

Balthus' Illustrations of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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Abstract

Between 1932 and 1935 Balthasar Klossowski de Rola, known as Balthus (1908-2001) created a series of illustrations of Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*. Diverging from the contemporary Surrealist interpretation of the novel, Balthus developed a very personal reading which focuses on the theme of childhood. His perspective arose from strong beliefs about the human condition which he seems to have held from early youth. This paper provides a detailed analysis of Balthus' graphic response to Brontë's novel, broadly comparing it with Luis Buñuel's Surrealist film version and setting it within the context of Surrealist ideas in general. To help elucidate Balthus' vision, his artistic sources are examined closely, together with his preparatory studies, and the specific passages he chose to illustrate from Brontë's novel are analysed, with the aid of his own writings. The main contributions of this paper include new suggested artistic sources for the illustrations and the linking of the *Wuthering Heights* series with Balthus' painting of *The Guitar Lesson*. Overall, this paper hopes to develop our understanding of Balthus' artistic aims by demonstrating his commitment to the expression of certain themes fundamental to his art, which he recognised in *Wuthering Heights*. It also focuses upon Balthus' communion with and heavy reliance upon the art of the past, by observing his constant re-interpretation of poses, facial features and compositional arrangements from the Old Masters to convey meaning within his own work. Finally, Balthus' creative interpretation of Emily Brontë's wild and unique masterpiece presents an intriguing lens through which to appreciate the familiar and well-loved story of Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship.

Keywords:

Balthus, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff, Catherine Earnshaw, childhood, Buñuel, Surrealism, book illustrations.

Having first read Emily Brontë's dark and daringly original novel *Wuthering Heights* of 1847 as a boy, Balthus became fascinated by it during his early twenties. Between 1932 and 1935, he was inspired to create fourteen pen and ink drawings depicting significant episodes in the book.¹ Balthus was then living in Paris, a stronghold of Surrealism, and his illustrations of *Wuthering Heights* were enthusiastically embraced by the Surrealist group.² Yet, characteristically, Balthus rejected the Surrealist interpretation of *Wuthering Heights*, which celebrated the story as a socially unrestrained exultation of *l'amour fou* (mad passion).³ The Spanish film director Luis Buñuel, whose films have been described as constituting "the purest expression of the Surrealist vision in any form,"⁴ and who had previously collaborated with Salvador Dalí, suggested making a film of the novel in collaboration with Balthus.⁵ However, Balthus refused, taking the view that their "conceptions were too different" and so Buñuel turned instead to Pierre Unik, producing a screenplay in 1931 from which the film *Abismos de Pasión* eventually resulted in 1954.

The non-collaboration with Buñuel opens the question of the precise nature of Balthus' interpretation of Brontë's novel and how it compares with that of the Surrealists. Certainly, several scholars have observed the recurrent theme of childhood and adolescence within the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations. Sabine Rewald, for example, described the essential subject as "the separation between the world of adults and the world of Cathy and Heathcliff, the appearance of adults serving merely to emphasise the remoteness of the adolescents."⁶ Balthus himself acknowledged this as a dominant theme: "Very early on, I heard the call of childhood, as my version of *Wuthering Heights* shows."⁷ Nonetheless his expression of intent is drastically simplified, avoiding the complexity of ideas it contained, as indeed one would expect from an artist who never felt the need to explain his art. This paper, therefore, will reconsider the theme of childhood in depth. Close attention will be given to the relationship between Balthus' illustrations and Brontë's novel, since Balthus fervently read and re-read it, engaging with it on a detailed level. Crucially, Balthus' illustrations will be examined with reference to the rich body of artistic imagery with which he had furnished his mind during his formative years. As a young artist, lacking funds for a conventional training, he nevertheless educated himself - with the encouragement of Pierre Bonnard - by following the practice of École des Beaux-Arts students and copying "with scrupulous tenacity"⁸ the great classical masters and the Italian Primitives, both in Paris and in Tuscany. This process underpins our understanding of Balthus' own art; as he explains in his memoir, "My constant study of early Italian painters and once-frequent visits to the Louvre have strongly marked me with images added to my

¹Jean Clair and Virginie Monnier with the authorization of Balthus: *Balthus: Catalogue Raisonné of the Complete Works*, Editions Gallimard, Paris 1999, pp.485-498.

² The Surrealists hosted Balthus' first one man show in a Surrealist gallery, the Galerie Pierre in Paris, and published the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations in their journal *Minotaure* in 1935.

³ Francisco Aranda: *Luis Buñuel*, London, 1975, p.162.

⁴ W. French, Foreword to V. Higginbotham: *Luis Buñuel*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1979.

⁵ Nicholas Fox Weber: *Balthus, A Biography*, Dalkey Archive Press, 2013, p.367. As related by Balthus to Nicolas Fox Weber.

⁶ S. Rewald: exh. cat. *Balthus*, Metropolitan Museum of Art; George Pompidou, New York, 1984.

⁷Balthus: *Vanished Splendours, A Memoir*, as told to Alain Vircondelet, HarperCollins Publishers, 2001, p.111.

⁸Balthus, *op.cit.* (Note 7), p.39.

mind's immemorial crucible. My work constantly dips into it to rediscover landscapes, poses, and faces in other guises.”⁹



Illustration 1: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *Pull his hair when you go by*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. III), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 38.5 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 1: John Tenniel, *Alice, as she grows larger*, 1889, Illustration from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. ©Heritage-Images / The Print Collector / akg-images.

⁹ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.177.

The first of Balthus' illustrations of *Wuthering Heights* depicts a scene from chapter III which immediately brings the theme of childhood into sharp focus. A succinct vignette of the enclosed and dysfunctional family life endured by Cathy and Heathcliff, it portrays the vacuum created by their parents' absence and the cruel dynamics that come to fill it. Heathcliff had joined the Earnshaw family under mysterious circumstances. These are explained sketchily in chapter IV where we learn that, finding the hungry, homeless orphan on the streets of Liverpool, Cathy's father took him home and adopted him. Following the deaths of Mr and Mrs Earnshaw, Cathy and Heathcliff are subjected to the guardianship of Cathy's tyrannical elder brother Hindley and his wife Frances. Hindley immediately humiliates Heathcliff, reducing him from the status of a family member to that of a servant and engaging in a campaign of abuse against the boy he had long resented for usurping his parents' affections. Hindley is pictured ordering Frances to pull Heathcliff's hair heartily as she walks by, and he snaps his fingers as she willingly obliges.

Cathy is naturally pained by the death of her father, but we learn in Chapter V that Heathcliff's grief is still deeper: "And they both set up a heart-breaking cry."¹⁰ The young Balthus would have identified with this scenario, having himself in later childhood experienced the pain of an absent father following his parents' separation in 1917-18. In 1926 Balthus also lost his mentor and father-figure, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke. Rilke was described by Balthus as a "wonderful man,"¹¹ having provided the ongoing support and encouragement that Balthus needed after his parents moved apart. It is generally held that Balthus lent his own features to Heathcliff and those of his young love-interest, Antoinette de Watteville, to Cathy, indicating the extent to which the artist identified with Brontë's characters.¹²

Cathy's companion stands defiantly in illustration 1; together the pair embody solidarity in their grief and oppression. Like a cat, Cathy nuzzles up to Heathcliff for refuge, her body coiled and her neck crooked to fit an imaginary rectangle. This manner of depiction augments the sense of close confinement and is reminiscent of John Tenniel's well-known illustration to the fourth chapter of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, where Alice has grown so enormous that she almost outgrows the white rabbit's house (fig.1); the prominent, right-angled position of both Alice and Cathy's left arms are particularly alike. In his memoir, Balthus acknowledged his debt to the Alice of Carroll's book and to Carroll's photographs of Alice Liddell for enabling him to "embody childhood enchantment," both in general and specifically in his conception of *Wuthering Heights*.¹³

Considered together, illustrations 2, 3 and 4 contain only the figures of Cathy and Heathcliff and encapsulate the quintessential qualities of autonomy, self-absorption and completeness that characterise their early relationship. Their childhood realm transcends but is simultaneously undiminished by their inhospitable environment. It is unobserved and impenetrable; nothing exists outside their world. Balthus expresses this quasi-sacred harmony by employing the classic pyramidal-type composition of the High Renaissance, manifest especially in the immobile triangular formations of illustrations 2 and 3, whose corners are delineated by Cathy's and Heathcliff's heads, hands and feet.

¹⁰ Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*, Penguin books, London, 1985, V, p.85.

¹¹ Weber, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.42. In a conversation between Balthus and the author.

¹² Raphaël Bouvier, ed.: *Balthus*, exh. cat., Fondation Beyeler, 2018, p.116-117.

¹³ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p111.



I have got the time on with writing for twenty minutes

Illustration 2: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *I have got the time on with writing for twenty minutes*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. VI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 38.8 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 2: Eustache Le Sueur, *The Preaching of St Paul at Ephesus*, oil on canvas, Paris, Louvre Museum, Inv.8020. Photo ©RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Gérard Blot.

