Crying in the Novel

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Introduction: Crying in Class

If there is no church in the wild, if there is study rather than knowledge production, if there is a way of being together in brokenness, if there is an undercommons, then we must all find our way to it. And it will not be there where the wild things are, it will be a place where refuge is not necessary and you will find that you were already in it all along.

*Jack Halberstam,*

*The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*¹

It is hard to write about this moment.² It is one thing to feel loss, but it is another to fall asleep and wake up to loss. The loss is everywhere, even in places I cannot see. I don’t know how to measure what it means for time to pass. Which simile will do? What can I make of newscasts and grocery-store conversations? This moment feels unanchored, even in history.³ There is an urgency that guides this thesis, since learning how to live together seems more timely than ever. Learning how to live together, for me, is an exercise in language and critical thought. As I think during this pandemic, I become more and more aware of the gaps within and beneath language. And as I learn how to live right now, I find myself asking the same questions that guided this thesis: what is outside of language? What do we make of the things language cannot represent?

With these questions of language also come questions of reading. How can we read for what

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¹Stefano Harney and Fred Moten. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study.* (Wivenhoe: Minor Compositions, 2013), 12.

²As I finish this thesis, I am in the midst of a global pandemic that is unequally affecting communities and populations worldwide. I recognize both my ability to finish this thesis, and the time that I have been afforded to think, question, and study—both in this moment and outside of it. As the pandemic continues, the systems that many saw as natural, objective, and ever present are being critically analyzed. I write this thesis in that spirit of critical thought and praxis.

³The past is usually used to explain the present insofar as news channels and newspapers go. However, as someone seeing the pandemic unfold in the United States, it feels inaccurate to say that there is a historical understanding of the situation (at least at the level of the state).
isn’t overtly present in language? And, how does a careful study of language allow us to study the history of imperialism and hegemonic structures? This thesis is not a singular project. Instead, I think of it as another step and another beginning to a set of questions that I have been working on through the past two years.

The chapters ahead are concerned with literature, both as imaginative and realist. As an imaginative mode, literature is the space of invention and discovery. Literature also makes use of discursive spaces and imagines discursive possibilities. Characters talk to each other in the world of language and with language; literature imagines conversation and people living together. Literature also sometimes is realist, in that it tries to accurately represent reality. It is important here to repeat the obvious, that literature consists only of language: all that happens in literature happens in the realm of language. Realist literature, or realist novels for instance, then, take reality and distill it into language until only words remain. The realist novel has a socioeconomic history: its focus shifted from the nobility or aristocracy to the middle class.

However, while literature is the focus of the next two chapters, this project began elsewhere. I began this project in the space of the classroom. And while I am now interested in crying, I began thinking about emotion and physicality by considering laughter in the space of the classroom. That thinking culminated in a research paper about laughter in class, and through that I learnt about the ways that physical displays of emotion change the way we interact with each other in discursive environments. However, by the end of that project, I realized that there was a more pressing question I had in mind: why don’t we cry in class? Or, in other words, what does crying in the space of the classroom do? I was still deeply invested in the classroom as a space that values discussion, and I was interested in what could or could not be part of those
discussions. In talking with students, it was clear that people cried less in classrooms and laughed more. Each time someone cried in class, it was a memorable experience; it was also a deeply uncomfortable one. Through an independent study, I thought through the affective space of the classroom, and the ways that crying might differ from language. Consider the scenario: there is a discussion in a classroom, a student makes a comment, the instructor cries. One cannot ask of the crying, “is it true?” The tears take up physical space. They pose different problems of comprehension. They also create discomfort: people don’t really know what to do when someone cries in class.4

This study was not situated in an abstract classroom, but instead in the classrooms I inhabited everyday. The literature classroom, for instance, influenced by Enlightenment thought and western liberalism, can be thought of as a space of progress and learning, one that aims to engage students in a linear model of knowledge. As Fredric Jameson reminds us, the university depends upon “enlightenment-type critiques and demystification of belief and committed ideology, in order to clear the ground for unobstructed planning and ‘development.’”5 The literature classroom is a space of reading, of close and critical examinations of language. It is a space where individuals read together and question together. The seminar classroom exemplifies this emphasis on dialogue, on the importance of talking to one another to produce knowledge. However, it is not always the space for the inexplicable, or the incomprehensible. Even in the literature classroom, students and professors don’t usually cry. The university—including the literature classroom—demystifies or at least airms to demystify. Crying jolts the space out of this

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4 I say this partly from my own experiences as someone who has cried a fair amount in the classroom, and also from observing others.

“progress” narrative. In a discursive environment, crying does not function in the way that sentences do: it does not move the conversation along diametrically.

My interest in crying deepened as I read the works of authors such as Sara Ahmed and Sianne Ngai, who understand emotion as culturally and socially influenced. And then I moved, slowly and suddenly, from the classroom to the novel. Literature tries things out: the space of the novel is the space of imagined scenarios and circumstances, of mimicry and reconciliation. The novel is also a space that reflects and shapes political and sociocultural beliefs; the novel is not apolitical or innocent. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács writes, “As form, the novel establishes a fluctuating yet firm balance between becoming and being; as the idea of becoming, it becomes a state. Thus the novel, by transforming itself into a normative being of becoming, surmounts itself.” The novel feels self-enclosed and always contains its own shortcomings or absences. This thesis, then, takes place in the novel but tugs at its edges to see what might be underneath or outside. If a novel itself is “a state,” what does it let go of in this transformation? Which instabilities give way to its apparent stability, to its “becoming”? And as mentioned before, my interest lies in crying, in the uneasy uncomfortable displays of physical emotion. Crying is outside or underneath the novel in that it cannot be represented semantically or linguistically; it is recounted or elided. I am taking crying seriously, as both a sound and an utterance. Crying is also the action that produces tears, which take up physical space and act on the world around them.

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Linguistically, tears don’t denote meaning the same way words do. In *How To Do Things With Words*, J.L. Austin starts by talking about performative language. In discussing “explicit performatives” he writes of the way that print conventions render performatives explicit. For example when we use tone of voice or cadence, those features are not reproducible in language. “For example,” he writes, “we have tried to convey the tone of voice cadence and emphasis of a protest by the use of an exclamation mark and a question mark (but this is very jejune).” Speech acts are bigger than, and include, written acts or written language. The closest thing to tears at the level of written language would perhaps be a single-exclamation point sentence.

In reading literature, it is hard to not encounter mentions of tears. However, when I looked closely, it was clear that tears were refracted by literature; they turned into something strange and almost unrecognizable when on the page. Tears in language cannot and do not retain their individual integrity. They were either described in terms of what they were not (fiery rage or solemn coolness) or turned into things that were no longer tears. When tears streamed down faces, they erased their own becoming. When they nestled in eyelashes, they were made one with the face. Tears also cannot speak for themselves in literature: they are recounted, narrated, obscured. When instances of crying take place in literature, all the emphasis is on the action: on the bursting, the gushing, the exploding.

The two chapters that follow are studies of such instances. The first chapter is situated in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, where Alice finds herself in a pool of her own tears. The pool of tears is a physical space outside of Alice (she nearly drowns in it), but the tears are Alice’s own (she shrinks after crying them). The pool then poses a problem both of

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9 Austin. *How to Do Things with Words*, 74.
scale and ontology, of interiority and exteriority, of emotion and of logic. What does it mean to drown in one’s own tears? What are the boundaries between “inside” and “outside”? This chapter is also of course about Alice’s bourgeois, Victorian upbringing and cognitive landscape. Alice makes sense of where she is by introducing the landmarks she is familiar with: trains, railway stations, beaches. When she finds herself in the pool of tears, she also finds herself in a mental matrix of sorts, in a crisis of identity and personhood, at crossroads with language and meaning itself. This chapter is then also about discursive environments, what it means to speak to another person, and what the sentence teaches us about personhood.

The second chapter studies crying by way of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*. *Wuthering Heights* is a strange, violent, passionate novel that changes the way we understand realism and the realist tradition. One way that it does this is through tears: almost everyone cries in the novel, and most characters cry several times. The chapter traces instances of crying while also tracking the height of imperialism and slavery; in it I try to read the tears as tears and also as indices of other phenomena present in Victorian consciousness. In this chapter I am also interested in the relationship between death and language, since crying in the novel is understood in terms of its associations with death. In *Wuthering Heights*, characters can cry after they have died. The novel also presents tears as a response to death, and sometimes as only acceptable if one is grieving a death or is dying. This characterization allows us to understand the societal rules of both the culture the novel was written into, but also into ways that language is imagined and governed. What, for instance, is a scandal of representation, or of language?\(^\text{10}\) What constitutes taboo?

