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Methods of Narration in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

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M.A. Studies

2025-2026

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë constructs a double-nested frame narrative: an outer frame narrated by Mr. Lockwood and an inner frame narrated by Nelly Dean. Rather than providing an objective, omniscient perspective, Brontë filters the tragedy through two deeply flawed, subjective observers whose personal biases and limitations shape how the story is told.

1. Mr. Lockwood: The Naïve, Urban Outsider

Lockwood serves as the reader's initial doorway into the world of the moors, but his unreliability stems from his vanity, city-bred assumptions, and fundamental inability to understand the people around him.

- **Superficial Misinterpretations:** Lockwood repeatedly misreads human interactions because he projects polite London social norms onto a raw, hostile environment. In the opening chapters, he foolishly assumes Heathcliff is a refined "capital fellow" hiding a sensitive heart, mistakes a pile of dead rabbits for a collection of puppies, and assumes Young Cathy is Heathcliff's wife.
- **Emotional Shallow-Mindedness:** Lockwood fancies himself a romantic misanthrope seeking solitude from city life, yet his narrative reveals him to be emotionally cowardly. He recounts an incident where he fled a young woman at the seacoast the moment she returned his romantic interest, proving that his understanding of love is purely aesthetic and superficial—making him completely incapable of comprehending the elemental passion between Catherine and Heathcliff.
- **Sickness and Dependency:** Lockwood is confined to bed for much of the novel, forcing him to consume the story second-hand through Nelly Dean.

He transcribes her words through his own biased lens, adding another layer of distance from the truth.

2. Nelly Dean: The Biased, Meddling Insider

While Lockwood is unreliable due to ignorance, Nelly Dean is unreliable due to her intimacy with the characters and her desire to justify her own actions.

- **Conventional Moralizing and Class Bias:** As a domestic housekeeper steeped in traditional mid-Victorian Christian morality, Nelly judges passions and impulses that fall outside conventional social standards. She views Catherine Earnshaw as proud and wicked, while favoring the refined, gentle Edgar Linton.
- **Active Meddling disguised as Duty:** Nelly is far from a passive observer; her actions actively drive the plot's tragic turning points. She frequently keeps secrets, delays delivering vital messages, and manipulates information—such as failing to inform Edgar of Catherine's deteriorating health or hiding the secret correspondence between Young Cathy and Linton—to avoid blame or punish characters she dislikes.
- **Self-Preserving Retelling:** Nelly tells the story to Lockwood to present herself as the sole voice of reason, prudence, and morality within two dysfunctional households. She selectively emphasizes the faults of others while minimizing her own complicity in exacerbating domestic conflicts.

3. How the Double-Frame Structure Shapes the Story

[Reader] —► [Mr. Lockwood (Outer Frame)] —► [Nelly Dean (Inner Frame)] —► [The Earnshaw / Linton Tragedy]

Creates Psychological and Aesthetic Distance

The raw violence, domestic abuse, and destructive passions of *Wuthering Heights* would have been deeply shocking to 19th-century Victorian readers. Filtering these events through Lockwood's conventional urban perspective and Nelly's practical domestic voice buffers the raw intensity, giving the core story a mythic, almost legendary resonance.

Forces the Reader to Become an Active Detective

Because neither narrator offers an absolute truth, Brontë forces the reader to read between the lines. The reader must constantly filter out Lockwood's arrogance and Nelly's self-righteous moralizing to reconstruct what actually occurred, transforming the reading experience into an active exercise in interpretation.

Highlights the Clash of Worldviews

The structure creates a narrative sandwich where three distinct worldviews collide:

1. **The Polite Urban Elite (Lockwood):** Represents artificial decorum and surface-level romanticism.
2. **Conventional Domestic Morality (Nelly):** Represents social duty, religious moralizing, and practical order.
3. **The Core Narrative (Heathcliff & Catherine):** Represents wild nature, elemental force, and passion that rejects societal and religious boundaries.