Turning to the second illustration, the inscription is taken from chapter III: “I reached this book, and a pot of ink from the shelf, and pushed the house-door ajar to give me light, and I have got the time on with writing for twenty minutes; but my companion is impatient and proposes that we should...have a scamper on the moors.”¹⁴ Cathy and Heathcliff clearly have different mental foci in this scene and they are physically separate too, each having “sought a separate nook” within the back-kitchen.¹⁵ Balthus closely approaches the figures in his illustration, but poses them facing in opposite directions; Cathy is intently absorbed in her book, Heathcliff daydreams of the natural world outside. While Balthus locates Cathy and Heathcliff within adjacent and self-contained, interlocking “nooks,” like statues in niches, he simultaneously flattens the perspective so that the figures occupy the same plane. We sense that the characters are in close harmony, though absorbed in separate thought-worlds and Balthus’ interpretation of the scene succeeds in tightly and powerfully communicating its psychological dynamic. The drawing is also emblematic of their contrasting educations, Heathcliff lacking Cathy’s schooling and learning what he can from her.¹⁶ We may assume that Balthus would have observed the similarity between himself and Heathcliff regarding their unstructured educational backgrounds. Evidently for Heathcliff, the Yorkshire Moors’ unbridled nature presents a superior, more enticing source of enlightenment and indeed illustration 3 goes on to show the friends together experiencing that communion with nature of which Heathcliff has just been dreaming.



Figure 3: Eustache le Sueur, *Christ Carrying His Cross*, oil on wood, Paris, Louvre Museum, Inv.8016. Photo ©RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/Jean-Gilles Berizzi.

¹⁴Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), III, p.64.

¹⁵Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), III, p.63-64.

¹⁶ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), VI, p.87.

Given Balthus' dependence upon the art of the past, it is not surprising to find similarities between the second illustration and two well-known paintings in the Louvre. Firstly, Cathy's unusual pose recalls the barefooted man who kneels prominently on all fours in the foreground of Eustache Le Sueur's *The Preaching of St Paul at Ephesus*, publicly burning books of 'curious arts' in response to Paul's preaching (fig.2). Notably however, Balthus transforms the role of the book into something valuable, to be scrutinised intently. One might even suggest that Cathy's book is revelatory, as implied by the elucidatory light that falls upon it through the open door. The other source which appears to have influenced Cathy's pose is the fallen Saviour in *Christ Carrying His Cross*, also by Le Sueur, in which Christ is presented from the side and positioned demeaningly on all fours (fig.3). Balthus poses Cathy in an almost identical manner, though she is reversed, and her back is flattened. The turn of Christ's head as He contemplates His own, shortly-to-be-pierced hand, strongly resembles the purposeful way that Cathy gazes sidelong at her book and is a connection which subtly reinforces the volume's sacred nature. Furthermore, in the painted version of this illustration entitled *The Blanchard Children* it is more obvious than in Balthus' monochrome pen and ink drawing that the open white pages of Cathy's book substitute the sacred linen cloth in Le Sueur's painting. While Le Sueur's Christ is naturalistically rendered, Balthus has turned Cathy's head around sharply in an anatomically improbable way. This device recalls the conventions of the Italian Primitive art that he studied and loved, seen for example in *The Carrying of the Cross* by Simone Martini,¹⁷ and it is a stylistic idiosyncrasy that recurs in Balthus' art. Heathcliff's pose appears to derive, though less obviously, from the two attendant figures in Le Sueur's *Christ Carrying the Cross*. Mirroring the left-hand figure, Simon of Cyrene, who supports the cross, Heathcliff is positioned above Cathy with left leg outstretched, although Balthus tightens the arrangement to create a unified, pyramidal stack of bodily forms. His other knee bent, Heathcliff's pose also translates the contemplative, philosophical manner of Saint Veronica in Le Sueur's painting, who holds the white cloth. Heathcliff's right knee rests upon the chair but its alignment with the small of Cathy's back has the optical effect of compressing her, confined as she is within the stark wooden architecture of table and chair. Such elements echo the heavy cross that bears down on Le Sueur's Christ. According to Balthus, Picasso, who bought *The Blanchard Children*, "sensed something about death and childhood" in the work.¹⁸ And it is surely through this pictorial reference to Le Sueur's painting that Balthus introduces the connotation of death, together with the associated notions of purity and redemption.

¹⁷ c. 1335, Louvre, Paris.

¹⁸ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.231.



It was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors and remain there all day.

Illustration 3: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *It was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors and remain there all day*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. VI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 36 x 29.4 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

Illustration III, set in the surrounding hills, is a more naturalistic rendering of Cathy and Heathcliff. Its composition suggests that Balthus was influenced by photographs of similarly reclining children by Lewis Carroll.¹⁹ The illustration also bears a strong resemblance to a painting by Balthus' "constant mentor" Delacroix,²⁰ an anglophile like Balthus whose work had a deep and enduring influence upon the young artist. Although reversed, the figural arrangement of Cathy and Heathcliff is close to Delacroix's placement of Lara and Kaled in his 1847-8 version of *The Death of Lara*, (fig.4) a subject based on Byron's poem:²¹ Portentously foreshadowing Cathy's death in Heathcliff's arms, a distraught Heathcliff lovingly supports Cathy's upper body with one hand underneath her head and

¹⁹ Edward Wakeling: *The photographs of Lewis Carroll: a catalogue raisonné*, University of Texas Press, 2015, p.116, IN-0709, 'Ethel and Lilian Brodie', p.126, IN-0884, 'Harry and Una Taylor', p.178, IN-1379, 'Ellis children: Mary (b.1856), Frances Dymphna Harriet (1854-1930) and Bertha S (b. 1858)', p.220, IN-1955, 'Julia Frances Arnold (1862-1908) and Ethel Margaret Arnold (1866-1930)', p.230, IN-2093, 'Alexandra "Xie" Rhoda Kitchen (1864-1925) and George Herbert Kitchin (b.1865), in Indian shawls.

²⁰Balthus. *op. cit.* (note 7), p.19.

²¹ Lee Johnson: *The Paintings of Eugène Delacroix. A Critical Catalogue, 1832-1863*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1986, Vol. IV Plates, Plate 107, cat. no. 290. Also Vol. III, Text, p.115-6. The painting was reproduced in 1916 for the first time in Etienne Moreau-Nélaton: *Delacroix, raconté par lui-même; étude bibliographique d'après ses lettres, son journal, etc.*, Paris, 1916, II, fig.274.

the other across her chest, in precisely the same way that Kaled holds Lara. The atmospheric Yorkshire moorland in which Cathy and Heathcliff recline is also reminiscent of the open, untamed landscape which envelops the figures in Delacroix's painting. Again, we see that Balthus' pictorial sources illuminate additional layers of meaning, with parallels existing between the dying Lara, who is haunted by his lost homeland and youth, and Cathy, who faces imminent estrangement from her childhood world. Furthermore, through Cathy's gesture, Balthus refers poignantly to the moment, near the conclusion of the poem, in which Lara raises his hand and points nostalgically to the East at some "remember'd scene" ²²of youthful and "more cloudless days."²³



Figure 4: Eugène Delacroix, *The Death of Lara*, between 1847 and 1848, oil on canvas. Photo taken from a copy of Etienne Moreau-Nélaton: *Delacroix, raconté par lui-même; étude bibliographique d'après ses lettres, son journal, etc.*, Paris, 1916, Vol II, fig.274, in a private library.

²² Byron: *The Complete Poetical Works*, Oxford University Press, 1970, II. 467-476, p.317.

²³ Byron, *op. cit.* (note 22), I. 175, p.305.



Cathy and I escaped from the wash-house to have a ramble of liberty —

Illustration 4: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *Cathy and I escaped from the wash house to have a ramble of liberty*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. VI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 38.7 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 5: Tiziano Vecelli (called Titian), *Madonna and Child with St Catherine (known as Madonna of the Rabbit)*, between 1525-30, oil on canvas, Paris, Louvre Museum, Inv.743. Photo ©RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/ Frank Raux.

Heathcliff adopts a more active role as nurturer and liberator in Balthus' fourth illustration, as he helps Cathy exit the rectilinear confines of the wash house and enter the freedom of open moorland. The composition recalls the central figures of the Virgin Mary and the Christ Child in Titian's famous *Madonna of the Rabbit* in the Louvre (fig.5), with the additional diagonals of Cathy's limbs heightening the sense of dynamic movement and purpose as they stretch across Heathcliff's triangular form. In Titian's painting, set similarly against a naturalistic background, if a softer one, Catherine of Alexandria holds the Christ Child not in her bare hands but in a white cloth, like a priest holding the Host. By evoking her image, Balthus associates Cathy once again with the concept of sacred innocence, conferring upon her the saintliness of her namesake. As well as portraying the bond between Mother and Child, Titian's painting expresses Saint Catherine's tender care and is a beautiful image of nurturing guardianship, in which the Christ Child is shown God's creation. In Balthus' illustration Heathcliff takes on the responsibility of the surrogate guardian in whom Cathy, the innocent orphan, willingly trusts.



Illustration 5: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *We ran from the top of the Heights*, (ch. VI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 39.8 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 6: Print made by William Blake, 1757–1827, British, *The Book of Thel*, Plate 6, "III. / Then Thel astonish'd . . .", 1789, Relief etching printed in brown with pen and ink and watercolor on moderately thick, slightly textured, cream wove paper, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection, B1978.43.1339. Public domain, <https://collections.britishart.yale.edu/catalog/tms:2258>.

Illustration 5 represents the scene in chapter VI of Brontë's novel in which "Cathy and Heathcliff ran from the top of the Heights" after their ramble, "Catherine completely beaten in the race, because she was barefoot."²⁴The influence of Blake's *The Book of Thel*, published in 1789, is apparent here. Balthus was familiar with Blake through Rilke, who owned a "deluxe" volume of Blake's work,²⁵ and also through the poet and anglicist Pierre Leyris, who made the standard French translations of both Blake and Lewis Carroll. Indeed, Balthus acknowledged the "luxuriant illuminism" in Blake's drawings and poems as "a creative and inventive source" for his illustrations of *Wuthering Heights*.²⁶ It is important to note that both William Blake and Lewis Carroll influenced many of the artists within the Surrealist group. Indeed, works by Blake and Carroll were in the library of Roland Penrose, influential both as an artist and a patron closely involved in the Surrealist movement²⁷.

