Although the frame-story is told my Mr Lockwood, the and tenant of Thrushcross Grange gentleman-in-retreat from a star-crossed life, the body of the narrative is conducted by Mrs. Ellen Dean who tells him everything she knows about the story Earnshaws and the Lintons just as she lived through it in her capacity as a servant by turns at Wuthering Heights and the Grange. The credulity of her story largely depends on the supposition that she was present at all of the key events, or else that she is repeating verbatim what other characters such as Isabella, Zillah and even Heathcliff himself, have told here; and all of these insertions are marked by quotation marks—either single or double inverted commas as the occasion requires.

Her narrative, although technically transcribed by Lockwood, is not however marked by such brackets which would, as a consequence, give rise to the pattern ‘“…”’ and even ‘“‘…”’. Inevitably, therefore, the system of notation breaks down when Lockwood hands over to Nelly at some points—as for instance, at the beginning of Chapter XV, there are no diacriticals at all. Moreover, his ensuing remarks are actually about her competence as a story-teller and his belief that it can hardly be improved upon by any alteration of his, and hence her continuation seems almost the same narration, though logically it is not.

Emily Bronte takes some trouble to state the reasons why Ellen Dean is qualified to tell the story as well as any novelist, or why Mr Lockwood is enabled to entrust her with a telling presumably addressed to an educated audience of his own class, language skills, and understanding. The reason, it appears, is that she has educated herself by perusing all but the Greek and Latin books in her master’s study while resident at Thrushcross as a family servant. She is thus a lower-class women who has worked, like her own mother, as a nurse to the Earnshaw’s children and later those of the Lintons, and who was raised alongside Hindley Earnshaw and shared in his cultural advantages.

While this important aspect of her character is not elaborated in any further detail, it serves to warrant her being entrusted with the narration and only marginally aroses suspicions about the real probability of any such cross-class transaction taking place. In view of such a fiction of her assiduous self-education amid the available books of the house—time being permitted to do so—she actually becomes a model of self-improvement to set beside *Pamela* in Richardson’s tale of ‘virtue rewarded’. Yet, finally, the self-education of Nelly is a narrative contrivance and a pretext for entrusting her with the telling of the story.

Alternately, Lockwood could confess to having heard the story from an ill-educated servant who saw it all enfolding, and then retells it in his own idiom and that of his social peers This would significantly change our sense of who she is, who he is and, with that, the entire bundle of epistemological and narratorial relations which comprise the framework of the novel. In this respect it may be said that Wuthering Heights narrowly escapes fatal improbability at the structural level no less than at the level of personality and events—but escape it she does.

Clearly, the author felt it necessary to explain how Nelly developed her language-skills and also why Lockwood is prepared to hand the telling over to her—or, otherwise, to trust in her narrative as an adequate, and perhaps the best, rendering of the story she has to tell. That this involves a somewhat uneven trace of her own role in tolerating and even instigating the events of the narrative constitutes a special dimension of the characterology of the story: does she agree to arrange the fatal meeting between Healthcliff and Catherine so close to her death because she acquiesces in his implausible explanations, or because the narration requires that she be present at such a scene? It is odd, indeed, that the passage in which Bronte allows Lockwood to speak of Ellen’s aptness as a narrator is the opening of the melodrama chapter in which that meeting takes place (Chap. XV).

It is notable that the concluding passage of the novel is supplied by Lockwood, talking in an elegiac tone which is quite beyond her reach where he speaks of the graveyard containing the remains of Catherine, Edgar and Heathcliff which he visits on an unplanned return to the region: “I lingered round them, under that benign sky: watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass, and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth.”

**Chap. IV**

[Lockwood narrating:] What vain weathercocks we are!  I, who had determined to hold myself independent of all social intercourse, and thanked my stars that, at length, I had lighted on a spot where it was next to impracticable—I, weak wretch, after maintaining till dusk a struggle with low spirits and solitude, was finally compelled to strike my colours; and under pretence of gaining information concerning the necessities of my establishment, I desired Mrs. Dean, when she brought in supper, to sit down while I ate it; hoping sincerely she would prove a regular gossip, and either rouse me to animation or lull me to sleep by her talk.

‘You have lived here a considerable time,’ I commenced; ‘did you not say sixteen years?’

‘Eighteen, sir: I came when the mistress was married, to wait on her; after she died, the master retained me for his housekeeper.’

[…]

The worthy woman bustled off, and I crouched nearer the fire; my head felt hot, and the rest of me chill: moreover, I was excited, almost to a pitch of foolishness, through my nerves and brain.  This caused me to feel, not uncomfortable, but rather fearful (as I am still) of serious effects from the incidents of to-day and yesterday.  She returned presently, bringing a smoking basin and a basket of work; and, having placed the former on the hob, drew in her seat, evidently pleased to find me so companionable.