While these two novels are interesting ways into tears, crying, and emotional displays outside of language, they are only a beginning. What this does allow us to see, however, is the unrepresentable or the invisible, the non-sentence like and the unsemantic. Reading for the tears is then also a practice of reading, one that allows for the text to refer to elements outside of itself, to leave things out, and to be always already incomplete. Tears take up physical space, but not in the way that the pages of a novel do. In fact, as I read the news, my tears wet the pages of the newspaper, rendering the letters almost invisible.
Crying and Imperialism in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

“Language is never innocent.” - Roland Barthes\(^\text{11}\)

“Wonder here seems premised on ‘first-ness’: the object that appears before the subject is encountered for the first time, or *as if* for the first time.” - Sara Ahmed\(^\text{12}\)

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is directly concerned with language and conversation: language breaks down, mis-signifies, ambiguates, fails.\(^\text{13}\) The text asks what language is, and whether it accurately communicates what its participants intend. In this chapter, I argue that *Alice* is asking a version of the question at the center of my thesis: what do tears do in the discursive space? This one question nestles within itself several other questions. For instance, how does literature represent that which is beyond language? Is it possible to write about what writing itself forecloses in order to exist? Crying makes things happen. Sometimes it is an aftermath of an unknown disaster, although there are aftermaths without disasters. Crying is an aftermath that calls attention to itself as one. The lights in the cinema turn on to reveal faces soaked with tears once the movie ends. Could crying mark beginnings? How does it change the way people talk to each other? *Alice* is a cultural text, which, like Edward Said writes in *Culture and Imperialism* “are protean things, they are tied to circumstances and to politics large and small, and these require attention and criticism. But reading and writing texts are never neutral activities: there are interests, powers, passions, pleasures entailed no matter how aesthetic or

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entertaining the work.”

Alice here is a work of literature that is about tears, croquet, playing cards, and caucus races, and also about British imperialism, industrialization, and cultural commensurability. To echo Barthes, to divorce innocence from language is not to read vindictively, but instead recognize the role of power and material circumstances in the processes of writing and reading.

Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* is on one level about games and puzzles. Few would dispute this claim—Carroll was a mathematician, and the text has been continually analyzed for its logical and mathematical implications and evocations. However, it also reveals a fascination on his part with the imaginative possibilities latent in a “confrontation of cultures”—the kind of encounter that the imperial experience of the nineteenth century was bringing to the forefront of European consciousness. One of the questions *Alice* asks, then, is what happens when one deposits aspects of English culture in a “foreign” land populated by beings who live by unfamiliar rules? In short, this chapter in part examines Alice's relationship to imperialism because the dilemma in which she finds herself seems designed to raise questions about her assumption that all discourses are either self-evidently commensurable or can be made to seem so. In other words, cultural commensurability is understood by Alice in a way that furthers British imperialism. In *Alice*, Carroll renders a world organized by gamelike social structures in which mastery of the game promises mastery of others. Essential to imperialism is

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15 I get my sense of cultural commensurability here by way of Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s definition, that began in the semantic sphere, and further proceeded to argue that the fundamental problem was one of the ‘indeterminacy of translation.’ Subrahmanyam focuses on the power differentials between cultures, but also argues that incommensurability is irrelevant since dialogue itself cannot be indicative of inter-imperial relationships. For more, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam. *Courtly Encounters : Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia*, (Cumberland: Harvard University Press, 2012.)
language. However, language in *Alice* is complicated and complex, and the discursive space is marked with outward displays of emotion. In this chapter, I argue that the narrative of *Alice* is propelled by the act and effects of crying. In other words, the involuntary nature of crying—seen most prominently in the second chapter, “The Pool of Tears,” governs all of Alice’s actions. Tears index moments; they also allow for the story to move outside of Alice. In “The Pool of Tears,” language and crying interact with each other in ways that could explain both the imperial context that the story references and is referenced by, as well as the role of tears themselves in discursive spaces.

What we get in the title of the chapter—the pool of tears—we get literally by the middle of the chapter. Alice’s foot suddenly slips into a pool of what she thinks is salt-water. It takes Alice a while to be sure that she “was in the pool of tears which she had wept when she was nine feet high.” (*Alice*, 19) The tears quite literally surround Alice; she is surrounded by crying. Her tears, although they once were a part of her, now make up her outside—she knows she exists because she is surrounded by tears. Given the unique situation she is in—the “first-ness” of it—Alice isn’t sure what the salt-water that surrounds her is. Her inability to define her outside or inside is a kind of fracturing, a kind of wonder. Her first thought sketches out her cognitive landscape. “Her first idea,” the narrator says, “was that she had somehow fallen into the sea.” (*Alice*, 19) The sea is also composed of salt-water; this makes material sense. However, it is the next idea she has that is fascinating—she is sure she can escape and “go back on the railway.” In many ways, Alice is an ordinary bourgeois child of her era. The railway is essential to her world-view: no matter where she is in the world, she is confident she can talk a train back home.
This is also an imperial gesture—railways, of course, played an instrumental role in the process of extraction by the British Empire.

The narrator here enters again (parenthetically) to explain, “Alice had been to the seaside once in her life, and had come to the general conclusion that, wherever you go to on the English coast, you find a number of bathing-machines in the sea, some children digging in the sand with wooden spades, then a row of lodging houses, and behind them a railway station.” (Alice, 19)

The desire to go “back by railway” is one that is influenced by British industrialization and Alice’s class status. It is also a way that Alice tries to make sense of where she is. Where exactly is Alice? We learn early on that she is in a hallway underground. However, she can quickly convince herself that she is in the sea, or perhaps a pool. Alice has lost all sense of constancy in her life. It is true that two reasonably constant aspects of ordinary existence—natural progressive growth and predictable size—have already lost their apparent validity. Perhaps this leads her to not ascribe any permanent value or characteristics to the space she is in.

When Alice figures out that she is in a pool of her own tears, she is upset. She immediately regrets it. “I wish I hadn’t cried so much,” she says while swimming in the pool of tears, “I shall be punished for it now, I suppose, by being drowned in my own tears! That will be a queer thing, be be sure! However, everything is queer to-day!” (Alice, 19) The fact of drowning in one’s own tears is a punishment. If we read her words for what they are, though, it is hard to not emphasize the *own* in “my own tears.” Here looms the possibility of drowning in *someone else’s* tears—which is less worse than drowning in one’s own. I get this sense of self-punishment here from popular expressions that heighten and exceptionalize the damage one can cause oneself, such as “cutting off the nose to spite the face.” The point here is not simply that cutting
off one’s nose is objectively bad, but that it damages the face (and by extension, the self) more than the object of one's anger. Drowning in one’s own tears would be worse than the cause of the tears themselves. Alice drowning is worse than her not getting into the door.

The sentence also brings to the fore the idea of poetic justice—of the irony of being suffocated by one’s own sadness. In her book *Ugly Feelings*, Sianne Ngai explores the potential and political significance of what she terms “ugly feelings.” Such feelings are “ Explicitly amoral and noncathartic, offering no satisfaction of virtue, however oblique, nor any therapeutic or purifying release.”\(^\text{16}\) Alice’s tears are noncathartic in that they impose the threat of violence. Since the tears can possibly drown Alice, and are outside of her, there is a misplacement of ownership. Owing to their size, the tears complicate the boundaries of Alice’s body—both limiting it and stretching it past its seams. Alice uses queerness (here meaning strangeness) to classify her experiences in underground and in Wonderland. Drowning in her own tears is a queer thing—however it is the conjunction “however” is what makes this sentence worth noting. By the second chapter of the novel, perhaps Alice has found some semblance—a hint of a pattern—through her adventures in Wonderland. She understands the fact of drowning in her tears as just another queer thing happening that day.