Thel is a maiden whose essential dilemma is whether to face Experience or to remain perpetually in a state of Innocence. Confronting Experience through successive encounters with the humanised

²⁴ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), VI, p.89.

²⁵ E.C. Mason: *Rilke, Europe and the English-Speaking World*, Cambridge, 1961, p.107.

²⁶ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.111.

²⁷ These were featured in an exhibition entitled 'Surreal Roots: From William Blake to André Breton' at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art (Modern Two) in Edinburgh, 28 March-July 5, 2015.

existences of the Lily-of-the Valley, a cloud, a worm, and a clod of clay, she finally rejects it and returns to the Vales of Har, whence she came. Cathy's pose is close to that of Thel in her confrontation with the worm, a poem which begins "Then Thel astonish'd viewed the Worm" (fig.6). Both figures are viewed from behind with one leg extended to suggest forward movement, their arms outstretched, hair blown to one side by the wind and their dresses billowing around their legs. By referencing Thel in this illustration, Balthus dramatises and implicitly questions the choice that Cathy herself will soon make between Innocence and Experience, manifested in her own situation by the dilemma between true love and society's expectations.



Figure 7: Balthus, study for Illustration 5, *We ran from the top of the Heights*, (ch.VI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 27.8 x 24 cm, current location unknown. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

A study for illustration 5²⁸ sheds further light on Balthus' depiction of the scene (fig.7). The image has something of an expulsion from Eden about it and although Cathy and Heathcliff are engaged in a race in Brontë's text, there is no discernible sense of competition between them here. Rather, in a development from illustration 4 in which Heathcliff gently and gallantly led Cathy out from the wash house, he now firmly leads Cathy by the arm like a parent hurrying a young, dawdling child. Viewed in this context, with its heavily foreboding sky, there is a sense in illustration 5 that somehow Cathy has unintentionally been left behind in this so-called race. She is pictured desperately running after Heathcliff, repeating the raised arm gesture we saw in the third illustration.

²⁸ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.488, I1561.

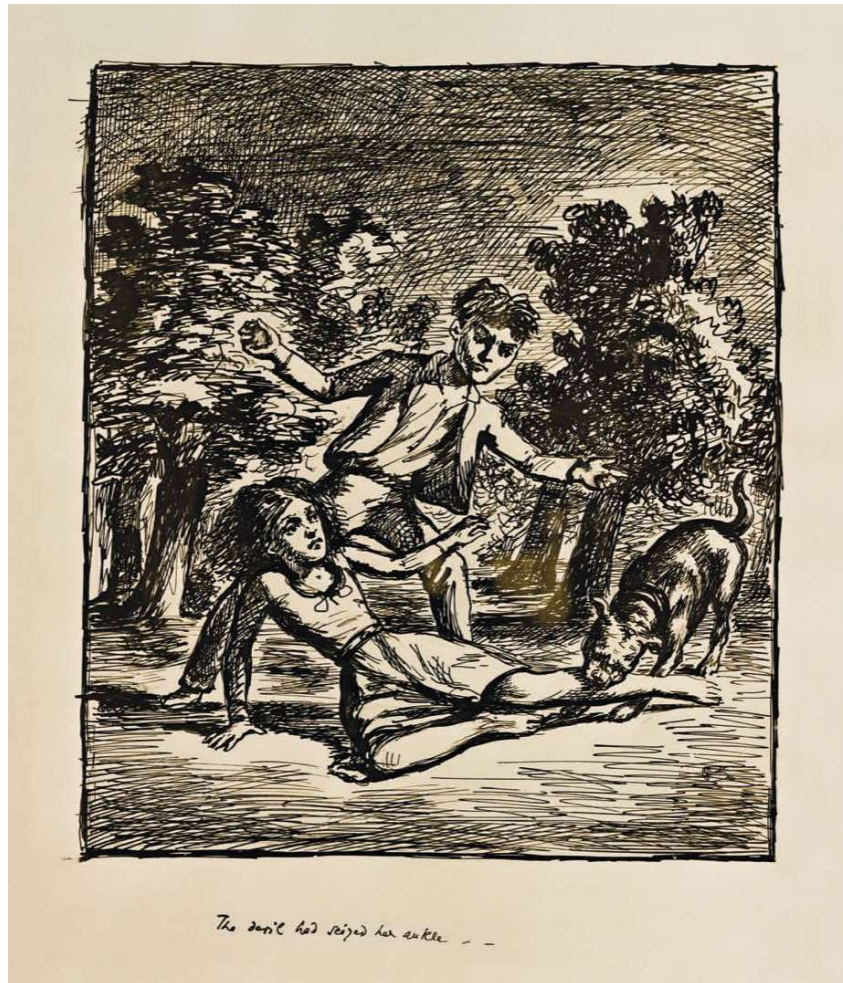


Illustration 6: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *The devil had seized her ankle*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. VI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 39.8 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

Following this prophetic build-up, the plot climax of Emily Brontë's novel, for Balthus, comes in an episode in chapter VI. After Cathy and Heathcliff peer inquisitively into the drawing-room window of neighbouring Thrushcross Grange, the Linton family loose their bulldog on the young trespassers. Illustration 6 depicts the moment the dog seizes Cathy by the ankle, injuring her badly. A long recuperation at the Lintons' residence follows, during which Cathy is taught how to look and behave like a young lady. The compositional arrangement of this illustration signals a significant change; for the first time, the two figures break out of their tight, harmonious grouping, their outstretched limbs expressing alarm and disarray.

Brontë's metaphoric use of dog as devil serves Balthus' interpretation well; providing the inscription for illustration 6, it implies the violent intervention by a malevolent, external force. Judging from the pivotal role played by this image in shifting the visual language of the illustrations, Balthus appears to have conceived it (in an idiosyncratic reading of the text) as embodying the symbolic moment when Cathy ceases to be a child and becomes ensnared within social conventions. Seen within the context of the antithesis of childhood and adulthood, this event initiates her transition from one state of consciousness to the next. An important visual source, which substantiates and underpins Balthus' interpretation of this scene, can be found in the Sieneese art that he so admired. The arc-shaped arrangement of Heathcliff, Cathy and the dog is unmistakably close to a group of figures

within the first of four side panel scenes from Simone Martini's *Panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello: The Saint Inspired by an Angel and Four of His Miracles* of c.1328 (fig.8). This panel portrays a child violently attacked and killed by a wolf at the doors of a medieval city and is followed by another panel in which the child is miraculously raised from the dead by Agostino Novello. Balthus would certainly have known this painting, writing in his memoir: "What would I have become without my stays at...Siena studying Simone Martini in the afternoons?"²⁹ By referencing Martini's side panels Balthus invests Emily Brontë's account of a non-fatal dog bite with the notion of child mortality and, by extension, with the subtler concept of terminated childhood.



Figure 8: Simone Martini, side panel depicting a child being attacked and killed by a wolf, from *Panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello: The Saint Inspired by an Angel and Four of His Miracles*, c. 1324, tempera on wood, Siena, Pinacoteca Nazionale. ©akg-images/Joseph Martin.

The repercussions of this dramatic event are clearly felt in the following three illustrations, each one encapsulating a different aspect of the heightened social and self-awareness that accompany adolescence. Cathy's perception of being observed and admired by others is treated in illustration 7. The composition recalls traditional representations of The Adoration of the Infant Christ and once again connects Cathy with the theme of the innocent child. Indeed, it has been noted by Walker that the figures surrounding Cathy resemble "the manner of visitors at a holy accouchement."³⁰ In such representations Mary and Joseph, the Magi, shepherds and Saints typically gather to worship the

²⁹ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.112.

³⁰ Wendy Walker: *Balthus Picture-Book, Ch.3: The Illustrations for Wuthering Heights*, www.wendywalker.com under OtherWriting/Projects, © Wendy Walker, 2013, p.14.

infant Jesus, Who is often shown raising His hand in blessing or benediction;³¹ Cathy adopts a similar gesture, a variation of her habit of raising one arm, and her detached and “deific expression”³² is also noteworthy. Cathy’s gaze, her face shape and features bear an uncanny likeness to a photograph of an abstracted Alice Pleasance Liddell taken on 25 June 1870 by Lewis Carroll³³ (fig.9) and would appear to corroborate Balthus’ statement that Carroll’s photographs of Alice Liddell enabled him to “embody childhood enchantment.” Evidently this beguiling photograph continued to interest Balthus, since its unmistakable influence can be seen in the painting of his wife Antoinette de Wattewille of 1938, entitled *The Bernese Hat*.



Illustration 7: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *I saw they were full of stupid admiration*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. VI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 35.4 x 31 cm, private collection.
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³¹ *The Adoration of the Christ Child* by Fra Bartolomeo, c.1499, Galleria Borghese, Rome, *The Adoration of the Christ Child* by Josse Lieferinxe, c.1500, the Louvre, *Virgin and Child with St Julian and St Nicholas of Myra* by Lorenzo di Credi, 1494, the Louvre, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, Jusepe de Ribera, 1650, the Louvre.

³² Walker, *op. cit.* (note 30), p.13.

³³ Wakeling, *op.cit.* (Note 19), p.212, IN-1876.



Figure 9: Photograph of Alice Liddell by Lewis Carroll, 25 June 1870, Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, Bequest of Maurice B. Sendak 2012, Acc. No. 2013.159.4. Available under the Met's Open Access Program, Creative Commons Zero (CC0).
<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/306205?ft=alice+liddell&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=3>.

