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"HALF SAVAGE AND HARDY, AND FREE":

THE FAILURE OF FEMININE IDENTITY IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

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“HALF SAVAGE AND HARDY, AND FREE”:

THE FAILURE OF FEMININE IDENTITY IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

Over the last half-century, much of the scholarly discourse concerning *Wuthering Heights* has considered Catherine Earnshaw's struggle for belonging in the social order, using a transgressive mode of gender criticism to push against the constraints of traditional femininity found in both the space of Brontë's world and within the norms of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries at large. Using Lacanian theoretical analysis, however, I argue that Brontë's novel effects an uncanny interpretation of womanhood, placing Catherine between two impossible, failed identities. The first, beginning in childhood, is rooted in an Imaginary form of identification with Heathcliff, who acts as the image with whom she identifies. The second emerges through her participation in the Symbolic order as a socially recognized wife, mother, and upper-class lady. Unable to find satisfaction in the self-mediation necessitated by these Imaginary and Symbolic identities, she lacks any identity at all. Instead, it is only in death that Catherine attains true freedom from the agony of identification. By tracing this search for a fully realized sense of self throughout her life, I endeavor to illustrate how Lacan's theory offers a framework for understanding Catherine's inner conflict, revealing the fundamental futility of searching for oneself in an external object or system.

"Half Savage and Hardy, and Free": The Failure of Feminine Identity in *Wuthering Heights*

Introduction

As a novel concerned with the tension between contradictory positions and identities, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, published in 1847, itself inhabits a disjointed place concerning its genre and era of publication. To use Andrew Miller's phrase, *Wuthering Heights* resists both the "moral perfectionism" (3) that often undergirds nineteenth-century literature and what Jesse Rosenthal refers to as "an agreed-upon sense of what constitutes the right outcome of events" throughout the plot (5). As a result, it stands apart from the moralistic, comic, and sentimental narrative conclusions found in more conventional novels of the century. Instead, *Wuthering Heights* adopts various tropes of the eighteenth-century Gothic tradition—particularly the uncanny, which Freud describes as the "class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar" (2-3)—as the novel makes familiar reality (i.e., the morality, expectations, and standards of nineteenth-century Britain) appear unfamiliar. The novel's use of the Gothic intervenes in the development of the self intrinsic to the traditional bildungsroman, allowing for the disruption of Victorian social norms as it not only challenges the categories of gender and class but also exposes the nightmarish effects of such inherently constricting identities. Brontë exemplifies this complication in particular through Catherine Earnshaw, trapped between two incongruous forms of identification, as she renders uncanny the familiar role of women in a patriarchal world.

Critical Context

In addition to the standard critical focus on Catherine's relationship with Heathcliff as it conflicts with the overarching patriarchal, socioeconomic structure of the British gentry, many scholars follow a transgressive model of gender criticism that overemphasizes the disparity between Catherine's perceived freedom in childhood and her constrained experience of socialized womanhood. I argue, however, that this neglects to account for the fundamental failure of Catherine's identifications both within and outside the social order. For example, Michelle Massé tackles the issue of gender in *Wuthering Heights* with a particular emphasis on the emergence of gender disparities between young children that arise through the process of social and emotional development. She claims that "the difference is seen in what is represented as socially possible for girls and boys" and how "they incorporate those social expectations as part of their identities" (138). Massé portrays the issue of socialization and Catherine's creation of an identity according to social norms as a kind of fall from an idealized, Edenic childhood markedly free from the restrictive expectations of a socialized feminine identity. This implication of a "true" self that societal participation corrupts overlooks the limitations and dissatisfaction characteristic of Catherine's identification with Heathcliff that motivate her assimilation into the social sphere in the first place.

More recently, Claire Jarvis, partially drawing from the work of Leo Bersani, applies this transgressive interpretation to Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship more specifically: "Catherine's intense feeling for the foundling Heathcliff indicates a decision to identify beyond the bounds of the family; it is her extreme difference from him that makes her identification with him so radical" (34). Nevertheless, Jarvis concludes, the children's complex connection—even as it changes from apparent difference to an uncanny kind of identification—remains essential to

their constructions of self throughout their lives, particularly concerning their proximity to each other and to the social order from which they are long excluded. Like Massé, Jarvis construes Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship as a kind of escape from the social "bounds of the family" and, in doing so, suggests that the identification between the two is not itself constrictive—a perspective that a Lacanian reading of the novel rejects as impossible given the alienation intrinsic to any kind of interpersonal association.