For Alice to be submerged in her tears would be for her to swallow them. If crying is a problem for language, if to represent crying language has to be submerged, then it is ironic that Alice would need to swallow tears. Language—speech, utterances, vocal communication—leaves the mouth and enters the world. In this case, Alice’s tears would go through her mouth, reversing the act and intention of speech itself. Crying, then, could be here an

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inverted language, the form of vocal communication reversed. Here, the very possibility of
swallowing tears makes clear the rule that governs dialogic communication—that words leave
mouths. The pool of tears is thus a problem for language since it turns language inside-out; the
mouth becomes a receptacle rather than a vehicle. If Alice were to completely drown, she
wouldn’t be able to speak at all, but her mouth would be full of tears. Tears are thus a problem of
form in Alice. In *The Forms of the Affects*, Eugenie Brinkema situates the abandonment of form,
characterized in Lone Bertelsen’s and Andrew Murphie’s statement that “affect is not form”—as
premised on a misleading binary whereby form is passive and rigid, and affect is active and
volatile.¹⁷

Crying can also be a hurdle for language. Through the whole chapter, it is unclear
whether Alice is talking or thinking. Her emotions also affect her speech—at the very start of the
chapter, the narrator writes, “she was so much surprised, that for the moment she quite forgot
how to speak good English.” (*Alice*, 15) We don’t know many things about this sentence. What,
for instance, is “good English”? How does forgetting operate in *Alice*? Forgetting implies a
linear temporality; to forget is to know before. Forgetting also implies a “first-ness,” since to
forget is to know again, as Ahmed writes of wonder, “as if for the first time.” This forgetting is
short-lived since it only lasts a “moment.” The structure of the sentence implies causality—“she
was so much surprised, *that* for the moment she quite forgot to speak good English.” The *that*
carries on its back the weight of explanation, the narrator’s justification for Alice’s bad English,
which is given to the reader in parentheses, as explanation, as an afterthought. Already, from the
first sentence of the chapter, we have a definition of “good English,” by way of its exception.

“Good English” is when one is not surprised, when one does not forget, when one does not cry, and when one does not utter “curiouser and curiouser!” Bad English is a combination of all of these things. In what we can narrowly and elusively define as Standard English, “curiouser” this is not a properly formed word; the standard form is “more curious.” As a general principle, the comparative -er suffix attaches to monosyllabic words, and more is preferred with polysyllabic words, so even though a word like curiouser is readily understood, it has an odd quality to it—this is the reason. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word curiouser was coined by Lewis Carroll in 1865, as the phrase “curiouser and curiouser.”18 In fact, the OED cites this phrase only, and does not treat curiouser as a word unto itself; the phrase has the meaning “increasingly strange.” If one were to actually believe in and abide by the invidious, imaginary rules of Standard English, to utter “curiouser and curiouser” would be an exercise in bad English. And if crying were language, it would be bad English.

There is an important distinction here between knowing and speaking. In using the phrase “speak good English” the narrator locates Alice’s forgetfulness in the act of utterance, not of knowledge. For all we know, Alice knows that she is speaking bad English. In Crises of the Sentence, Jan Mieszkowski writes, “The ability to use language ‘properly’ is essential to function successfully in virtually any communal domain, for to be a citizen in good standing is first and foremost to be a producer and consumer of correct sentences.”19 Language situates the self within a collective; that Alice speaks bad English is understood through larger systems of power. “Good English” creates “bad English” which in a way ‘others’ English. To ‘other’ English is to

19 Mieszkowski, Crises, 15.
make audible the imperial power sewn into the language. It is to unravel English, to slit it open so that its histories slide out into the light so that we can see them, and write about them.

Who exactly is Alice speaking to? The first manuscript of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* was titled *Alice’s Adventures Under Ground*; the fact that Alice is underground is an important part of the story. In the first chapter, Alice falls down the rabbit hole that will eventually take her to Wonderland, she wonders if she might find herself on the opposite side of the earth without knowing exactly what country that would be:

Presently she began again. “I wonder if I shall fall right through the earth! How funny it’ll seem to come out among the people that walk with their heads downward! The antipathies, I think——” (she was rather glad there was no one listening, this time, as it didn’t sound at all the right word) “—but I shall have to ask them what the name of the country is, you know. Please, Ma’am, is this New Zealand? Or Australia?” (and she tried to curtsey as she spoke—fancy, *curtseying* as you’re falling through the air! Do you think you could manage it?) “And what an ignorant little girl she’ll think me for asking! No, it’ll never do to ask: perhaps I shall see it written up somewhere. (*Alice*, 8-10)

She imagines having to ask someone the name of the country, and practices the respectful courtesy she would use while asking. But then reluctant to have anyone think of her as ignorant, she decides it would “never do” to ask, and instead hopes to see the name “written up” somewhere. Present here are Alice’s insecurities about language. It is important to her that “there was no one listening” when she said what might have been the wrong word. In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, Deleuze writes, “But why didn’t Carroll keep this title? Because Alice progressively conquers surfaces. She rises or returns to the surface. She creates surfaces. Movements of penetration and burying give way to light lateral movements of sliding; the animals of the depths become figures on cards without thickness.”20 When Alice cries, she

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conquers the surface of her own body (we can think of crying in terms of transcending visible boundaries), and also creates a surface with her pool of tears. That Alice is underground is important, but the very definition of underground changes and acquires depth through the novel. What is underground in Alice might well be “right through the earth.”

That Alice cries, and drowns in a pool of her own tears in the hallway leading to Wonderland is important. While she remains relatively unfazed in Wonderland, she tears up at its door and considers her identity, her relationship to the world, and the use of language. She cries here—and not in Wonderland—because outside Wonderland she is not the center of her story. That she tears up makes clear that she wonders, since her tears are inexplicable and happen before the fact of knowledge or clarification. Her pool of tears shows us that she does wonder, but perhaps at the time we least expect it.

To cry at the threshold of Wonderland can be a kind of preparation: Alice cries to cleanse herself, to flush the tears out before she can enter the door. Perhaps Alice cries to learn how to wonder before she can enter Wonderland. Descartes writes, “When our first encounter with some object surprises us and we find it novel, or very different from what we formerly knew or from what we supposed it ought to be, this causes us to wonder and to be astonished at it. Since all this may happen before we know whether or not the object is beneficial to us, I regard wonder as the first of all the passions.” (Descartes 1985: 350, qtd. in Ahmed) Perhaps what happens to Alice before entering Wonderland is what should have happened to her while she was there. Wonder and crying operate similarly in that they both create discursive fractures. When Alice cries “Curiouser and curiouser” she experiences the kind of surprise that Descartes calls wonder.
However, instead of revelling in its novelty, Alice is quick to relate this experience to her Victorian life above the ground.

What differentiates Wonderland from the world Alice is used to, is precisely what Alice first imagines: dialogue. For her, interaction marks society, and “good English” is necessary for one to communicate properly. So when she enters Wonderland, and through the second chapter, she is unable to sustain dialogue—which also distorts the way she views herself entirely. Since knowledge and speech are confused for one another, Alice has no way of sustaining a permanent, fixed identity: thinking is entangled with talking. This not only creates confusion for the reader, but it also poses interesting questions in terms of language. While Alice has been taught to speak in sentences, thoughts don’t necessarily form in sentences. Mieszkowski writes, “to compose sentences, arguably the defining act of self-expression, is to engage with the limits of our own aims and tastes, exposing ourselves to directives whose function we may not always understand, because much of our experience of grammaticality takes the form of intuitions about what ‘sounds right,’ the logic of which we would find ourselves hard-pressed to articulate.”21 Since Alice doesn’t necessarily speak out loud, she doesn’t always participate in the “defining act of self expression,” which leads to her questioning her identity towards the end of the chapter. It is also of course the reason she doesn’t have a stable sense of identity through the whole chapter. Alice doesn’t know her own limits, verbal or otherwise. How does crying fit into this narrative?

For one, the difference between the transitive and intransitive forms of the verb “cry” is not delineated by the story. The first line of the chapter, “Curiouser and curiouser” is cried by Alice. The cry here is transitive; its object is the utterance. However, the next time Alice cries, it

21 Mieszkowski, Crises, 8.
is intransitive: “she sat down and began to cry again.” (Alice, 16) The fact that we get both forms of the verb is in fact an important characteristic of crying itself—it obscures the difference between acting and acting on. It is this unsure quality of the word that confines it to the individual—here to Alice—and that can explain how she, and the group of animals dry themselves off. While crying is solitary, and obscures one’s actions in the world, the caucus race is explicitly political. Crying then exists parallel to language—the word “cry” itself is a bifurcation that produces a rift. In the transitive sense, to cry is to perform a speech act. However, when “cry” is intransitive, it stops speech altogether. Through the first two pages, Alice is expanding—her head strikes against the roof of the hall, and we are told that she “was now rather more than nine feet high.” (Alice, 16) Deleuze writes, “She is larger now; she was smaller before. But it is at the same moment that one becomes larger than one was and smaller than one becomes. This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present [qtd. in Puckett].”22 While it is clear by now that Alice is underground and conquering surfaces, it becomes apparent now that her body and its becoming also eludes the stability of the present, of a static surface. It is at this moment that she begins to cry. The cry comes after a challenge, that of opening the garden door with the little golden key. Instead of being able to open the door with the key, all she is able to do is “look through into the garden with one eye.” (Alice, 16) Alice fails the challenge, “to get through was more hopeless than ever: she sat down and began to cry again.” (Alice, 16) The same eye that allowed her to look through the surface of the door is now welling up with tears. And soon, Alice is surrounded by her own tears.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself,” said Alice, “a great girl like you,” (she might well say this) “to go on crying in this way! Stop this moment, I tell you!” But she went on

all the same, shedding gallons of tears, until there was a large pool all round her, about four inches deep and reaching half down the hall.”

