroyed. In the process, however, Arnold’s film fiercely engages an intertextual correspondence of the kind that Jacobus describes. Like the films of Jane Campion, and indeed Claire Denis and Lynne Ramsay, it suggests how landscapes – space – can function for women film-makers, for whom the gaze at, and the exploration, penetration and ownership of, landscape are processes saturated in visual as well as literary traditions, so that they must be confronted, and must – again and again – be radically disturbed.

## Notes

1. Jacobus uses ‘correspondence’ in its double sense: as ‘textual interchange or dialogue’ and as ‘relation of agreement, similarity, or analogy’ (1986: 281).
2. Reflecting on her own search for the marks of female authorship in the films of Elvira Notari, Giuliana Bruno argues that ‘the “real” is such that it can never be grasped’. The lost film-maker ‘can only exist as the product of discourse, as the effect of “the death of the author”’. At the same time, however, her relation with Notari is ‘an intersubjective relation between two females: the authorial scene . . . is . . . a “joined collaboration, active and shared”’ (1993: 239–40).
3. See, for example, critical writing on the work of Claire Denis. Henrik Gustafsson, citing Denis’ own question: ‘Do I have a landscape?’, writes of her use of landscape to ‘stall and interrupt’ narrative progression (2014: 205), and Martine Beugnet refers to her films as a “cinema of the senses”: a cinema that relies, first and foremost, on the sensuous apprehension of the real, on a vivid and tactile combination of sounds and images that expands cinema’s primarily visual powers of evocation’ (2004: 132). See also Kate Ince’s discussion of the ‘personal geography’ of Agnès Varda’s film world (2013: 607).
4. Spender writes of her own university degree in ‘Eng. Lit.’ that ‘my introduction to the “greats” was (with the exception of the famous five women novelists) an introduction to the great men’ (1986: 115).
5. Bruno is quoting Anna Banti, whose search for authorship in the paintings of Artemisia Gentileschi follows a similar pattern of loss and (re)creation.
6. Margaret Homans points out that, in the novel, ‘Cathy and Heathcliff, the characters whose relations to nature would seem to be the strongest and most important to the novel, are never presented on the moors.’ The landscape, she suggests, remains beyond words, refusing ‘entrapment’ by narrative (1978: 9, 11).
7. Charlotte Brontë was the first to see the novel itself as a textual equivalent of both the moors and of Emily Brontë herself. The novel, she wrote in 1850, ‘is rustic all through. It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of health. Nor was it natural that it should be otherwise; the author being herself a native and nursling of the moors’ (cited in Miller 2003: 366).
8. Godwin describes the process in her interview with David Corfield for *Practical*



*Photography*, December 2004. Reviewers of Arnold's film cited the poetry of Hughes as a reference point: Kate Stables, for example, wrote of the film's 'Ted Hughes-like scrutiny of wildlife both dead and alive' (2011).

9. Interestingly, Godwin rejected the title 'Landscapes' for her most famous collection of work, published in 1985, in favour of the more material 'Land'. See her account of 'Land' for the National Media Museum (2010).

10. Though they do carry an intertextual reference to the final words of Brontë's novel, where Lockwood watches 'the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells' (1995: 334).

11. In Liedeke Plate's account of 'rewriting', on which I draw here, she argues that such a technique features prominently in postcolonial narratives, as a form of 'writing back' against the dominant narratives of conquest and occupation.

12. The scenes in which Heathcliff is washed clean by Nelly seem to be an explicit, ironic echo of the nineteenth-century Pears Soap advertisements described by Anne McClintock (1995: 212–17).

13. In interview Arnold describes her discomfort at the one scene in the film where the camera is ahead of the character, because it is 'against my philosophy' (quoted in Harris 2012).

14. Reviews have tended to place Arnold's films in a British tradition of social realism; see, for example, Fuller (2010). For an academic study which places Arnold's films in this tradition, see Dave (2011).

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