Illustration 8 highlights Cathy's new-found awareness of Heathcliff's uncouth appearance. Although her first, natural impulse is to rush to embrace her old friend upon their reunion, we learn in the novel that this joyful recognition is soon clouded by her surprise at how black and dirty he is.³⁴ Heathcliff's sense of shame is simultaneously indicated by his embarrassed expression and by his body language, as he recoils from Cathy. The inscription, "You needn't have touched me," brings to mind "Noli me Tangere" (touch me not) in religious painting, in which Mary Magdalene recognises the risen Christ and reaches out towards Him. Depictions of this subject, such as that by Bronzino of 1561 in the Louvre (fig.10), show Christ recoiling from touch, just as Heathcliff does. Such associations subtly underline Heathcliff's own recognition that a change of consciousness has occurred. It is a fundamental, spiritual transformation which will inevitably lead to physical separation between himself and Cathy. A preparatory sketch depicting a slightly earlier moment from the same scene (fig.11) shows that Balthus initially experimented with a more loving reunion, lacking the physical and emotional tension as well as the art-historical resonances of the final illustration.³⁵

³⁴ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), VII, p.94-95.

³⁵ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 491, 11568.

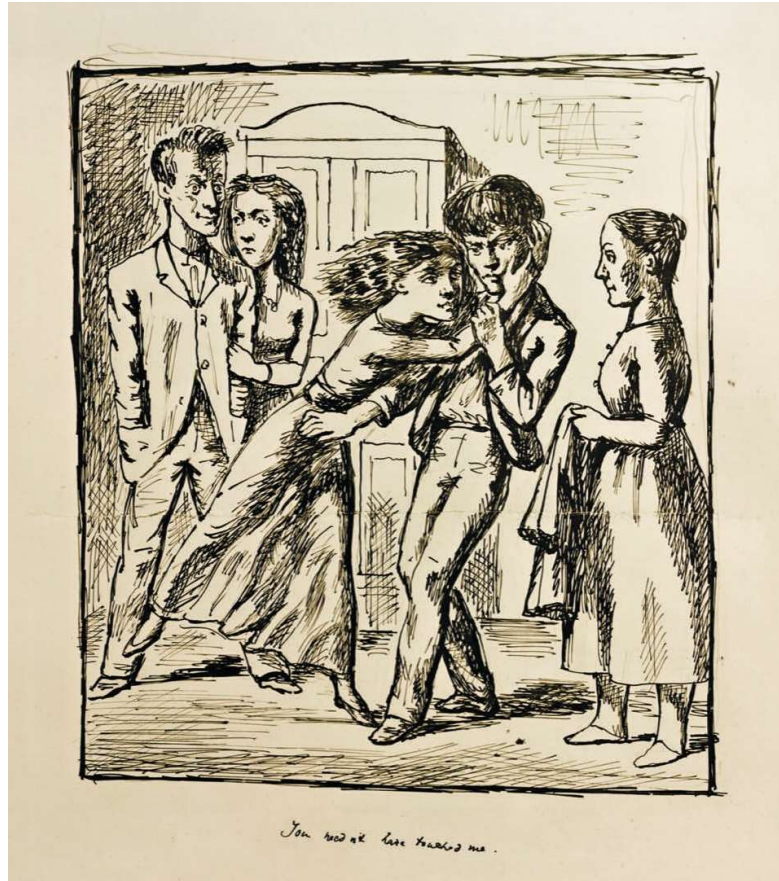


Illustration 8: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *You needn't have touched me*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. VII), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper and crayon, mounted on paper (transversal tear), 39.4 x 30.9 cm, private collection. © Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 10: Agnolo di Cosimo (called Bronzino), *Noli me Tangere, Christ appears as a gardener to Mary Magdalene*, 1560/61, oil on wood, Paris, Louvre Museum, INV130. Photo ©RMN-Grand Palais (musée du Louvre)/ Mathieu Rabeau.



Figure 11: Balthus, study for the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations. *He would have escaped if Miss Cathy had not seized him again*, (ch. VII), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 30 x 28.5 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, collection John S. Newberry. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

Considering, for a moment, the overall development of the illustrations, we notice that Cathy and Heathcliff's peaceful, private, and self-sufficient world disappears after illustration 4, along with the tight and harmonious compositional formats employed to embody their childhood intimacy. In illustrations 7 and 8 Cathy and Heathcliff are surrounded by other people and by the ninth we will see that a sturdy physical barrier now stands between them in the shape of nurse Nelly. From illustration 8 onwards, Balthus starts to employ strong diagonals to create growing tension and emotional disharmony: in illustration 8 for example, Cathy's dynamic, forward-thrusting pose conveys a raw, instinctive response towards Heathcliff, which is completely at odds with her newly acquired etiquette.

In illustration 9, Balthus highlights Cathy's growing self-awareness and awakening sexuality, reinforcing this through the introduction of a mirror motif. A connection to another of Blake's images is discernible here. Originally published in 1789, Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, *Showing the two Contrary States of the Human Soul* are characterised by the dichotomy between childhood and adulthood and would thus have presented themselves as an obvious source for Balthus. The drawing shows an aloof, forward-facing Cathy being groomed by her nurse Nelly, who stands to the left in profile. This arrangement is reminiscent of Blake's *Nurses Song of Experience*, in which a nurse combs an adolescent boy's hair (fig.12). Like Blake, Balthus includes a seated figure, although Heathcliff is positioned to the left of Nelly, who effectively separates the two friends. In Blake's image the nurse is much taller than the boy but Balthus reverses and exaggerates this dynamic so that an enlarged, statuesque Cathy becomes a towering and intimidating creature of

budding womanhood at whom Heathcliff can only gaze in confused awe.³⁶ Like Blake's regretful nurse, who grooms the young man in readiness for the world of experience, Nelly prepares Cathy for the arrival of her approved suitor, Edgar Linton, and therefore plays a similar role as the bearer of "civilized" values. Cathy's curious, self-conscious pose, in which she leans backwards slightly whilst placing her left arm forward, also appears to show the influence of a photograph of Gertrude Dykes wearing a fancy frock, taken in 1862 by Lewis Carroll (fig.13).³⁷

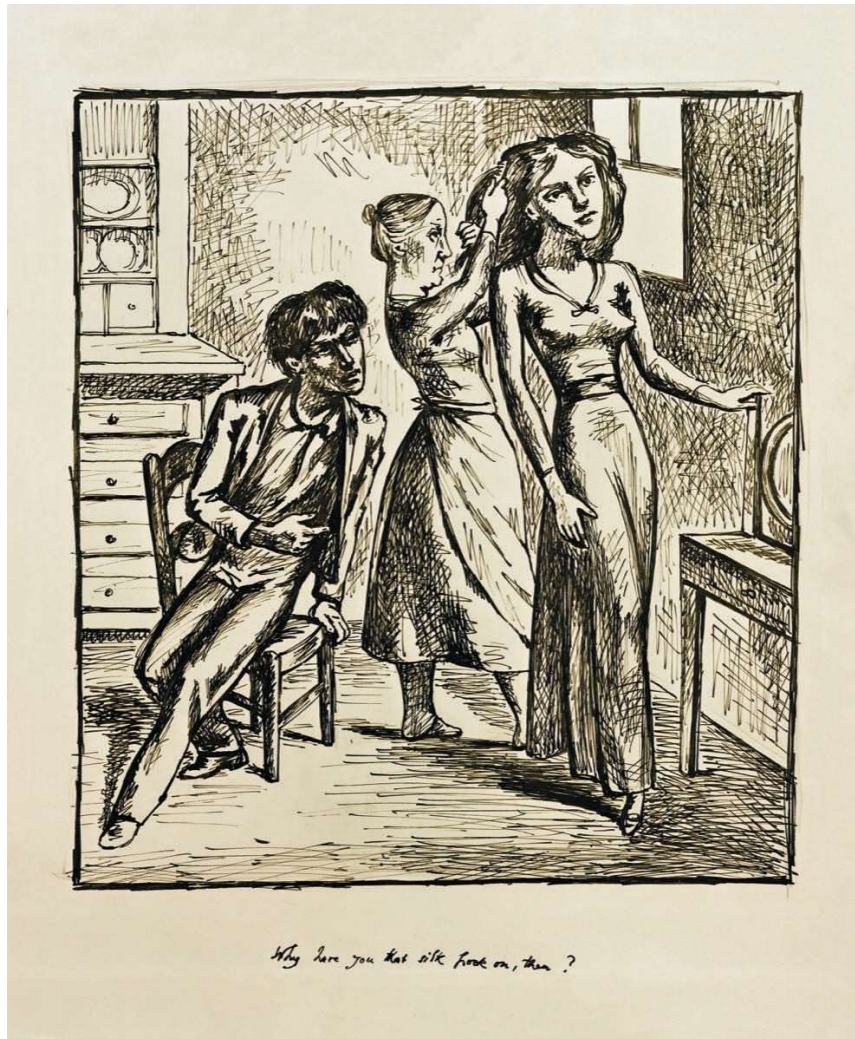


Illustration 9: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *Why have you that silk frock on, then?*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. VIII), 1933-1935, Chinese ink and crayon on paper, 39.8 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

³⁶ Two preparatory studies for illustration 9 show the figure more equally matched in height. Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.492, I1571 and I1572.

³⁷Wakeling, *op. cit.* (note 19), p.128, IN-0904.



Figure 12: William Blake, *Songs of Experience: Nurses Song*, [1794] printed ca.1825, relief etching printed in orange-brown ink and hand-coloured with watercolour and shell gold, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund 1917. Acc. No.17.10.38. Available under the Met's Open Access Program, Creative Commons Zero (CC0). <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/347972?ft=william+blake+the+nurses+song&offset=0&pp=40&pos=1>.