Once again, it is unclear whether Alice is talking. After the first utterance, we learn that it was “said” by Alice. However, after the next few words, the narrator adds a parenthetical note—“she might well say this”—which then creates ambiguity around the next two statements. The first thing Alice expresses after crying is shame. Shame is social. To be ashamed is to be embarrassed or guilty because of one's actions, characteristics, or associations, to imagine oneself publicly, to draw boundaries creating the public and private. Shame is associated with character—a “great girl” like Alice shouldn’t cry. “Stop this moment” is in the imperative; it is a mandate, a prohibition. In Alice, thinking is knotted up with talking; however, crying is clearly and fully material.

We know that crying is material, is real, because the end of the aforementioned passage centers the material reality of crying. Alice sheds “gallons of tears,” until there is “a large pool all round her, about four inches deep and reaching half down the hall.” (Alice, 16) Alice is large, so in effect her tears are large, too. While tears are usually confined to eyes, or to the face, here the tears take up space much like a creature or a body. Ahmed writes, “the surprise of wonder is crucial to how it moves bodies.”23 In referencing the corpus of literature about wonder, she writes, “the philosophical literature on wonder has not focused on wonder as a corporeal experience, largely because it has been associated with the sublime and the sacred, as an affect that we might imagine leaves the materiality of the body behind.”24 Alice can only, and does only feel wonder in her body—and crying is the way that operates.

The tears are real; they take up physical space; they form a large pool. How exactly do they form a pool? Is Alice in a confined space that allows that? Tears also inhibit Alice’s outward vision—she needs to hastily dry her eyes before she can clearly see again. Tears are water, and water is reflective. So the tears reflect, and while Alice cries, the film outside her eyes shows her her own image. Tears make clear that Alice does not just see the world—she sees it through a body. She knows through her body; as Ahmed writes, “focusing on emotions as mediated rather than immediate reminds us that knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensa- tion; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world.”25 Her pool of tears is a mirror; it was also once part of her. In Mythologies, Barthes wrote that he regretted that when travelling in a car we cannot see—at the same time—the countryside and the car-window.26 And yet he spent his whole career trying to perform this strange and impossible feat, this “double grasp” on reality: seeing the language and the human relations it implies and employs. His “double grasp” of human meanings was, he claimed, like an “illness,” in that it became obsessive, unhealthy even; but this “illness” was also salutary, because it encouraged him to use his writing as a way of stopping a fixed and simplistic understanding of human interactions. For an instance, tears only allow us to see the window.

Tears create tension between inside and outside; they seem to occupy both positions. The boundaries between transitive and intransitive verbs, aided by punctuation and grammar, help to ambiguate language. Through Alice’s tears, she is able to shatter these boundaries, to further ambiguate, to end up with a language that signifies an unknown object. This tension created by

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crying is also mapped onto Alice’s sense of self. For instance, when she is in the process of expanding, she says “Now I’m opening out like the largest telescope that ever was! Good-bye, feet!” (Alice, 15) The comparison of feet to a telescope is a curious one. It isn’t the first time Alice compares her body to a telescope—when she shrinks, she says, “What a curious feeling! I must be shutting up like a telescope!” (Alice, 15) A telescope makes distant objects appear closer through a series of lenses. Alice’s feet, on the other hand, that were once close to the rest of her body, are now far away. She continues to talk (perhaps think) about her feet—how far they are, how lonely—but she also clearly asserts her control over them. “I must be kind to them,” she thinks, “or perhaps they wo’n’t walk the way I want to go!” (Alice, 15) Alice’s feet are not governed by her wishes. Rather, if she is “kind to them,” they follow her instructions and walk the way she wants to go. The logic of crying makes sense here: although Alice cannot control her tears, the way she manages them is of the essence.

Alice understands that her feet are important to her, because they can get her places. However, as she sees herself expand, she isn’t scared for her life—she isn’t nearly as surprised as she should be. She doesn’t wonder. She is quick to make light of the situation, and is equally quick to plan out the rest of her life, to “manage it.” “They must go by the carrier,” she thinks about the boots she would gift “them” (her feet) every Christmas, “and how funny it’ll seem, sending presents to one’s own feet! And how odd the directions will look!” (Alice, 15) Alice can clearly imagine being large enough that her feet have a separate mailing address. Her choice to associate her large feet with gifts and Christmas invokes commerce and industrial Britain. She also participates in cultural commensurability: to understand the workings of Wonderland, Alice applies her own experiences—her above-ground, Victorian life—and assumes that this world
works the same way. It isn’t clear how long Alice sheds “gallons of tears” for. However, what
prompts her to hastily dry her eyes is “a little pattering of feet in the distance,” the sound of
which compels her to “see what was coming.”

What is startling about the above passage isn’t just the entangled, confused nature of
thinking and talking, it is the role of tears in the discursive space. Why does Alice cry so much?
What is the need for tears? The fact of crying is that it is ambiguous and outside truth. It isn’t
always indexical or referential; one doesn’t know why someone else is crying. Often, crying
interrupts speech—it makes it harder to understand what someone else is saying, it creates a
mess, it creates discomfort or awkwardness. Crying in narrative functions differently. For all of
the physical space that crying is afforded in “The Pool of Tears,” it doesn’t get much space at the
level of the paragraph. For one, it is hard to represent crying. Crying is not a word. It is also not a
thought. Crying is therefore a problem of evidence, but also makes visible the limits of linguistic
representation. However, it populates the space of conversation, even if its starts and stops
speech. Can tears be punctuation? Mieszkowski writes, “the rules of grammar govern sentences,
but punctuation, ostensibly as rule-bound as anything else, is not part of this system in the same
way that syntax or morphology are.”27 In that way, crying isn’t a part of the system of language,
but still exists around it, near it, because of it. In the case of “The Pool of Tears,” perhaps crying
doesn’t interrupt language. When language breaks down, Alice cries—words are replaced by
tears. When we learn that Alice “began to cry again,” however, the next line jumps to her
speaking. If Alice starts speaking by crying, what can this tell us about interruption? Who is
interrupting who? And again, who is she talking to?

27 Mieszkowski, Crises, 11.
To begin to answer these questions, it is helpful to return to where we started, to closely analyze Alice’s physical position in the pool of tears. Alice is alone in the pool for a couple paragraphs, and then is joined by the White Rabbit. The “little pattering of feet in the distance” is now close enough to Alice. The White Rabbit returns, “spelindly dressed, with a pair of white kid-gloves in one hand and a large fan in the other.” He speaks, presumably to himself, “Oh! The Duchess, the Duchess! Oh! Wo’n’t she be savage if I’ve kept her waiting!” (Alice, 16) The word “savage,” now understood as possessing clear racist undercurrents, could have meant “that is in a state of nature, wild”; it also could have meant “be cruel or barbarous.” The White Rabbit here uses the word to describe the Duchess, which is a significant move, since it has a long history of describing non-human (in a specific, Enlightenment-era definition of “human”) creatures. Alice hears what the Rabbit says, and feels “so desperate”—she doesn’t want anything to do with the White Rabbit’s problems, with his hurry, but needs help, urgently, and from anyone. The White Rabbit’s speech doesn’t so much act as an expression of thought but as an expression of self, as a hallmark of existence. He doesn’t invite Alice to talk to him; he doesn’t open up the space for conversation. Alice hears him and does try to ask for help, in a “low, timid voice,” but before she can utter more than four words the Rabbit leaves. Upon hearing her speak, he starts violently, and drops his belongings. He then “skurries away, into the darkness,” perhaps down the hallway, but perhaps someplace else. Language breaks down again; conversation is not possible since the Rabbit and Alice do not engage with each other. The Rabbit’s belongings, however, still occupy the space of the text and the space of the hallway—they do not leave with him. Perhaps they are soaked with Alice’s tears. She picks them up, the fan and the gloves, “as the hall was very hot,”

and although she has only had the fan for a moment, we are told that she “kept fanning herself all the time.” (Alice, 16) Time operates differently in the Pool of Tears—things could already always be happening when they start.