Similarly, Carol Jacobs writes that *Wuthering Heights* offers "that one last refuge of identity, the passion between Catherine and Heathcliff, for this relationship defines itself in terms of those themes of disjunction (i.e., from social connections) that it would seem to transcend" altogether (73). According to Jacobs, then, the very issue of Catherine's unsuccessful participation in the social order is inseparably tied to her complicated performance of gender, her inability to offer an answer to the question of what exactly—what roles, what relationships, what self-understanding—constitutes womanhood, as well as her family name and her relationship with Heathcliff, the last of which effectively usurps these social bonds. As with the previous critics, Jacobs's argument misses the implication in Brontë's novel that the "refuge of identity" ostensibly represented in Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship does not actually exist, that all forms of external identification are by nature suffocating and inadequate. It is with this point in mind that this paper contradicts these transgressive readings through Lacanian theoretical analysis, revealing that a self can never be fully realized and exploring how Brontë's novel thus effects an uncanny interpretation of womanhood as it positions Catherine between two unviable, failed identities.

Theoretical Context

The search for self in the work of Jacques Lacan begins with an acknowledgement that humans are inherently lacking beings. It is this lack that produces the desire for an unknowable something (called, among other things, *l'objet petit a*) and a fruitless drive for fulfillment through self-identification, as "one identifies with persons, images, and so forth because one lacks innate being and wants to eradicate this loss by bridging the void within and without" (Boliaki 55). Lacan explains how humans work to overcome or assuage this perception of lack through his triadic categorization of psychic experience: "the Symbolic order constitutes our social reality, the Imaginary provides an avenue for the illusory transgression of that reality, and the Real marks the point at which the Symbolic fails—the gap that always haunts it" (McGowan, *The End of Dissatisfaction* 18). The Imaginary and the Symbolic are the two primary registers of identification in this theory, offering a subject, in different ways, the fantasy of self-discovery through an association with an external object or participation in a larger system.

In Lacan's view, the Imaginary originates in the mirror stage, his term for the period of development in childhood when a baby, observing its own reflection in a mirror, is first able to make "*an identification*, in the full sense analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image" (94). The child's recognition of physical independence from the mother as an individual within its environment allows it to distinguish between "self" and "other," categorize its world successfully, and, consequently, enter social reality. This results in an awareness of one's own difference and "apartness," commencing a lifelong search for a perceived unattainable wholeness in an other.

Todd McGowan describes the Imaginary as "the domain of images, a register of experience that allows the subject to visualize the enjoyment it lacks" in which "there is no

distance between the subject and the image" due to an absence of mediation between the two (*The End of Dissatisfaction* 18, 20). In the context of *Wuthering Heights*, the first of Catherine's two identities is Imaginary and encompasses her attempts to "[don] the armor of an alienating identity" through the fantasized, idealized, "whole" image of Heathcliff, with whom she begins to identify in childhood (Lacan 78, 97). Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship is Imaginary in that it is detached from Symbolic roles and identities, though they insist on having this sense of self through the other, not apart from it. Despite this failure of separation, alienation does develop in that they each acquire an identity outside of themselves. However, I argue that a Lacanian reading of their relationship reveals the collapse of this Imaginary mode of identification in two primary ways. First, the very existence of an image, an other, serving as a basis or support for Catherine's perception of self simultaneously and inevitably annihilates it, as true self-determination and "autonomy [can] only come from the suppression of the very image" upon which one's identity depends (Boliaki 58). Second, a legitimate Imaginary identity, in which one finds oneself in one's own image, is not possible for Catherine and Heathcliff because of their consistent mediation of this identification through language, epitomized in Catherine's infamous declaration, "I *am* Heathcliff" (Brontë 82).