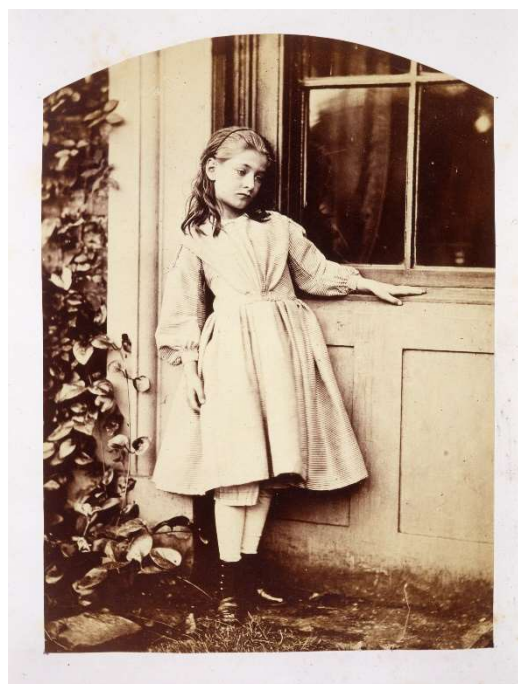


Figure 13: Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll), *Gertrude Dykes*, 1862. ©The Executors of the C L Dodgson Estate. Photo courtesy of Princeton University Library, (from M.L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists: Dodgson, Charles Lutwidge, 1832-1898 (Lewis Carroll)/Photograph Albums, Special Collections, Princeton University Library).

Capturing an intimate moment in which Cathy dresses before a mirror, illustration 9 brings to mind a traditional and familiar theme in art, that of 'A Woman at her Toilet'. Given the context, it is also suggestive of a particular symbolic strand within that tradition, in which the devil is seen lurking behind the mirror, tempting the woman's vanity. Although the devil is not pictured plainly within the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations as an obviously diabolical, horned presence, he is certainly executing his evil plans behind the scenes and lingering around the place in disguise, as we saw in illustration 6. Previously incarnated as a bulldog, the devil now appears to inhabit the divisive, meddling figure of Nelly, whose hardened, unsympathetic expression suggests hidden motives. Found in German Renaissance imagery, for example in woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer and Sebastian Brant, this theme was employed by Delacroix in his painting *The Woman before the Mirror (Le Lever)*, shown at the Salon of 1850 and now in the Collection Maxime Citroen, Paris (fig.14). In 1851 Eugène-Louis Lamy made an engraving after Delacroix's painting (Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale), a photograph of which was reproduced in Moreau Nelaton's book on Delacroix. We can therefore be sure that Balthus would have known it. Four paintings were later executed by Balthus on the theme of a young girl at her toilet, in which a nurse Nelly-type figure loiters in the background, near the mirror.³⁸ Painted between 1946 and 1949, these works show Balthus continuing to develop the subtle ideas contained within illustration 9, years after he completed the series of illustrations. These are not paintings of a young girl assisted by her loving and dutiful nurse but are images of resplendent youth threatened by the menacing presence of an evil and ill-intentioned hag.



Figure 14: Eugène Delacroix, *Le Lever*, Salon of 1850, oil on canvas, Paris, Collection Maxime Citroen. Photo taken from a copy of Etienne Moreau-Nélaton: *Delacroix, raconté par lui-même; étude bibliographique d'après ses lettres, son journal, etc.*, Paris 1916, Vol II, fig.288, in a private library.

³⁸ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.147, *Jeune Fille*, 1946, P159, p.149, *Jeune fille à sa toilette*, 1948, P170, *Jeune fille au miroir*, 1948, P171 and p.153. *La Toilette de Georgette*, 1948-49, P186.



Illustration 10: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *By a natural impulse he arrested his descent*, (ch. IX), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 39.8 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

Heathcliff's rescue of Hindley's son Hareton, in illustration 10, is an event at which Cathy is not present. It is surprising then to find this episode included in what is otherwise a concise portrayal of Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship and it leads one to consider whether Balthus assigned to it a symbolic significance exceeding its literal importance in the text, as with the earlier dog-biting scene. One of the few humane acts performed by Heathcliff, its inclusion contrasts revealingly with Buñuel's film, *Abismos de Pasión*, which omits entirely the first part of the book dealing with Cathy and Heathcliff's childhood intimacy and regularly features scenes of distressing cruelty towards Hareton. Balthus' illustration pictures the fortuitous moment when Heathcliff catches his young nephew, who is carelessly dropped over the staircase banister by his drunk and violent father. Given the moral implications of falling, it is suggested that Balthus conceived this picture as a symbol of Heathcliff's attempt to "catch" or hold onto childhood in the face of advancing adulthood. This idea resonates with illustration 9, where Heathcliff appears to watch Cathy growing up, while he remains seemingly immune from ageing. Standing in a defiant pose, similar to the one he adopted in illustration 1, Heathcliff's constancy of mind and spirit is reinforced by his stance. However, the struggling child, kicking and trying to escape, hints that Heathcliff's efforts may ultimately prove futile.

It is significant in this suggested symbolic context that the second scene from the side panels of Simone Martini's *Panel of the Blessed Agostino Novello* altarpiece also portrays the rescue of a young boy who has fallen from a balcony. Although Balthus chose not to transpose Agostino

Novello's audacious aerial interception of the descending child, he does reprise the detail of the negligent parent looking down from above. More fundamentally, the subject of this panel must surely have influenced Balthus' inclusion of the analogous scene from Brontë's novel. With Heathcliff re-enacting Agostino Novello's dramatic and saintly role as child rescuer, Balthus further enriches his evolving vision of Heathcliff as the spiritual guardian of childhood. Balthus thus appears to punctuate his telling of Cathy and Heathcliff's story with two symbolic incidents: the dog bite in illustration 6 and the staircase fall in illustration 10. Together these scenes reflect the two essential elements of child death and rescue/resurrection that occur in Simone Martini's "child miracle" side panels and this apparent synergy demonstrates the complex and resonant over-layering of art-historical imagery so integral to Balthus' art.



Figure 15: John Tenniel, 'Alice, the Duchess, and the Baby', 1889, Illustration from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. ©Heritage-Images / The Print Collector / akg-images.



Figure 16: William Blake, *The Good and Evil Angels*, 1795, printed 1805, colour print, ink and watercolour on paper, Tate Britain, Presented by W. Graham Robertson, 1939 to the Tate Gallery. Photo ©Tate. CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported.) <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/blake-the-good-and-evil-angels-n05057>.

Balthus' memorable conception of Heathcliff resolutely holding the baby has further precedent in Tenniel's illustration of the grim-faced duchess holding the child in Chapter VI of *Alice in Wonderland* (fig.15). The astonished figure of Nelly entering stage left is paralleled so closely by the corresponding figure of Alice in Tenniel's image that there is little doubt as to the influence of the one upon the other. Balthus' overall composition is also close, though in reverse, to William Blake's *The Good and Evil Angels struggling for Possession of a Child* of 1795/c.1805 (fig.16). With Heathcliff and Nelly reflecting the respective positions of the good and the evil angels, this source may also have informed Balthus' conception of Heathcliff as childhood's supernatural protector, especially since the strong compositional element of the arched staircase in Balthus' image seems to mirror the similarly arching strip of cloud in the background of Blake's. The rendering of baby Hareton is close to the large and prominent baby in the foreground of Poussin's *Massacre of the Innocents*, of 1629, in the Musée Condé de Chantilly; reinforcing the themes of innocence and death that steadily weave through the series of illustrations, this would be an especially significant pictorial reference for Balthus' image of rescue.

Illustration 11 shows Cathy recounting to Nelly a vivid dream, in which she envisions her deep love for Heathcliff and their unchangeable status as true soulmates: he is "more myself than I am."³⁹ Unaware that Heathcliff is listening, she nevertheless resolves not to marry him because he is a social inferior and would "degrade" her. The importance of Cathy's dreamlife, which speaks truth to the contemporary reality of social and moral convention, would certainly have appealed to the Surrealists since their highest goal was absolute reality or *surreality*, that is, the fusion of two apparently contradictory states of mind, waking and dreaming.⁴⁰ Dreaming is a frequent theme in Balthus' oeuvre as a whole and many works whose specific subject is not dreaming often have a dreamlike quality.

Two of Balthus' visual sources for illustration 11 are instructive in terms of how he invests the image with a deeper significance, in accordance with his own agenda. The first source, Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus* of c.1629 in the Louvre (fig.17), was a significant painting for Balthus on both a personal and artistic level. In 1925 the young artist spent three months copying Poussin's masterpiece as a gift for Rilke's fiftieth birthday, reciprocating the poet's dedication to him in January 1925 of his poem *Narcisse*.⁴¹ Balthus also referenced Poussin's picture in several paintings including *Summertime* (1935), *The Mountain* (1937)⁴² and *The Victim* of 1937⁴³ and used it, according to Nicolas Fox Weber to 'teach himself composition and spatial organisation.'⁴⁴ Close parallels exist between the subject of Balthus' illustrations and that of Poussin's work, with their common themes of youth, unrequited love, self-obsession, grief and death. In Ovid's telling of the myth, the handsome young Narcissus rejects the love of Echo the mountain nymph, causing her to waste away to nothing except her voice. Narcissus falls in love with his own reflection and gradually pines away, gazing at himself in a pool. Cathy is posed similarly to Poussin's dying Narcissus, occupying a horizontal, sleeping position within the foreground of the composition; her eyes are open though in

³⁹ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), IX, p.121.

⁴⁰ A. Breton: *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, University of Michigan Press, U.S.A., 1972.

⁴¹ Weber, *op. cit.* (note 5), chapter 5, p.102. Documented in correspondence between Rilke and Balthus' mother Baladine and between Rilke and Balthus, as quoted by Nicolas Fox Weber.