While Alice is fanning herself, she goes on talking. It is clear that the White Rabbit has left—and this is reflected in the fact that she talks without interruption. She exclaims how “queer everything is to-day,” (Alice, 19) and tries to figure out why that is. Her first suspicion is that she has changed overnight—which leads her to ask the classic “who in the world am I?” This meditation on the self and identity leads Alice to consider her physical appearance, and what differentiates her from “all the children she knew that were of the same age as herself.” (Alice, 10) The phrase “in the world” bears watching. Alice typically persists in (fruitless) attempts to relate her truly “out-of-the-world” adventures to her previous “in-the-world” assumptions. This influences the next thing Alice does: she tries to test if she knows all the things she used to know, starting with multiplication. Perhaps sensing that her above-ground identity rested on arbitrary, constructed systems like arithmetic, she aims to reestablish that “in-the-world” identity by reciting lessons. Her numbers are all wrong, and she comes to the conclusion that it is perhaps not the best test, since she will never get to twenty, and the “Multiplication-Table doesn’t signify.” (Alice, 18) The choice of the word “signify” brings with it linguistic theories of language, and the history of semiotics. The Multiplication Table is a sign, in that it bears no resemblance to anything in the material world. The very process of signification—the basis of semiotics—is a paradox.

In “Caucus-Racing,” Kent Puckett elucidates the ways that the novel makes rules and paradoxes painfully explicit—for instance, he writes, “the rules of the Dodo’s caucus-race are
both perfectly ridiculous and responsibly transparent.” He understands the novel in terms of its employment of paradox, which he defines as “the compressed and visible embodiment of the necessary but fragile logics that allow systems to seem to cohere.” Alice, the character, and more importantly, *Alice*, the novel, present the reader with a dazzlingly clear set of paradoxes—rules of the game—that make clear the tautologies behind the formation and usage of language itself. Puckett’s reflections teach us something that is at the center of the form of the novel: that it is compressed, and that it contains fragile logics that, at least at first glance, seem to cohere independently. After Mathematics, when Alice starts to try Geography, she gets the capitals and countries all muddled up. She knows she is wrong, and she is certain.

The last experiment Alice tries is a nursery rhyme. Each time Alice tries to repeat a nursery rhyme in Wonderland, strange things happen: her voice becomes hoarse and hollow-sounding, her memory subverts her, and the words she finds herself saying aren't at all the words she had learned in the schoolroom. The innocuous (and didactic) rhymes that she learned emerge in different, quite dreadful forms. Rhymes that were meant to console her end up betraying her. The first one she tries is “How doth the little”—an Isaac Watts poem familiar to Victorian children, about a good little bee that buzzes from flower to flower collecting nectar and industriously builds the combs in which to store it. There are some glaring disparities between this and the way Alice seems to recall it; her version is about a sinister crocodile that inveigles trusting little fish into its jaws, grinning wickedly all the while. It is also curious to note that she adds the crocodile to her version of the rhyme, an animal known for its tears:

How doth the little crocodile

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30 Puckett, “Caucus-Racing,” 19.
31 Isaac Watts, "Against Idleness and Mischief", from *Divine Songs for Children*, 1715.
Improve his shining tail,
And pour the waters of the Nile
On every golden scale!

How cheerfully he seems to grin,
How neatly spreads his claws,
and welcomes little fishes in,
With gently smiling jaws!

Each time Alice wants to recite one of these rhymes, she automatically folds her hands on her lap as she has always done when repeating her lessons, indicative of the extent to which these poems represent rote memorization. In Alice's case, once the originals have been taken in, she can't help but chew them up a bit before spitting them out. Watts' poem begins “How doth the little busy bee…” and uses the bee as a model of hard work. In Carroll's parody, the crocodile's corresponding “virtues” are deception and predation.

This distortion affects Alice, and she is aware of it—“I’m sure those are not the right words,” she says, “her eyes filled with tears again.” (Alice, 18) The tears, when still on her eyes, are a film. This mirror of salt-water. Why again does Alice cry? Her tears index certain moments in the text. Unlike language (the entangled speech and thought), which blurs the boundary between self the world, her tears clearly leave her. Tears are also of course a part of her—they are of the inside until they leave. Her tears remain constant, and (except for their size) are seemingly unchanging. There is no way to have “good crying.” Although her voice becomes hoarse and strange, she is able to cry in a way that isn’t markedly different from times she has cried before. After a few sentences, she cries again—this time it is with a “sudden burst of tears.” The relationship of crying to tears here is notable—the crying is happening throughout, the “sudden burst of tears” is, well, sudden. This is helpful in mapping out the process of crying temporally. Crying is still crying when there is no “sudden burst of tears.”
when Alice talks. When Alice “cries, with a sudden burst of tears,” she is lonely. “I do wish they would put their heads down! I am so very tired of being all alone here!” (Alice, 18) she says. Alice naturally begins to sense her frightening isolation, her alienation from the self-defining constructs of “in-the-world” above-ground culture. It is at this point that Alice changes size again. She realizes that she had “put on one of the Rabbit’s little kid-gloves,” which leads to her realization that she “must be growing small again.” (Alice, 18) Although putting on the glove was also an involuntary action, it does not induce shame in the same way crying does. However, her lack of control is evident—Alice seems to not have full control over her body, not only in that she doesn’t know how big she is, but also that she doesn’t fully remember putting the glove on. She assigns her shrinking to the fan, that she then drops hastily, “just in time to save herself from shrinking away altogether. (Alice, 18) The phrase “growing small” is inherently contradictory, and suggests a problem of identity, especially since Alice is a child and still growing. It is also a moment in which the novel plays with the basis of words and meaning itself: the phrase is an experiment in language.

When she realizes that she “must be growing small again,” Alice gets up and goes to the table to measure herself by it. The table represents familiarity—it is how Alice estimates that she was “about two feet high and was going on shrinking rapidly.” (Alice, 18) The switch from “growing small” to “shrinking” is one of note—it signifies a change in thought process, one that tries to locate the phenomenon in the world Alice already knows versus understanding it on its own terms. After Alice drops the fan, she doesn’t shrink away altogether. “That was a narrow escape,” she says, frightened, but “very glad to find herself still in existence.” (Alice, 19) How does Alice know she exists? Is it because she can talk to herself, because she can think? As soon
as she is relieved that she exists, The tears appear again here, but in a different way. Alice
complains about her size—“for I never was so small as this before, never! And I declare it’s too
bad, it is!” It is important to remember that while Alice is saying all of this, she is still
surrounded by her tears. Her tears still have material presence and narrative function in the story.

Soon, Alice isn’t the only one in her pool of tears. She is still confused about her own
size, both actual and relative, so when she hears some splashing, she assumes it is a walrus or
hippopotamus. When she “remembers how small she was now,” she realizes that it was “only a
mouse, that had slipped in like herself.” (Alice, 19) Except the mouse didn’t slip in like Alice
did—Alice’s slip is very different from that of the mouse. For one, these are Alice’s tears, and
not the mouse’s. Where does this mouse come from? What does it mean to swim in someone
else’s tears? While we don’t hear anything to the effect of the mouse’s experience in the pool, it
is a markedly different situation for both characters. To swim in someone else’s tears is not to
blur the boundaries between inside and outside; it might simply be akin to drowning in the sea.
In John Tenniel’s illustration of this scene, the mouse is almost bigger, if not the same size as
Alice. All of Alice’s concepts—of her own size and strength, her upbringing and socioeconomic
class—dissolve in the water and are rendered inaccurate by the mouse swimming with her. The
fact that the mouse is actually small, if not relatively, might mean something outside of its
physical size. From this illustration, it is also clear that the pool creates a surface, In crying
enough to create a pool of tears, Alice conquers and recreates the surface of the ground, raising
it, swimming in it, and causing others to slip into it.
Alice calls the other creature in the pool “only a mouse,” and thinks to herself whether it “would be of any use” to speak to it. This is in stark contrast to Alice’s interaction with the White Rabbit. At that point in her journey, Alice was desperate for help—she would talk to anyone—but now she thinks twice before engaging. Her next thought complicates this even further. While she didn’t question whether the White Rabbit could speak, she does question the mouse’s abilities. “Everything is so out-of-the-way here,” she thinks, “that I should think very likely it can talk: at any rate, there’s no harm in trying.” (Alice, 19) Her phrase “out-of-the-way” can be read alongside “in-the-world.” Wonderland is literally “out-of-the-way”—it is underground, and cannot be accessed easily. It is also “out-of-the-way” in a logical
sense—Alice’s “in-the-world” concepts don’t apply here, she must think differently to accomplish what she wants.