By contrast, Catherine's second failed identity as a refined lady is rooted in the Symbolic order. Upon her assumption of this role, she strives to fit within the rigid system of social, economic, and gendered traditions, laws, expectations, and norms that encompass the structure of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture and society. As with the Imaginary register, Lacan illustrates the futility of these elements in terms of identification, in this case citing the way in which they mediate the self through signifiers: "these non-natural values, socially patterned, internalized and embodied repetitions, will organize one's fragments, perception, language,

thought and action, and formulate one's self-image, identity and personal history and life" (Boliaki 68). This so-called "[organization of] one's fragments" reiterates not only the motivation to seek out ways to compensate for one's inherent lack, but also the impossibility of doing so; a mere "organization" of what is already fragmented does not alter or fix the fragmentation—the lack—itself. Catherine's participation in the Symbolic order, establishing a socially available identity centered on the hegemonic standards of class and gender, depends on her compliance with the traditional behavioral expectations, social propriety, and conventions of the landed gentry into which she is born, thus requiring her transformation from unruly child to wife, mother, and lady.

The search for ourselves in any external being, group, or other social identification fails, then, writes Lacan, because our "self" can never be fully realized—a consequence of our own lack, which breeds the desire to find identification elsewhere in the first place—nor be adequately mediated through an other due to our innate alienation from anything outside or beyond ourselves. The Freudian concept of the uncanny likewise emerges from a sense of alienation, rendering the familiar strange and frightening through uncomfortable unfamiliarity. These uncanny moments reject the commonly accepted classifications that comprise the way in which we comprehend the world around us (e.g., us/them, internal/external), inhibiting self-mediation and thus resulting in a failure of identification. This effectively destroys our perception of reality, which is constructed around specific categories—a process that *Wuthering Heights* portrays in its revelation of the fundamental uncanniness of and isolation within the Symbolic and Imaginary orders through Catherine's crisis of identity.

Throughout the novel, Catherine experiences both the uncanniness characteristic of these means of identification and the inability to make either identity something with which she can

live. In addition to the nature of the Gothic allowing for the solution to Catherine and Heathcliff's struggles through their ghostly afterlife, the work of Lacan offers a framework for understanding Catherine's confrontation of her own lack in two distinct ways. First, it explores the extent to which it exposes not only the limited options for women in the social order, and, second, it reveals the impossibility of true satisfaction as she is simultaneously trapped within the claustrophobia of an Imaginary relationship with Heathcliff and subject to the Symbolic expectations of marriage to Edgar Linton. This paper analyzes the metamorphosis of Catherine's sense of self—both in life and after death—in conjunction with her fluctuating distance from sociocultural norms. In doing so, it addresses the constrictions of Catherine's identification in childhood, the artificiality of nineteenth-century societal expectations following her interpellation into the hegemonic social structure, the ultimate breakdown of her Imaginary and Symbolic identities, as well as the complications of her position following her death as the novel challenges traditional romantic notions of self-unification.

"More Myself Than I Am": Foundations of an Imaginary Identity

From childhood, the problem of Catherine's identity is one of complicated mediation, perpetuated by the rejection of traditional nineteenth-century expectations. Instead, I suggest, she relies on Heathcliff, the figure she most closely relates to as an "outcast of that society" and most distant from social norms, to create a non-traditional, Imaginary self-image. Through the observations of Nelly Dean, a house servant and the novel's primary narrator, Brontë depicts Catherine as essentially ungendered, free to roam the moors, and not bound to a specific identity or held to the expectations of traditional femininity:

> Certainly she had ways with her such as I never saw a child take up before; and she put all of us past our patience fifty times and oftener in a day: from the hour she came downstairs till the hour she went to bed, we had not a minute's security that she wouldn't be in mischief. Her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going—singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same...She was much too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him: yet she got chided more than any of us on his account. (Brontë 42)