⁴² Sabine Rewald: 'Balthus's magic mountain', *Burlington Magazine*, Sept. 1997, Vol. 139, pp.622-628.

⁴³ Weber, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.100. Noted by the author.

⁴⁴ Weber, *op. cit.* (note 5), p.99.

the manner of a waking dream and she raises her right hand to repeat the gesture we observed in illustrations 3, 5 and 7. Taking further compositional cues from Poussin's painting, Balthus includes two leaning upright figures, Nelly, and Heathcliff. As our eyes move from Cathy to register Nelly's apprehension of Heathcliff's presence, our attention finally rests upon Heathcliff who turns away, alienated and heartbroken at his inability to save his love from her inevitable demise. The inclusion of the contented and recently rescued baby Hareton in Nelly's arms serves to intensify the impact of Cathy's physical and emotional decline.



Illustration 11: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *Nelly, do you sometimes dream queer dreams?*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. IX), 1933-1935, Chinese ink and crayon on paper, 39.8 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 17: Nicolas Poussin, *Echo and Narcissus*, towards 1630, oil on canvas, Paris, Louvre Museum, INV.7297. Photo ©Musée du Louvre, Dist.RMN-Grand Palais/Martine Beck-Coppola.



Figure 18: *Songs of Experience: The Angel* by William Blake, [1794] printed ca. 1825, relief etching printed in orange-brown ink and hand-coloured with watercolour and shell gold, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund 1917, Acc. No. 17,10.41. Available under the Met's Open Access Program, Creative Commons Zero (CC0), <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/347977?ft=william+blake+the+angel&offset=0&pp=40&pos=13>.

A second source for illustration 11, both in subject and composition, and which was certainly familiar to Balthus, is another of William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the *Angel of Experience* (fig.18). This illustrated poem conveys the disappointment brought about by age. A woman dreams of being guarded by an angel but because she hides her love from him, he departs and when he eventually returns she is "arm'd" with "ten thousand shields and spears": "For the time of youth was fled. And grey hairs were on my head." Like Poussin's *Echo and Narcissus*, Blake's image also features a horizontal, dreaming figure in the foreground with one arm raised and is very likely to have contributed to Balthus' conception of Cathy.



Figure 19: Balthus, character study for the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations, 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 30 x 28.5 cm, current location unknown. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

Compositionally, illustration 11 makes an interesting comparison with illustrations 1-4, since the three figures here form a broken outline, surrounding a central, triangular lacuna. If a harmonious, pyramidal arrangement of figures was earlier used to reflect Cathy and Heathcliff's idyllic childhood realm, Balthus now cleverly places the figures in a way which highlights the loss of that realm and the fracturing of Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship. In what appears to be an earlier character study for this scene (fig.19), Nelly, Cathy and Hareton form a tight, pyramidal grouping which could almost fit inside the empty triangle in illustration 11.⁴⁵ This earlier arrangement was not entirely unsuitable for expressing Cathy's defining moment of clarity, when she confides her true feelings to Nelly. However, at some point during the evolution of the project, Balthus re-worked and more-or-less reversed this concept, choosing to reserve the classic pyramidal composition exclusively for Cathy and Heathcliff's unsullied childhood days.

⁴⁵ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.495, l 1582.



Illustration 12: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *No, no, Isabella, you shan't run off*, (ch. X), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 31.5 x 26.5 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 20: Balthus, study for Illustration 12, *No, no, Isabella, you shan't run off*, (ch. X), 1933-35, Chinese ink on paper, 29.3 x 21 cm, current location unknown. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 21: Eugène Delacroix, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, (before restoration), oil and wax on plaster, Paris, The Church of Saint-Sulpice. Photo ©RMN-Grand Palais/Agence Bulloz.

Illustration 12 exposes Cathy and Heathcliff's relationship following the latter's return after a three-year absence. Heathcliff now finds Cathy married to Linton and unable to reciprocate his love. Physical and emotional tension is barely contained as Cathy cruelly restrains Heathcliff's admirer Isabella, who is pushing her body weight against her tormentor as she tries in vain to break free. Two sketches for this scene convey the sense of forced restraint even more strongly.⁴⁶ The second of these, containing two figural groupings, recalls paintings of mass abduction such as the Abduction of the Sabine women, a subject represented by many artists, including Rubens and Poussin. Isabella's unusual, head-butting posture in the final illustration is loosely reminiscent of a similarly posed woman in the right foreground of Sebastiano Ricci's painting of the subject for example.⁴⁷ A close and likely precedent however for the figures of Cathy and Isabella can be found in the stubborn struggle between the two figures in Delacroix's mural *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, of 1854-1861 (fig.21), in which Jacob is eventually rendered powerless by the angel. Isabella's head-butting posture, her prominently raised thigh, Cathy's muscular arm firmly gripping Isabella and even Cathy's face all recall Delacroix's famous composition. Furthermore, the former of the two preparatory studies (fig.20) is closer still to Delacroix's figural group, with Cathy's centre of gravity falling further back so that her right leg extends forward beneath Isabella's raised knee, her right arm stretching out fully across Isabella's body and Isabella's head resting on Cathy's chest. Balthus' apparent use of this source escalates the drama to an epic, spiritual level and underlines the

⁴⁶ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.494, I1578 and I1579.

⁴⁷ c.1700, Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna.

magnitude of Cathy's growing internal conflict. By now, despite many allusions to the fundamental innocence of her nature, Cathy has undergone a significant and unwelcome development from the young, tormented victim we first encountered to become herself something of a tormentor. Three studies, from a scene in chapter XV of the novel,⁴⁸ show Balthus experimenting with this idea more explicitly since they depict Cathy engaging in the very same act of hair-pulling as Frances in illustration 1.⁴⁹ Balthus appears to demonstrate a certain degree of awareness of the consequential complexities of mistreating the very young.



There, you've done with coming here! cried Catherine —

Illustration 13: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *There, you've done with coming here! cried Catherine*, (written inscription beneath the drawing), (ch. XI), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 35 x 26.9 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

The tension reaches breaking point in the penultimate illustration, which captures the moment after Heathcliff's violent attack on Linton. As Cathy lunges to the right, exclaiming "There, you've done with coming here," she faces the unbearable reality that her separation from Heathcliff is now irrevocable, and she wrenches herself away from her soul mate once and for all. Balthus often includes faceless figures, viewed from the rear, within his works and this is the third time he does so within the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations. Each time, in the sixth, eleventh and thirteenth, the device seems to correlate to the expression of an extreme state of emotion characterised by despair,

⁴⁸ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), XV, p.195.

⁴⁹ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.497, I1587, I1588 and I1589.

brokenness, loss and separation. Cathy's taut, leaning pose in illustration 13 bears a strong similarity to that of the halberdier in the right foreground of Raphael's drawing of *The Journey of Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini to Basle*,⁵⁰ and as illustration 14 will show, there is additional evidence to suggest that Balthus was familiar with Raphael's drawings in the Uffizi. Like Raphael's journeying halberdier, Cathy's pose creates a strong feeling of momentum across the page as we reach the closing stages of the drama. Furthermore, everything within illustration 13 tips towards the right in sympathy with her sideways stance, as if the room has been affected momentarily by the tremor of an earthquake. This is an unusual, directional depiction which introduces a disconcerting instability as we approach the dénouement.

And so, in his final illustration, Balthus draws events to their disastrously inevitable conclusion, powerfully summing up the various portents contained within the earlier images. While many of the drawings convey the sparse feel of bare-stage theatre, illustration 14 evokes the melodrama of a grand finale from tragic opera. Heathcliff assumes his familiar, unchanging stance, this time with a tortured, delirious expression and holding not a baby but Cathy's slumped body. It is the pair's final moment together before Cathy's death later that night. Balthus' sketched copies of Rubens' *The Rape of the daughters of Leucippus*, c.1618⁵¹ and Gericault's study for *The Raft of the Medusa*⁵² may have informed his conception of the main figures of Cathy and Heathcliff. However, like Delacroix before him (in the final, death scene of his *Hamlet* lithographs), Balthus turned to Raphael's *Entombment* of 1507 in Galleria Borghese, Rome, for the general composition of his dramatic narrative. Specifically, he appears to have looked at a famous pen drawing for the painting in the Uffizi (fig.22). With the draped, supported figure of Cathy corresponding to the dead Christ, a perplexed Linton appears in the doorway and mirrors the figure that looks on from the background in Raphael's *modello* but which was omitted in his final painting. The allusion to Christ's death renders the apparently unstable ground of the previous illustration prescient in the light of biblical descriptions of the crucifixion which describe the foundations of the earth shaking.

⁵⁰Florence, Uffizi, 520E. Reproduced in Paul Joannides, *The Drawings of Raphael with a Complete Catalogue*, University of California Press, and Phaidon Press, 1983, p.49.

⁵¹ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.412, CC1467/7.

⁵² Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.211, D396.