She soon looks toward the Mouse for assistance, “O Mouse, do you know the way out of this pool?” (Alice, 19) She addresses him with the respect that her Victorian childhood has taught her to have. The narrator interjects here with some context, “Alice thought this must be the right way of speaking to a mouse: she had never done such a thing before, but she remembered having seen in her brother’s Latin Grammar, “A mouse—of a mouse—to a mouse—a mouse—O mouse!” (Alice, 19) And when the Mouse fails to respond, she tries again, this time with the first sentence from her French lesson-book, “Ou best ma chatte?” (Where is my cat?). She uses French after she considers that “Perhaps it doesn’t understand English, I daresay it’s a French Mouse, come over with William the Conqueror.” (Alice, 19-20) The Mouse then leaps out of the water, quivering in fright, and she immediately remembers one should never mention cats to mice. She apologizes for her thoughtlessness. Yet, she can’t seem to help herself from continuing on just that topic; she begins to extol her own cat, Dinah, and “half to herself, as she swam lazily in the pool,” she says, “she is such a dear, quiet thing, as she sits purring so nicely by the fire…and she’s such a capital one for catching mice—oh! I beg your pardon!” (Alice, 20) Alice speaks about her cat without wanting to, and again, she frightens him. In submerging the mouse in salt-water, Alice’s tears exert physical control over it.

Through “The Pool of Tears,” crying mediates language and is mediated by it in different permutations. The novel imagines crying as both part of and outside language. When it is part of language, it changes, or broadens, the status of language itself. If language itself could weep, that pool would resemble the one Alice nearly drowns in. In Writing Degree Zero, Barthes writes that
language “enfolds the whole of literary creation much as the earth, the sky and the line where they meet outline a familiar habitat for mankind. It is not so much a stock of materials as a horizon, which implies both a boundary and a perspective; in short, it is the comforting area of an ordered space.”

Crying makes the horizon of language visible.

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Coming to Terms in *Wuthering Heights*

“Writing is precisely that contradiction that turns the failure of communication into a secondary communication, speech for others but speech without the other.” — Roland Barthes

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*Beneath Language*

If the project of the realist novel is to represent the material fact of existence, crying disrupts that project. In *The Theory of the Novel*, Michael McKeon writes, “The business of realist writing is, according to its philosophy, to be the equivalent of a reality, to imitate it. This ‘imitation’ is the basis of realist literature, and its technical name is *mimesis*, mimicry. The whole basis of mimesis is that writing is a mere transcription of the real, carrying it over into a medium that exists only as a parasitic practice because the word is identical to, the equivalent of, the real world. Realism naturalizes the arbitrary nature of the sign; its philosophy is that of an identity between signifier and signified on the level of an entire text as much as that of a single word.”

In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt defined “truth to individual experience” as a main criterion of the realistic novel form. As opposed to earlier literary forms of generality and works inspired by legend and history, he explains, the eighteenth-century novel focused on human individuality and the conscious experience. Plot events began to be connected causally, and language was used

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descriptively and denotatively, rather than non-figuratively. The novel was defined as middle-class as opposed to only limited to the aristocratic class.

_Wuthering Heights_ presents us with a different kind of realism. It is not that the novel is not realistic: it presents us with a story of two families making sense of the socioeconomic and cultural times that they find themselves in; it is about racial tensions; it is about love. But _Wuthering Heights_ is also about the specters that haunt realism—it contains strange fits of passion, domestic violence, and inexplicable madness. It is the kind of realist novel that makes clear the genre and form’s gaps and holes. In _Culture and Imperialism_, Edward Said writes, “As we look back at the cultural archive, we begin to reread it not univocally but _contrapuntally_, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts.”

In _Myths of Power_, Terry Eagleton writes, “The world of Wuthering Heights is neither eternal nor self-enclosed; nor is it in the least unriven by internal contradictions.” The novel is not absent from its economic and social history; it is about love and passion and violence while being about slavery, imperialism, and capitalism. One way into reading it contrapuntally is to read for tears.

Tears—such as those in _Wuthering Heights_, are always narrated. In _Wuthering Heights_, characters have to recount tears: they are absent from dialogue. Tears cannot speak for themselves. Tears do not come to terms; in one way, they are a failure of representation. Understood differently, they bring to the fore a level of narrative that we might otherwise ignore. Crying makes clear that not everything happens in the realm of language, and reading _for_ the tears allows us to read through the gaps of language. Here, when I talk about crying I am talking

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36 Said, _Culture and Imperialism_, 51.
about the physical display of emotion that produces tears. While a cry can also be defined as a yelp or a shout, I am focusing here on the intransitive verb. In this way, crying helps us reimagine the narrative economy that undergirds novels; it helps us move through, beneath, above, and around language. Crying is extra-literary in that it cannot be fully grasped by literature. Maybe crying is not outside language in the way that gardens are outside homes. Gardens beautify homes and gardens also nourish homes: they grow things and can be controlled by the home to provide for itself. The home—language—benefits from and can understand the value of the garden. Homes often want gardens. But crying is outside language in the way that rain is outside homes: surrounding it, sometimes dripping inside if one opens a window— but never falling directly inside it. The home here feels the effects of rain, but it cannot control it. Sometimes it can preserve parts of it—little floods in the hallway, or damp terraces on Sunday afternoons—but it cannot preserve it and take from it what it requires. Its value is not understood by the home.

Crying happens and tears arise. Tears have bodies: they are liquid, they can flow, burst, move, and drip. They also don’t move the same way that words do: the sentence cannot comprehend or compute crying. While we disambiguate words through punctuation and the grammar and structure of the sentence, crying both disrupts and is outside of that structure. On a physical level, tears move perpendicular to the sentence. Instead of following its semantic structure, tears disrupt the sentence’s structural logic. Tears drip down while sentences plow forward; tears reveal the disjunct nature of “realistic” language. When we process knowledge in the form of sentences, there is no way of reading tears since tears refuse to enter that system of knowledge. What signifies crying? Unlike laughter, which can be represented by “haha,” crying
has no onomatopoeic signer. Tears are always reduced to verbs—cried, burst, wept, sobbed, bawled, wailed, etc. When crying is transitive, the object of the sentence is not the sound of crying but instead words that the subject speaks in-between the tears. The sound of crying has not and maybe cannot be represented by literature. One way to understand this is that the sound of crying is one that cannot be categorized according to its meaning, since it is not referring to a common referent. While Barthes made the distinction between open and closed meanings, is it possible that “open” meanings are always already, to some degree, closed? Another way to think about this is to consider narrative structure at the level of sentence and at the level of the novel; tears cannot be plotted.

A Repository of Fears

As mentioned before, *Wuthering Heights* is an archive of its time: it contains within its pages sociocultural norms and beliefs and economic changes. It is not, as Eagleton reminds us, “eternal nor self-enclosed.” Published in 1847, *Wuthering Heights*—Emily Brontë’s only finished novel—was written at the height of British colonialism. The text begins with our introduction to Lockwood, the new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, and Heathcliff, his landlord at Wuthering Heights, four miles away. Lockwood asks his housekeeper, Nelly Dean, more about Heathcliff and the rest of the Heights’ residents. He writes down his recollections of her tale in his diary; these written recollections form the main part of the novel. *Wuthering Heights* is also full of tears. One way to imagine the tears is as microcosms for the outside world, or the world that the novel was written into. The tears seem to reveal something about passion, societal relations,
socioeconomic class, and other systems of power that the novel is constantly making sense of and grappling with.

