

emagazine Close Reading Competition 2020

Entering the Competition

- Write a 500-word close reading of the passage from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë.
- Complete your details and submit your entry at www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/emagCR2020

TO J. HALFORD, ESQ.

Dear Halford,

When we were together last, you gave me a very particular and interesting account of the most remarkable occurrences of your early life, previous to our acquaintance; and then you requested a return of confidence from me. Not being in a story-telling humour at the time, I declined, under the plea of having nothing to tell, and the like shuffling excuses, which were regarded as wholly inadmissible by you; for though you instantly turned the conversation, it was with the air of an uncomplaining, but deeply injured man, and your face was overshadowed with a cloud which darkened it to the end of our interview, and, for what I know, darkens it still; for your letters have, ever since, been distinguished by a certain dignified, semi-melancholy stiffness and reserve, that would have been very affecting, if my conscience had accused me of deserving it.

Are you not ashamed, old boy—at your age, and when we have known each other so intimately and so long, and when I have already given you so many proofs of frankness and confidence, and never resented your comparative closeness and taciturnity?—But there it is, I suppose; you are not naturally communicative, and you thought you had done great things, and given an unparalleled proof of friendly confidence on that memorable occasion—which, doubtless, you have sworn shall be the last of the kind,—and you deemed that the smallest return I could make for so mighty a favour, would be to follow your example without a moment's hesitation.—

Well!—I did not take up my pen to reproach you, nor to defend myself, nor to apologize for past offences, but, if possible, to atone for them.

It is a soaking, rainy day, the family are absent on a visit, I am alone in my library, and have been looking over certain musty old letters and papers, and musing on past times; so that I am now in a very proper frame of mind for amusing you with an old world story;—and, having withdrawn my well-roasted feet from the hobs, wheeled round to the table, and indited the above lines to my crusty old friend, I am about to give him a sketch—no not a sketch,—a full and faithful account of certain circumstances connected with the most important event of my life—previous to my acquaintance with Jack Halford at least;—and when you have read it, charge me with ingratitude and unfriendly reserve if you can.

I know you like a long story, and are as great a stickler for particularities and circumstantial details as my grandmother, so I will not spare you: my own patience and leisure shall be my only limits.

Among the letters and papers I spoke of, there is a certain faded old journal of mine, which I mention by way of assurance that I have not my memory alone—tenacious as it is—to depend upon; in order that your credulity may not be too severely taxed in following me through the minute details of my narrative.—To begin then, at once, with Chapter first,—for it shall be a tale of many chapters.—

Anne Brontë: *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)