Illustration 14: For *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë. Balthus, *Catherine's arms had fallen relaxed, and her head hung down*, (ch. XV), 1933-1935, Chinese ink on paper, 29.4 x 26.2 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 22: Raffaello Sanzio, Study for the central group of *The Deposition*, July 1505 ca., pen over traces of black chalk, (squared in pen, red chalk and stylus), Florence, Uffizi Gallery, inv. GDSU n.538E. Reproduced with the kind permission of the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Uffizi Gallery. Photo: <http://www.mostraraffaello.it/dep-dis.htm>, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12079382>

The positioning of an emotional Nelly corresponds loosely with the placement of the fluid contrapposto figure to the right of Raphael's picture, although her precise gesture, placement and pose is close to Delacroix's figure of the swooning maid Alix in his 1829 lithograph *The Sister of Duguesclin* (fig.23). Since the maid in this chivalric tale was treacherously complicit in the entry into the castle of the two English soldiers it is likely that Balthus enjoyed this compositional allusion to nursemaid Nelly's pivotal role in Cathy's demise. It would certainly not have been lost on Balthus that this figure also bears an unmistakable similarity to the prominent figure of a woman lamenting the death of her child in the background of Poussin's *Massacre of the Innocents* (fig.24), albeit in reverse and without the dramatic and arched throwback of the head and upper body. This association invests Balthus' illustration with a sense of innocence destroyed violently and forcibly, an idea we have seen in earlier illustrations. It leaves us in little doubt that, while the lifeless human form is that of a fully grown woman, the final scene concludes a telling of Brontë's story which documents and ultimately mourns the death of the innocent child in Cathy.

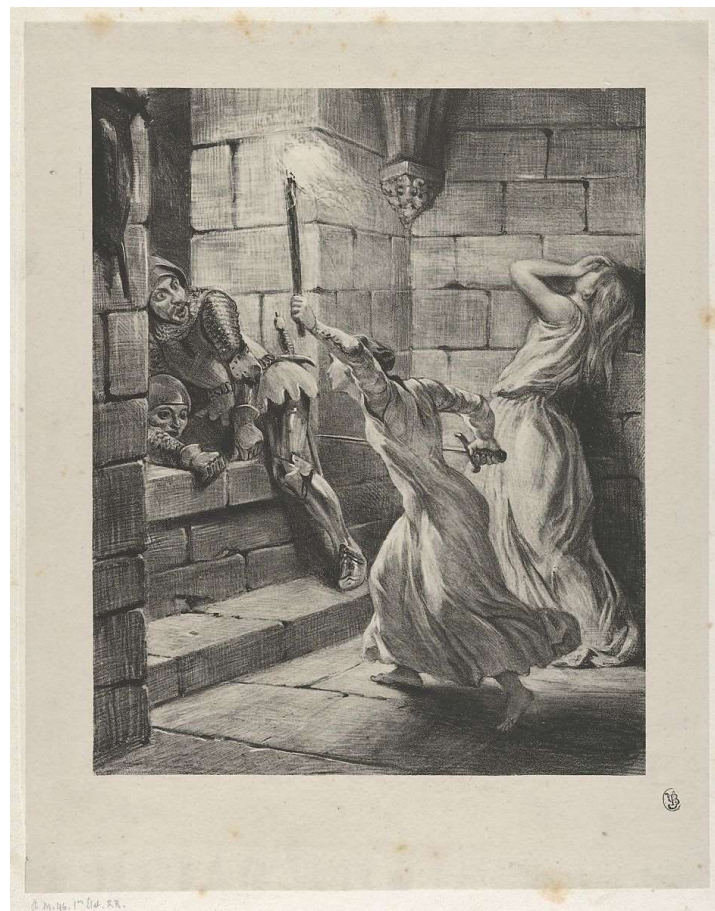


Figure 23: Eugène Delacroix, *The Sister of Duguesclin*, lithograph, 1829, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund 1923, Acc. No. 23.21.31. Available under the Met's Open Access Program, Creative Commons Zero (CC0).

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/336632?ft=delacroix+duguesclin+sister&offset=0&rpp=40&pos=1>.



Figure 24: Nicolas Poussin, *The Massacre of the Innocents*, c.1628, oil on canvas, Chantilly, Musée Condé, PE 305. Image reproduced with the kind permission of the Musée Conde, ©Musée Condé.

A fifteenth illustration⁵³ was added to the series much later in the two illustrated editions of the novel (Paris, Séguier, 1989 and New York, The Limited Editions Club, 1993).⁵⁴ Depicting a scene from chapter XII, it picks up on certain themes from earlier illustrations that Balthus clearly wished to reinforce. Having been confined to her room for days, in a delirious state of deteriorating health, Cathy feels close to death and has been dwelling feverishly upon the idyllic childhood she spent on the moors with Heathcliff. The specific scene pictured is where Cathy exclaims “Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I’m afraid of being alone!”⁵⁵ Brontë’s text reveals that it is Cathy’s own face that has been haunting her, which she views in the mirror on the wall, from her sick bed. The mirror is indistinct, although two similar preparatory sketches⁵⁶ clearly show Nelly beside the mirror, trying to reason with Cathy and then covering up the mirror with a shawl (fig.25); try as she might, she is incapable of making Cathy comprehend that the face is her own. Thus, the mirror motif of illustration 9 returns and Cathy reprises her role in illustration 11 as a Narcissus type; fading away before her own reflection, she epitomises youth, destructive self-obsession, grief, and death.

⁵³ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.496, I1583.

⁵⁴ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.485. (Notes on the publishing history of Balthus’ *Wuthering Heights* illustrations.)

⁵⁵ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), XII, p.161.

⁵⁶ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.496, I1586 and I1584.



Illustration 15: Balthus, *Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!*, (ch. XII), 1933-35, a drawing which was added later as the fifteenth illustration for *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë, Chinese ink on paper, 21.5 x 17.5 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 25: Balthus, study for *Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!*, 1933-35, Chinese ink on paper, 40 x 31 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

It is evident from this examination of Balthus' Illustrations of *Wuthering Heights*, that his interpretation of Brontë's novel differed fundamentally from that of Buñuel. Whilst the latter read it in accordance with his mainstream Surrealist ideas regarding mad passion (*l'amour fou*) which releases the unconscious to prevail over reason, Balthus saw it as confirming certain strong ideas he already held about childhood and adulthood. Since the main thrust of their individual readings of the text are so different and yet both so powerfully expressed, we can understand why Balthus was unwilling to collaborate with the great Surrealist filmmaker. It is part of the genius of Emily Brontë's writing style that allows for so many diverse readings and interpretations, without risk of compromise. Employing an indirect narrative method which precludes explicit authorial comment, it combined maximum statement with minimal explanation. This enigmatic quality was recognised at the time, leading Clement Shorter to describe its author as '...the sphinx of our modern literature'.⁵⁷

Certainly, there are many points of commonality between Balthus' series of illustrations and Surrealist ideas, including - as already mentioned - the importance of the dreamlife, and there are certain shared literary and artistic influences. And in general, the Surrealists saw children as having greater connection with the unconscious since growing up is partly a process of repressing unconscious drives. Indeed, childhood within Surrealism is a huge subject with many figures both at the centre of the group and towards its fringes taking an interest in childhood and child's play. Salvador Dali for example drew upon repressed childhood memories to create some of his compositions, Marcel Duchamp's *His Twine* installation of 1942 in New York famously featured a group of children playing in between lines of draped string and Jean Cocteau's *Les Enfants terribles* of 1929 concerns two siblings whose childhood world is shattered by the stresses of adolescence, a story that has obvious parallels with *Wuthering Heights* and Balthus' particular interpretation of it.

Buñuel's *Abismos de Pasión* and Balthus' illustrations for *Wuthering Heights* both reject reason and social convention. Equally laden with passion and melodrama, each culminates in tragic and inevitable death. And yet Buñuel's rendition of the story, in which the protagonists are united beyond the grave, is nevertheless triumphant in the face of death. In the true revolutionary, progressive and optimistic spirit of Surrealism a new order is established in which passion sweeps away reason, exposing the lies and hypocrisy of the social world and revealing itself as the only true force. By contrast the final scene of Balthus' interpretation, in which death brings about separation, the overwhelming atmosphere is one of defeat, loss and inconsolable despair as the pure and precious world of the child is destroyed and lost forever. While Buñuel's interpretation shows us how to live and love, Balthus' interpretation is a cautionary tale, the wreckage of Heathcliff's life demonstrating the consequences of abandoning the truth. We are left at the finale with a bleak scenario, seemingly devoid of comfort or remedy. And yet, the broken figure of Heathcliff still manages to elicit a germ of hope within the viewer, and we cannot help but admire his fearless idealism as the defiant protector of childhood until the very end, even while all those around him succumb to the destructive forces of the adult world. Instead of being portrayed, as he so often is, as the Byronic or romantic hero, Heathcliff becomes a very different hero in Balthus' hands, the guardian and upholder of childhood innocence and the only grown-up who perceives things as they really are. Balthus does give us Cathy and Heathcliff's love story but his version of it centres primarily

⁵⁷ M. Allott, *Emily Brontë: 'Wuthering Heights', A Selection of Critical Essays*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Press, 1993, introduction, p.12.

on the character of Heathcliff and his single-minded mission to take Cathy in a direction she cannot ultimately follow.