Before I came to live here, she commenced—waiting no farther invitation to her story—I was almost always at Wuthering Heights; because my mother had nursed Mr. Hindley Earnshaw, that was Hareton’s father, and I got used to playing with the children: I ran errands too, and helped to make hay, and hung about the farm ready for anything that anybody would set me to.  One fine summer morning—it was the beginning of harvest, I remember—Mr. Earnshaw, the old master, came down-stairs, dressed for a journey; and, after he had told Joseph what was to be done during the day, he turned to Hindley, and Cathy, and me—for I sat eating my porridge with them—and he said, speaking to his son, ‘Now, my bonny man, I’m going to Liverpool to-day, what shall I bring you?  You may choose what you like: only let it be little, for I shall walk there and back: sixty miles each way, that is a long spell!’  Hindley named a fiddle, and then he asked Miss Cathy; she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip.  He did not forget me; for he had a kind heart, though he was rather severe sometimes.  He promised to bring me a pocketful of apples and pears, and then he kissed his children, said good-bye, and set off.

It seemed a long while to us all—the three days of his absence—[…]

**Chap. VII**

[…; Lockword to Ellen, while recovering from illness:]

‘[…] I perceive that people in these regions acquire over people in towns the value that a spider in a dungeon does over a spider in a cottage, to their various occupants; and yet the deepened attraction is not entirely owing to the situation of the looker-on.  They do live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface, change, and frivolous external things.  I could fancy a love for life here almost possible; and I was a fixed unbeliever in any love of a year’s standing.  One state resembles setting a hungry man down to a single dish, on which he may concentrate his entire appetite and do it justice; the other, introducing him to a table laid out by French cooks: he can perhaps extract as much enjoyment from the whole; but each part is a mere atom in his regard and remembrance.’

‘Oh! here we are the same as anywhere else, when you get to know us,’ observed Mrs. Dean, somewhat puzzled at my speech.

‘Excuse me,’ I responded; ‘you, my good friend, are a striking evidence against that assertion.  Excepting a few provincialisms of slight consequence, you have no marks of the manners which I am habituated to consider as peculiar to your class.  I am sure you have thought a great deal more than the generality of servants think.  You have been compelled to cultivate your reflective faculties for want of occasions for frittering your life away in silly trifles.’

Mrs. Dean laughed.

‘I certainly esteem myself a steady, reasonable kind of body,’ she said; ‘not exactly from living among the hills and seeing one set of faces, and one series of actions, from year’s end to year’s end; but I have undergone sharp discipline, which has taught me wisdom; and then, I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood.  You could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into, and got something out of also: unless it be that range of Greek and Latin, and that of French; and those I know one from another: it is as much as you can expect of a poor man’s daughter.  However, if I am to follow my story in true gossip’s fashion, I had better go on; and instead of leaping three years, I will be content to pass to the next summer—the summer of 1778, that is nearly twenty-three years ago.’

[…]

**Chap. VIII**

On the morning of a fine June day my first bonny little nursling, and the last of the ancient Earnshaw stock, was born.  We were busy with the hay in a far-away field, when the girl that usually brought our breakfasts came running an hour too soon across the meadow and up the lane, calling me as she ran.

[…]

**Chap. XV**

Another week over—and I am so many days nearer health, and spring!  I have now heard all my neighbour’s history, at different sittings, as the housekeeper could spare time from more important occupations.  I’ll continue it in her own words, only a little condensed.  She is, on the whole, a very fair narrator, and I don’t think I could improve her style.

[…; Nelly continues her narration:]

In the evening, she said, the evening of my visit to the Heights, I knew, as well as if I saw him, that Mr. Heathcliff was about the place; and I shunned going out, because I still carried his letter in my pocket, and didn’t want to be threatened or teased any more.  I had made up my mind not to give it till my master went somewhere, as I could not guess how its receipt would affect Catherine.  The consequence was, that it did not reach her before the lapse of three days.  The fourth was Sunday, and I brought it into her room after the family were gone to church.  There was a manservant left to keep the house with me, and we generally made a practice of locking the doors during the hours of service; but on that occasion the weather was so warm and pleasant that I set them wide open, and, to fulfil my engagement, as I knew who would be coming, I told my companion that the mistress wished very much for some oranges, and he must run over to the village and get a few, to be paid for on the morrow.  He departed, and I went up-stairs.

Mrs. Linton sat in a loose white dress, […]