Nelly acts as the mouthpiece for conventional ideas about the nineteenth-century gender and class structure throughout the novel. Catherine, having "ways with her such as [Nelly] never saw a child take up before," already functions outside of established social expectations. In place of the feminine propriety and decorum expected of her station, Catherine tends towards the uncouth and overzealous—a "too muchness" that aligns her with Heathcliff and, therefore, in Nelly's eyes, trouble. Massé notes the "role of agency and aggression in the preoedipal period" and "Catherine's 'unfeminine' inclusion of them as integral parts of her core self" in defiance of gendered expectations (141). Catherine rejects the stereotype of upper-class girlhood as innately demure, well-groomed, and quiet in favor of noise and mischief (Brontë 42). Nelly lacks any comprehension of or sympathy for Catherine's restlessness and instead complains of her antics ("we had not a minute's security"; "she put all of us past our patience fifty times and oftener in a day") because she holds her against the standards of the landed gentry class into which she is born. As a result, Catherine, who embraces a wild, aggressive, untamable, "unfeminine" sense of self, cannot meet these gendered expectations of proper behavior.

With this social alienation in mind, Bonnie Burns argues that their passion for each other transcends any variance between the two of them (of birth, of demeanor) and instead moves them

into a “space of non-differentiation”—of near-sameness (82). The “non-differentiation” of their Imaginary identity is, in part, founded on Catherine and Heathcliff’s shared trauma of alienation from the social sphere. Heathcliff in particular bears his suffering at the hands of Catherine’s brother, Hindley, “pretty well at first, because Catherine taught him what she learnt, and worked or played with him in the fields. They both promised fair to grow up rude as savages, the young master being entirely negligent how they behaved” (Brontë 46). In the place of authoritative care and socialized guidance, Catherine and Heathcliff remain apart from the expectations of those (e.g., Hindley) who have, with few exceptions, excluded them from familial belonging, “entirely negligent how they behaved.”

Consequently, there is a burgeoning codependence between them, a discovery that they are, as Nelly calls them, “unfriended creatures” (Brontë 47). Even Nelly, the adult most concerned with their wellbeing, describes the two children using terms that distance them from normative Symbolic identities, calling them “savages” and “creatures.” Because Nelly speaks for and represents conventional morality in the social order, she views Catherine and Heathcliff as naturally existing outside of the bounds of civilization itself; Dorothy van Ghent offers a romantic description of their inability to adhere to expectations: “[they are] portions of the flux of nature, children of rock and heath and tempest, striving to identify themselves as human, but disrupting all around them with their monstrous appetite for an inhuman kind of intercourse” (157). Catherine and Heathcliff are all alone in their “inhuman” world, long since set apart from the social sphere. Thus, they can only rely on each other for understanding, companionship, and the creation of an Imaginary identity. Van Ghent’s description of the children’s “monstrous appetite” suggests not only that the core of this Imaginary identification lies in their own inherent lack, consistently craving something external to and beyond themselves

as individuals, but also the failure of this identity—and, therefore, the other—to satisfy their own intrinsic desires for wholeness.

Though the pre-social foundations of their respective conceptions of self each reflect the other, Catherine and Heathcliff's Imaginary bond already exists in an alienated state, mediated through metaphors and signifiers. Catherine's declaration that "I *am* Heathcliff—he's always, always in my mind…as my own being" (Brontë 82), reveals the inability of her identification with him to serve as a self-coincident identity; her metaphorized assertion that she "is" Heathcliff negates any legitimate self-identification while simultaneously rejecting any Symbolic modes of identification outside of him. Her identity is thus fundamentally uncanny in that it complicates any degree of belonging other than with and "as" Heathcliff—himself utterly estranged from the familial social structure of Wuthering Heights. Catherine subverts gender norms, avoids participation in the class structure, and refutes any other restrictive label of identity even as she remains confined within this Imaginary identification.

Their childhood bouts of wild abandon and emotional turbulence reveal their removal from the sociocultural, gendered order, and thus their possession of a structured identity only in the most literal sense: a recognition of the other. The two children have established an Imaginary identity through "a relationship built on an internal accord that is, by its nature, mysterious to outsiders," particularly Nelly, Hindley, and his wife Frances (Jarvis 34). Because Nelly cannot understand an identity that does not fit within normative conceptions of gender and class, it is through this "inhumanness" of behavior and appearance that the reader can locate Catherine and Heathcliff as alienated in their environment. However, even though Catherine does not yet conform to the organized confines of decent society, she has, through her surname, a family connection that the mononymous Heathcliff lacks and, as a result, has the potential to eventually

assume a proper place within the Symbolic social order. This, then, acts as the ultimate evidence of the failure of Catherine's identification with Heathcliff; her dissatisfaction in the Imaginary results in a search for wholeness in a new "other": the Symbolic register.