The roots of Balthus' reading of the text lie amongst the ideas associated with the nineteenth century Cult of Childhood. Stemming from Rousseau's seminal *Emile* of 1762, this literary phenomenon was exemplified in the work of English Romantic poets, including William Wordsworth and William Blake. It held up childhood as a state of innate freedom and innocence, to be valued and preserved from the corruption that comes from experience of the world. Some permutations of this ideology viewed childhood as a sacred condition, close to God as well as a force for moral redemption, while others recognised the impossibility of perpetual childhood or a refusal to grow up. Authors sometimes expressed their longing to become children once more, as in Lewis Carroll's poem *Solitude*. This sentiment is a key idea communicated through Cathy's character in *Wuthering Heights* and takes us to the heart of the novel's appeal to Balthus. In chapter XII, whilst confined to her room, Cathy exclaims: "I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy and free."⁵⁸ Balthus' own writings reveal that he possessed a similar mindset, which he appears to have projected onto the character of Heathcliff. Aged fourteen, significantly the same year in which he first read Brontë's novel, he wrote to a friend of his father's: "God knows how happy I would be if I could remain a child forever."⁵⁹ In his memoir he also muses: "I've never left my childhood, and perhaps that's why I've painted flowers and budding girls so tenaciously"⁶⁰ and: "I've often stated, and still say today, that I paint as I saw things earlier, in my childhood."⁶¹

The changes and dislocations of Balthus' later youth certainly played a part in his emotional attachment to childhood. His early life is a recurring theme of his memoir: he reminisces about "Happy days in Paris with my brother, my father, Erich, and my mother, Baladine."⁶² When asked whether he empathised with Heathcliff, the artist replied: "I did at the time, yes. Because I had a very different youth and a wonderful childhood and then I discovered the difficulties of life."⁶³ Balthus credited his beloved mother, who never "abandoned the spirit of childhood, with its secrets and grace against which time sharpens its teeth," for helping him to "hear the soft, muted music of another time."⁶⁴ But it was above all the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, with his "natural naïveté" and "childlike gaze,"⁶⁵ who was the critical influence upon Balthus' committed and heartfelt retreat to a form of nineteenth century childhood ideology. Rilke's own work is steeped in this ideology⁶⁶ and was highly influential upon the young artist. The poet also introduced Balthus to many relevant and complementary artistic and literary sources, including the work of William Blake.⁶⁷

Brontë's novel was an enduring influence upon Balthus, and he continued to exploit its themes, working up at least two of the illustrations into full-scale paintings: *The Blanchard Children* (1937)

⁵⁸ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), p.163.

⁵⁹ Balthus, letter to Professor Jean Strohl in Zurich, November 1922, Private collection. Quoted in Rewald: exh. cat. *Balthus: Cats and Girls*, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2013, p.6.

⁶⁰ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.208.

⁶¹ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.188.

⁶² Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.119.

⁶³ D. Bowie: "The Last Legendary Painter", *Modern Painters*, Autumn 1994, p.18.

⁶⁴ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.120.

⁶⁵ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.84.

⁶⁶ F. Wood: *Rainer Maria Rilke. The Ring of Forms*, Minneapolis, 1958, p.27.

⁶⁷ Mason, *op. cit.* (note 25).

and *Cathy Dressing* (1933.) Later paintings also appear to draw heavily upon his illustrations for *Wuthering Heights*, as we saw for example in the discussion of illustration 9. One might even say that the series is a manifesto of sorts for his entire oeuvre since his paintings invariably appear to portray the transience and fragility of childhood, the malevolent and destructive force of burgeoning adolescence and the cruelty of experience. We are certainly prompted to consider his art afresh, through the lens of the distinct stages of the progressive deterioration of childhood consciousness, as laid out elaborately and almost analytically within the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations.

In 1934, a year after painting *Cathy Dressing*, Balthus painted *The Guitar Lesson*, his most controversial work. It is proposed here that this too was a large-scale, worked-up extension of the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations. Specifically, it appears to be an amalgamation of the first *Wuthering Heights* illustration and preparatory studies in which Cathy pulls Heathcliff's hair, with added references to the ultimate fate contained within the final illustration. Although the music teacher has been likened to Balthus' mother Baladine,⁶⁸ her appearance recalls that of Frances in illustration 1. Both these characters indulge in the cruel act of hair-pulling and prominent use is made of both arms in each case, the right to pull the hair and the left to restrain the victim. Furthermore, a sketch for *The Guitar Lesson* (fig.26) is executed in a similar graphic style to that employed in the *Wuthering Heights* series⁶⁹ and when viewed alongside the first illustration, the music student's expression, and sideways head position echo that of Cathy. It is notable that in this sketch the music student wears the same round-necked, long-sleeved top or dress, tied in a fine bow at the neck, that Cathy wears in the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations; in the finished version of *The Guitar Lesson* Balthus modified the clothing, giving the music student a dress with a wider bow at the neck, together with a long-sleeved cardigan. An illustration and two associated studies exist which depict a scene from chapter XV that Balthus decided not to include in the final series of illustrations.⁷⁰ Here, Heathcliff kneels on one knee to embrace Cathy but when he attempts to rise she seizes his hair and keeps him down. In the most cursory of the two studies (fig.27)⁷¹ it is significant that Cathy, seated and leaning forward on a balloon-backed chair, with one breast seemingly exposed, is posed similarly to the music teacher in *The Guitar Lesson*. And Heathcliff, who is positioned almost orthogonally to Cathy with his knees bent and his legs slightly apart, is presented in a manner reminiscent of the music student's pose in the same painting.

⁶⁸ Sabine Rewald: "Some Notes on Balthus's Nonmusical Guitar Lesson," *Notes in the History of Art*, Vol. 11, no. 3/4, Essays in honour of Gert Schiff, 1992, p.59-62.

⁶⁹ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.221, D451.

⁷⁰ These have already been mentioned in passing. See note 47.

⁷¹ Clair and Monnier, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.497, I1589.



Figure 26: Balthus, study for *The Guitar Lesson*, 1934. Chinese ink on paper, 25 x 20 cm, private collection. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.



Figure 27: Balthus, study for *Heathcliff had knelt on one knee to embrace her; he attempted to rise, but she seized his hair, and kept him down*, (ch. XV), Chinese ink on paper, current location unknown. ©Reproduced with the kind permission of Harumi Klossowska de Rola, rights owner of Balthus.

The Guitar Lesson hangs heavy with the connotation of holy death and mourning through its pieta-like figural arrangement,⁷² and is particularly reminiscent of the 15th century Burgundian *Pieta* sculpture in the Louvre with its tight arrangement and androgynous Mary, who leans over an awkwardly posed Christ. In this specific context, the expansive, dark underside of the student's dress acquires tomb-like connotations. The teacher's exposed breast recalls religious images of maternal nursing and reinforces the association between the music student and the innocent Christ figure. As well as suggesting the strumming of guitar strings, the music teacher's left hand is also posed similarly to how a mother might present the breast to her nursing child; it is particularly close for example to the Madonna's left hand in Andrea Solario's *Madonna with the Green Cushion* of 1507-10 in The Louvre. Notwithstanding the undeniably disturbing nature of *The Guitar Lesson*, the links observed here between this work and the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations highlight some overlap between their themes: in particular, the perversion of guardianship, the violent cruelty that exists in the adult world, and the spiritual death of the innocent child as he or she experiences that cruelty and is forced to make the transition to adulthood. *The Guitar Lesson* does not appear to represent two individual persons or characters but instead combines different aspects of the characters of Frances, Cathy and Heathcliff from Balthus' *Wuthering Heights* illustrations and their associated studies.

To conclude, the essential subject of Balthus' Illustrations of *Wuthering Heights* is Cathy Earnshaw's turbulent transition from childhood to adulthood. The precious and uncomplicated innocence of her youth is celebrated but this is under constant threat from the very beginning. As we follow Cathy's tragic story, scene by scene, the fragile childhood realm she shares with Heathcliff is overshadowed by the prospect of death and is eventually destroyed by the malevolent rationale of the adult world. While this is a natural and inevitable process, adults do appear to have some agency in deliberately turning the young, innocent Cathy from one state of consciousness to the other. Moreover, there is a sinister and complex undercurrent which makes itself felt at times in cruel, humiliating behaviours which appear to have a disorientating, corrupting effect upon her.

The more specific focus of the illustrations is the character of Heathcliff, with whom Balthus clearly identifies. Playing the starring role as defender of childhood, Heathcliff observes and tries to arrest the process of growing up. His unsophisticated, rigid nature is manifest in his obstinate refusal to adapt to any of the changes going on around him. However, he never becomes an object of pity but stands heroically as an idealistic figure who views life in extreme terms of right and wrong, truth versus deception; someone who champions the importance of making difficult but authentic decisions at the important junctions of life instead of dishonest and calculated compromises. He is a lone and valiant beacon of hope who never gives up on his childhood vision of the world, nor on his true childhood love and soulmate, Cathy Earnshaw. Cathy herself knew the truth, admitting as much to nurse Nelly as she spoke of Heathcliff: "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same."⁷³ And yet despite a brave, spiritual struggle of epic proportions, fuelled entirely by Heathcliff's almost superhuman will and determination, Cathy is not strong enough to escape the forces of the adult world, or indeed to survive the conflict. Balthus' portrayal of Heathcliff represents a highly personal interpretation of Emily Brontë's famous character, arising from his deeply held apprehension about life. While there are some points of contact between the illustrations and

⁷² Rewald, *op. cit.* (note 68), p.59.

⁷³ Brontë, *op. cit.* (note 10), IX, p.121.

contemporary Surrealist ideas, as one would expect, Balthus' version of the story displays a fundamental independence of thought and feeling that we perceive in all his art.

Balthus has stated that "the artist must not become a storyteller. The anecdote should not exist in painting."⁷⁴ Rather, he valued art for its ability to convey "the essence of things"⁷⁵ and to reveal a "deeper elucidation of the world."⁷⁶ Balthus' powerful illustrations of *Wuthering Heights* satisfy his own criteria in a remarkable way, encapsulating his feelings about the human condition within each stage of the narrative. Central to Balthus' achievement is his expressive mastery of composition and his constant re-interpretation of diverse sources from the art of the past whose visual elements, themes and meanings deliberately underscore, enrich, and lend authority to his underlying world view. Extant studies - all in pen - for the *Wuthering Heights* illustrations, produced over a two-to-three-year period, provide valuable insights into the evolution of Balthus' response to the text and bear witness to the prolonged seriousness with which he held the task of re-interpreting Emily Brontë's unique masterpiece in pictorial form.

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⁷⁴Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.105.

⁷⁵Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.35 and p.208.

⁷⁶ Balthus, *op. cit.* (note 7), p.95.