A way to read the tears, then, is as indices of sociocultural and economic changes and conflicts. The tears—already unrepresentable—convey something about the nature of Victorian England, of the height of slavery, industrial capitalism, and imperialism. *Wuthering Heights* is full of crying: nearly every character barring Lockwood cries several times; the novel offers a large vocabulary of tears. At the start of the novel, we meet Heathcliff, who Earnshaw picks up at Liverpool. Liverpool was the center of England’s slave trade: the country made up more than fifty-percent of traffic worldwide by the close of the eighteenth century.  

Instead of a whip for Cathy and a fiddle for Hindley, objects emblematic of the cruelty and indolence nurtured by institutionalized slavery, Earnshaw substitutes Heathcliff, “dark almost as if it came from the devil.” Earnshaw found “it… in the streets of Liverpool where he picked it up and inquired for its owner—Not a soul knew to whom it belonged” (*WH*, 45). Heathcliff's racial otherness cannot be a matter of dispute; Brontë makes that explicit. From the first and frequently thereafter he is termed a “gypsy” (*WH*, 6, 45, 48, 61); Mr. Linton recognizes him as “that strange acquisition my late neighbor made in his journey to Liverpool—a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway” (*WH*, 62); Nelly encourages Heathcliff to “frame high notions of [his] birth”—his father might have been the “Emperor of China” and his mother “an Indian queen” (*WH*, 72). Heathcliff essentially only gains personhood—the pronouns he/him as opposed to “it”—when he is named by Earnshaw. In effect, he is a source of great anxiety for the mid-nineteenth-century

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Victorian. Through the novel, Heathcliff’s name appears several times: Isabella turns into Mrs. Heathcliff after her marriage, and Lockwood reads “Catherine Heathcliff” all over her old room in Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff’s single name attaches itself, and can attach itself, to anything. His name therefore becomes a repository of fears.

Of the Victorian age and of imperial culture in general, Said writes, “In an important sense, we are dealing with the formation of cultural identities understood not as essentializations (although part of their enduring appeal is that they seem and are considered to be like essentializations) but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions…” Heathcliff is always already other. He has one name that is at once both his first and last name, and neither. Towards the middle of the book, his name becomes Isabella’s—she turns into Mrs. Heathcliff, while he still retains the name. Heathcliff’s identity is, at every level, oppositional.

Heathcliff cries at Wuthering Heights. In “The Wuther of the Other in Wuthering Heights,” Steven Vine writes, “…Heathcliff comes from outside, from the other, introducing an instability into the world that precariously incorporates him, and he is never stably lodged in any of the social places he assumes.” Vine calls Heathcliff’s position in the family unstable or “wuthering,” writing “…Heathcliff’s history metaphorized the indeterminacies of the boundary that separates the family's inside from its outside. Heathcliff’s tears open up the novel to its own dark underbelly. When he cries, it is surprising, since he cries sparingly and with intensity. Other characters, such as Nelly and Lockwood, are used to his solemn sternness and are taken aback when he cries. His tears, then, are doubly precarious: both as tears themselves, and as tears cried

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by “the other,” by someone who is a repository of Victorian bourgeois identity. Even outside of Heathcliff’s own tears, it is clear that moments of crying in Wuthering Heights bring to the shore historical and social phenomena that are implicit in the novel’s creation and content. As indices, tears teach us how to read contrapuntally and to read critically, thoughtfully, and incisively.

They did not melt

When Cathy finally meets Heathcliff and accuses him of killing her, both characters cry. This crying does not happen at the start of the scene—in fact, Nelly imagines tears where there are none. “And now he started at her so earnestly,” she narrates, “that I thought the very intensity of his gaze would bring tears into his eyes; but they burned with anguish, they did not melt.” (WH, 160) Tears here are what happens when eyes melt. Melting is what doesn’t happen, because burning happens. Heathcliff doesn’t cry but instead his eyes burn “with anguish.” Are melting and burning opposites? To melt, in the scientific sense, is to become liquefied by heat; to burn is to undergo combustion or be consumed partly or wholly by fire. In this sense, both melting and burning require heat and change the object that they act on. While melting always liquifies, burning sometimes reduces the object to ashes or discolors it. Both processes require heat, and the heat comes from an external source. Whether objects burn or melt usually depends on their individual substances, i.e. what they are made of. What is particularly interesting, however, is that substances that burn instead of melt have combustion temperatures that are lower than their melting points.

For Nelly—and, we can suppose, for the novel at large—burning and melting are different since melting produces tears and burning doesn’t produce any residue. There are no
ashes when a character gets angry. When eyes melt, however, there is excess. Their body takes up more space because tears take up space when they leave the inside to enter the outside. *Wuthering Heights* doesn’t quite know what to do with this excess, on the level of the sentence or the level of the novel.

*Not seeing the eyes*

“They were silent,” narrates Nelly, “their faces hid against each other, and washed by each other’s tears. At least, I suppose the weeping was on both sides; as it seemed Heathcliff could weep on a great occasion like this.” (*WH*, 163) Before they embraced, Heathcliff told Cathy, “don’t let me see your eyes!” (*WH*, 163) Nelly is surprised to see Heathcliff cry, although she is not fully sure that he is crying. While they couldn’t see each other’s faces, each face was “washed by the other’s tears.” Are tears part of one’s face? If we consider Heathcliff’s request (more like demand) to not see Cathy’s eyes, it could be possible that for him tears are located in the eyes, and so if one does not see the eyes one cannot see the tears. There is something about two people’s tears mixing that is just uncomfortable. I understand that tears can wash a surface—I understand washing most simply as water or water-like liquid cleansing something—and so tears can wash. But is there something about another person’s tears that is more cleansing? Do one’s own tears wash one’s face?

We have to remember here that tears arise from inside the body. This complicates their relationship to the face, and whether they can cleanse or wash. Can something from inside the body work on it from the outside-in? Is the face even a surface that *can* be washed, or is it part of the inside that the tears come from? It is important here that Cathy and Heathcliff’s faces hide
against each other. The face is a figure for representation: we look to the face for signs of emotion, interaction, etc. The face is also read—we read eyes and lips—and it can be considered an outward marker of internal thoughts and feelings. On one level, both characters do not see each other’s faces; they cannot read what the other is thinking. On another level, however, each face is washed by tears. The liquid stream of tears washes over the face, it blurs it, it obscures it. In essence, while tears themselves can be read as displays of emotion, they hide the face: which is the center of outward emotional displays. In this way, tears disrupt representation in that they take from us our paramount figure of representation, the face. This scene from the novel is particularly worth considering since Cathy and Heathcliff’s tears mix together. While one individual's tears can be traced back to their origins, this mix of tears poses a different ontological problem. The combination of two people’s tears—this salty, liquid, puddle—cannot be classified in the way that a single person’s tears can. Once tears mix, they are nobody’s to keep.

In the scene above, Cathy and Heathcliff’s tears mix. We can also understand this as an exchange of tears, as tears for another than then reach the other. What happens to tears that are for someone else, but never get there? Tears, when they are cried by Cathy, do not go nowhere like those cried by Heathcliff in the first scene. Sometimes it is clear who her tears are for, and where they intend to flow. Towards the beginning and middle of the book, all her tears are for Heathcliff and the Heights, because to her they are the source of life itself. This is true even of the tears in her dreams and states of half-consciousness. While tears blur the boundaries between inside and outside, they also mark the sign of an individual. Tears are tears because they are cried by a person. What does it mean to cry for another? What does this do to how—or
whether—personal identity is indexed in *Wuthering Heights*? Maybe tears are not really markers of personal identity in the novel. Perhaps tears have what resembles their own personhood. When Cathy cries for Heathcliff, her tears leave her and are then no longer hers. The move from inside to outside, then is a change in location but also an ontological and epistemological change.

If Cathy can cry for Heathcliff, can she become Heathcliff? What happens when she is identified as him? Eagleton writes, “‘I am Heathcliff!’ is dramatically arresting, but it is also a way of keeping the outcast at arm’s length, evading the challenge he offers. If Catherine is Heathcliff—if identity rather than relationship is in question—then their estrangement is inconceivable, and Catherine can therefore turn to others without violating the timeless metaphysical idea Heathcliff embodies.” The fact that Cathy identifies herself as Heathcliff is also a question of socioeconomic status. Eagleton clearly identifies Heathcliff as proletariat and Cathy as bourgeois. The fact that she calls herself Heathcliff, then, is both an instance of class mobility that is not available to Heathcliff (at least through the start of the novel), and that of familial rebellion. In identifying with him, she is also attempting to dismember herself from Earnshaw.