"The Queen of the Country-Side": Identity Through Interpellation

As she ages, Catherine struggles to reconcile integration into the social sphere with her childhood construction of self founded upon her Imaginary relationship with Heathcliff. Louis Althusser's concept of interpellation, the internalization of and subjectification by hegemonic values, is fundamentally one of rebirth in and through ideology. As McGowan claims, "subjectivity is the problem that ideology tries to conquer by offering the lure of Symbolic identity" ("The Bankruptcy of Historicism" 5). The very act of entering into a formal, socialized identity requires a mediation of oneself and thus participation in the Symbolic order. In this way, the Symbolic represents a means by which one may fill the void of one's own lack through the fantasy of finally "realizing" oneself, and interpellation functions to construct an identity within the terms of—and offer a position in relation to—hegemonic ideologies.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine experiences the beginning of this formation of social identity following her initial stay with the Linton family at Thrushcross Grange. During this period, Frances, who represents idealized womanhood as Hindley's wife, endeavors to bring Catherine into the social sphere by teaching her the conventions of proper femininity: "[she] commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise [Catherine's] self-respect with fine clothes and flattery, which she took readily," so that Catherine returns to Wuthering Heights much changed (Brontë 53). She is no longer a child of "absolute heathenism" (in Mr. Linton's view) or a "wild, hatless little savage" (in Nelly's), but a "very dignified person" (Brontë 53). Even Hindley

admires the difference, "exclaiming delightedly, 'Why, Cathy, you are quite a beauty! I should scarcely have known you—you look like a *lady* now'" (Brontë 53, emphasis mine). Her appearance, improved by "fine clothes and flattery," indicates this change in self-presentation and participation to accord with conventional social expectations. It announces to her delighted audience that she accepts these signifiers of femininity and her new place within the social system that determines these expectations of gender and status. Thus, due to her immersion in Thrushcross Grange and adapting to Isabella and Edgar Linton's normative, socially acceptable way of life as children of the upper class (as well as her prolonged separation from Heathcliff), Catherine undergoes the process of social interpellation. This transition strips away the perceived freedoms of her childhood at Wuthering Heights and prepares her for her proper role as a lady. Moreover, it denotes a progression of socialization that, given Hindley's exclamation, "I should scarcely have known you!" and Frances's great relief, has made her appear more ladylike.

In addition to her refined appearance, Catherine's behavior also seems to meet the standards befitting her stature and means. Though Frances warns that "[Catherine] must mind and not grow wild again here," expecting her to backslide into old habits, Catherine instead embraces the identities the Lintons had hoped she would take on: "[Catherine's] eyes sparkled joyfully when the dogs came bounding up to welcome her, she dared hardly touch them lest they should fawn upon her splendid garments," and "she kissed [Nelly] gently: [Nelly] was all flour making the Christmas cake, and it would not have done to give [her] a hug" (Brontë 53). This interaction marks a shift for Catherine, who was always before, in Nelly's eyes, "mischievous and wayward," defiant and impudent, and who, on the night she first arrived at the Grange, had even run across the moors barefoot (Brontë 38, 48). However, Nelly now describes Catherine's actions as gentle and notes how she hardly dares to touch the excitable dogs, fearing they should

sully her clothes. In this way, Catherine appears to exemplify a successful interpellation into the social order, meeting the stable Symbolic expectations of gentry femininity. Nelly's description of Catherine's behavior is entirely optimistic, either overlooking or ignoring any possibility of this identity's potential failure. Because Catherine imitates the Lintons' example of proper dress and behavior, Nelly believes that she has accepted her intended identity within the social sphere. Nelly's use of the phrase, "it would not have done," further underscores that, for the first time, Catherine follows a societal understanding of proper and improper conduct (Brontë 49). Though she would have readily and informally embraced her flour-dusted nurse in the past, not caring about sullying her dress, Catherine now refrains, more aware of the conventions and behavior expected of upper-class young women.

Despite these improvements in appearance and behavior, Catherine does not yet fully adhere to the rigid structures of the social, gendered, and economic hierarchies, leaving her torn between two conceptions of self. This disparity is made evident given how she, immediately following the precautions she takes to protect her pristine new outer shell from the dogs' excitement, "looked round for Heathcliff" (Brontë 53). At this moment, Catherine straddles the line between lady and child; though she fulfills the expectations of and makes an effort to act according to her family's wishes, she cannot suppress the long-held yearning of her child-self—that is, the self not yet embedded in the social order—to be with Heathcliff. Thus, upon her return to Wuthering Heights, her identity takes on a new form of in-betweenness. While she has, on the one hand, begun assuming the role of a lady, rooted in the Symbolic order, her (now-dwindling) connection to the child she once was, and therefore her lingering identification in the Imaginary, complicates this new position.

The process of interpellation, however, is ongoing. When they meet again, Catherine impresses upon Heathcliff, "If you wash your face, and brush your hair, it will be all right. But you are so dirty!" (Brontë 55). Despite her desire to be always with Heathcliff—a perception that formerly bordered on oneness—Catherine notices, at this moment, the overt differences between them that her recent societal adherence has produced. Though she claims that if he were to conform to this new set of expectations, "it will be all right," she also exhibits shock ("*But* you are so dirty!") before "[gazing] *concernedly* at the dusky fingers she held in her own, and also at her dress, which she feared had gained no embellishment from its contact with his" (Brontë 55, emphasis mine). These descriptions of apprehension elaborate upon the way Nelly interprets Catherine's recognition of her social and physical differences from Heathcliff—manifestations of her place within the social order and his remaining outside of it. In this way, the newly established distance between herself-as-child outside society and herself-as-lady within it both parallels and is indicative of the now-growing degree of dissimilarity between the two. As a result, Catherine "[adopts] a double character without exactly intending to deceive anyone" (Brontë 67), a conflict that arises when she claims a kind of psychological closeness to Heathcliff while simultaneously upholding the very social barriers—especially concerning her unspoiled appearance and haughty attitude—that now separate them. Despite her observance of feminine social expectations, her Symbolic transformation fails to alter her first identity, deeply rooted in her Imaginary relationship with Heathcliff, as though their emotional connection is ingrained beyond correction.

This dissonance between their childhood closeness and Catherine's assimilation into upper-class society only grows more complicated over time. Her assertion to Nelly that she would never be able to marry Heathcliff else they "should be beggars" demonstrates her new

consciousness of the barriers of class, wealth, and standing that now supersede their once-Imaginary relationship (Brontë 82). Here, then, there is a suggestion that this split occurs as Catherine undertakes her new station in the socioeconomic realm of familial power and expectations, as well as the advantages of the landed gentry—these "imperatives of class and fortune" (Burns 82). Because Heathcliff lacks the social connection or position inherent to either the possession of a family name or property of his own, the two cannot be united in the purely Symbolic union of marriage. Through this issue, Brontë underscores the separation that class difference forces upon their relationship. Social interpellation, however, merely contributes to the excesses, the void of meaning, the indefinability, and the uncanniness that characterize Catherine's conceptions of self, both in her relationship with Heathcliff and in the social order, and produce her desire to escape these Symbolic and Imaginary constraints.

"An Exile, and Outcast": The Failure of Identity

Catherine's participation in the Symbolic order culminates with her marriage to Edgar Linton and her subsequent assumption of the roles of wife and lady of Thrushcross Grange. This, Burns argues, cements for her a social bond "sustained through the consolidation of property, the perpetuation of lineage, and the careful adherence to convention…destined to reproduce" the social hegemony (83). In creating a socioeconomic identity rooted in these Symbolic concerns, Catherine continues her ultimately futile drive for self-fulfillment and satisfaction as she strives to successfully find herself within the restrictive labels of woman, wife, and soon-to-be mother in the upper class.