*On the Exclamation Point*

As Lockwood and Heathcliff are talking in Cathy’s old room, it is clear that Heathcliff wants to be left alone. He vocalizes this: “—but away with you!” mutters Heathcliff, “I’ll come in two minutes.” (*WH*, 28) I am thinking about muttering an exclamation point. Muttering an exclamation point is perhaps struggling to “vanquish an excess of violent emotion.” To mutter an

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exclamation point signals a disconnect between language and self, or more accurately between language and body. Heathcliff’s character, as we read it, personifies this disconnect. To mutter an exclamation point seems like the opposite of crying. Instead of moving outwards, the emotion is restrained.

At hearing Heathcliff mutter, Lockwood narrates, “I obeyed, so far as to quit the chamber; when, ignorant where the narrow lobbies I was witness, involuntarily, to a piece of superstition on the part of my landlord which belied, oddly, his apparent sense.” (WH, 28) Lockwood overhears the remaining part of the scene, and narrates it to us. In doing this, he makes clear observations that influence the way we read the tears. Our decisions are made for us by Lockwood; he is our interlocutor. Although Lockwood had only just met Heathcliff, he decides that the scene “belied..his [Heathcliff’s] apparent sense.” Heathcliff does both: he cries and he mutters exclamation points. Then Lockwood hears Heathcliff cry: “He got on to the bed, and wrenched open the lattice, bursting, as he pulled at it, into an uncontrollable passion of tears.” (WH, 28) When Heathcliff cries, Lockwood decides that he bursts into an “uncontrollable passion of tears.” There is again space between the crying and the tears: in between, he gets on the bed, and wretches open the lattice. When he is pulling at the lattice he bursts. In visualizing and understanding the tears as a burst, they aren’t directed at anyone or anything at particular. In this way, the tears are unmapped: they aren’t travelling anywhere so they don’t arrive anywhere. However, when Heathcliff speaks, through and around his tears, he could be talking to the spectre. “Come in! come in!’ he sobbed. ‘Cathy, do come. Oh, do - once more! Oh! my heart's darling! hear me this time, Catherine, at last!” (WH, 28) This time, Heathcliff sobs the exclamation points.
The exclamation point is syntactically a punctuation mark but perhaps not semantically. Per Roman Jakobson’s functions of language, it would lie somewhere close to the emotive and conative functions.\textsuperscript{42} However, the exclamation point makes clear the levels of translation present in its own being; it hides as much of itself as it reveals. Unlike a comma or period, both of which signal pauses or breaks, the exclamation point works retroactively: it adds to what is before rather than tell us what to do next.

Language and Death

If tears are impossible to represent in words, what happens when words represent impossible things? And how can this teach us something about narrative and representation? In “The Storyteller,” Walter Benjamin writes, “Death is the sanction of everything that the storyteller can tell. He has borrowed his authority from death.”\textsuperscript{43} Later, Benjamin writes, “The novel is significant, therefore, not because it presents someone else’s fate to us, perhaps didactically, but because this stranger’s fate by virtue of the flame which consumes it yields us the warmth which we never draw from our own fate. What draws the reader to the novel is the hope of warming his shivering life with a death he reads about.”\textsuperscript{44} In other words (perhaps too simplistically), plot is comforting. How does \textit{Wuthering Heights} offer this warmth? Does it? How does death operate in the novel, especially at the level of language?

After Heathcliff finally meets Cathy at the start of the second volume, she says to him: “you have killed me — and thriven on it, I think. How strong you are! How many years do you


\textsuperscript{44} Benjamin, \textit{Illuminations}, 101.
mean to live after I am gone?” (WH, 160) While she starts by telling him that he killed her, her third sentence asks how long he will live after she is gone. If we take seriously both sentences, it is clear that Cathy dies—but only for two sentences. In his essay “Textual Analysis of Edgar Allan Poe,” Barthes writes, “On the ‘I am dead,’ a psychoanalytic reflection is still possible. I have said that the phrase effected a scandalous return to the literal. That means that Death, as primordial repressed, erupts directly into language.” Poe writes, “amid ejaculations of ‘dead!’ ‘dead!’ absolutely bursting from the tongue and not from the lips of the sufferer”; Barthes calls the phrase “I am dead” an “exploded taboo.”45 Reading this analysis, it is hard to not read in tandem the declaration of death and the fact of crying. In Wuthering Heights, tears burst, they are uncontrollable. They are utterances but not from the “lips of the sufferer.” In one way, tears erupt “directly into language,” in that they burst into it and rip at its seams.

How does Wuthering Heights understand the relationship between crying and death? Early on in the novel, Cathy says to Isabella, “Well, don’t cry!” Replied Catherine, contemptuously. ‘You’re not killed—don’t make more mischief—my brother is coming—be quiet! Give over, Isabella! Has anyone hurt you?” (WH, 60) Cathy essentially tells Isabella that she can only cry after she has been killed, or if she is hurt. In Cathy’s mind, crying is then a signifier of death: in tears we know that someone has been killed. The first instance of crying which includes Cathy is one in which, at first, she does not cry. Nelly narrates an instance: Isabella is “weeping to go home, and Cathy stood by confounded, blushing for all”; Edgar is sobbing after his fight with Heathcliff; and then we hear Cathy: “Well, don’t cry!” Replied Catherine, contemptuously. ‘You’re not killed—don’t make more mischief—my brother is

coming—be quiet! Give over, Isabella! Has anyone hurt you?” (WH, 60) Characters in *Wuthering Heights* can cry *after* they are dead.

Barthes writes that he is trying to “unheard-of phrase “I am dead” is not at all an unbelievable utterance, but much more radically an impossible uttering.” In what ways does this belief hold true in *Wuthering Heights*? In *Wuthering Heights*, the un-narratable is essential to the real. The novel teases and pulls apart the phrase “realist novel” and asks whether the narratable and representable can be collapsed into one unit. In doing so, the novel pushes the boundaries of its own form to tell us something about the way language is inherently structured. While “I am dead” is a scandal of representation for Barthes, it is commonplace in the world of *Wuthering Heights*. What looks like a scandal here is just an attempt to get the reader outside language and embrace what “realism” might mean. We can also understand death as a generative force in the novel. Cathy and Heathcliff meet at a graveyard, and they talk to each other after one is dead. Cathy and Heathcliff communicate through and beyond death. This is also one way into understanding the strange ways in which family dynamics and naming work in *Wuthering Heights*. They both leave behind a second generation to persist in their absence—for Cathy, she even leaves her name.

What happens when Cathy dies? For Heathcliff, she is experienced as dismembered and dispersed throughout his world. He becomes haunted by her omnipresence as a set of infinite signs: “for what is not connected with her to me? And what does not recall her? I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped on the flags! In every cloud, in every tree-filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day, I am surrounded with her

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image!” (WH, 184) Cathy is more present for Heathcliff after she dies. Here, being present has everything to do with language; Cathy’s death changes the nature of language for Heathcliff. When she is no longer physically present, Cathy is everywhere: “in every cloud, in every tree-filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day.” While she was physically present and alive, Cathy’s image was tied to her body. Her body represented her both in language and in the world she inhabited. However, now that she has passed, her image only has language to cling on to, and that language is untethered. Instead of moving forwards on a plane in Heathcliff’s mind, language now behaves like air: her image is everywhere and ever present.
Epilogue: Portable Solitude

“...No sentence is an island, and no sentence wants to be treated as one.”⁴⁷ The sentences I write are not isolated from the sentences I live, or the sentences I read, or the sentences I hope to embody. My sentences are not portable solitudes. The past few days, I have been trying to convince myself why it is that I am writing about crying in these times. Writing feels like unlearning and I always feel like unmaking. What do I tell myself? When I am on the internet or watching the news, I see people cry. No one winces. Even the birds are quiet. Who can hum to a tiny, rushing song? I am writing because writing is a horizon and I can only know otherwise by writing. I am writing about crying because I am still—always—learning how to live with people, other people, my people. I am trying to open each sentence, to carefully take apart the stitching (is there any stitching?) Crying opens up language; language seems closed but it is open. Language hurts. To write about crying is to see through it, not completely, but almost. I am eleven and writing my name on a frosted car window over and over and over again because each time I write it, it disappears. People cry, streets cry, darkness closes in but it doesn’t settle. Grief has its own gravity. I’ve found it waiting in the slips near the street, so I stop habitually looking at my feet. With each sentence, I convince myself again to write, over and over again because each time I write, I leave the fog, and there is always more fog.

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