From the start, Catherine's relationship with Heathcliff complicates her marriage to Edgar. Even following her social interpellation, Catherine endeavors to maintain her kindred

connection to Heathcliff, trying, in a sense, to place herself within these two contradictory worlds simultaneously: “I cannot sit in the kitchen. Set two tables here, [Nelly]; one for [Edgar] and Miss Isabella, being gentry; the other for Heathcliff and myself, being of the lower orders” (Brontë 95). Considering this conflict, William Madden challenges the emotional legitimacy of the Lintons’ union, describing it as “an attempt to evade the basic truth about [Catherine], her being wedded to Heathcliff as a fellow outcast from that society” because “Heathcliff is inseparably connected in Catherine’s mind with her beloved moors ‘out there’ beyond society” (149). Because her legitimate marriage to Edgar is connected to her identity as a lady and participant in the social order, it is incompatible with the nature of her Imaginary self, which is “wedded to Heathcliff as a fellow outcast” and rooted in the dual illusions of the physical and psychological freedom she possessed prior to assuming her Symbolic identity and of “being of the lower orders” socially. According to Lacan’s theory, her struggle to navigate the two modes of identification speaks to the fundamental impossibility of this twofold self-perception—and to the futility of such identities all together. When Edgar eventually demands that Catherine choose between Heathcliff and himself, her consequent experience of having potentially lost access to Heathcliff—and therefore a connection to the Imaginary identity she held before becoming immured in the identity of a proper lady—triggers a failure of self-identification.

Catherine’s Symbolic identity fully collapses when she, toward the end of her life, cannot recognize her own reflection in the mirror, finding instead the feminized, mediated social image of the lady of Thrushcross Grange. When she cannot fulfill this identification, she asks Nelly, “Don’t *you* see that face?” as she “[gazes] earnestly at the mirror” (Brontë 123). Despite Nelly’s efforts to reassure her that the two are alone in the room, Catherine is convinced of another presence, exclaiming that the frightening apparition is “behind there still…And it stirred. Who is

it? I hope it will not come out when [Nelly is] gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!" (Brontë 123). Catherine's inability to find herself in the image of the lady of Thrushcross Grange both renders her reflection uncanny as she fails to classify it as an extension of herself, and calls this identity into question. She discovers that the room itself, usually so familiar and homelike, has also become inexplicably terrifying in its alienness ("Nelly, the room is haunted!"), and her fear of being alone speaks to the uncanny horror of lacking self-perception, as she is now stripped of her Imaginary identity as a result of her separation from Heathcliff and unable to assume that of a proper, conventional lady.

Even when Nelly insists that no one else is there with them and informs Catherine, "It was yourself, Mrs. Linton: you knew it a while since," Catherine is incredulous: "'Myself!' she *gasped*…'It's true, then! that's *dreadful*!'" (Brontë 123, emphasis mine). It is Nelly, grounded firmly in the Symbolic order, who offers the revelation that Catherine does not recognize herself ("It was yourself, Mrs. Linton"). In this moment of detachment from her once-familiar social image, Catherine's reaction to Nelly's assertion ranges from shock to despair ("'Myself!' she gasped"; "that's dreadful!"). As her sense of self thus splinters, Catherine is subtracted from the Symbolic order, suspended in the liminal space between the two insufferable identities as the Catherine who existed "as" Heathcliff during her childhood at Wuthering Heights and her own self-as-lady at Thrushcross Grange. This conflict illustrates the uncanny limitations of feminine identities in a patriarchal social structure; because Catherine cannot belong to both the Symbolic, upper-class, polished life Edgar offers and Heathcliff and their inextricable, Imaginary bond, she belongs to neither and thus lacks any identity at all. Nelly demands of Catherine, "Who is coward now? Wake up! That is the glass—the mirror, Mrs. Linton; and you see yourself in it, and there am I too by your side," and "trembling and bewildered, [Catherine] held [Nelly] fast,

but the horror gradually passed from her countenance; its paleness gave place to a glow of shame" (Brontë 124). Catherine, "trembling and bewildered," emerges into the trauma of a fragmented identity, having rejected the social position that she once held, and her "glow of shame" serves as a consciousness of this lack, the awareness of her own alienation from society and its uncanny means of identification.

Though her Imaginary association with Heathcliff also failed to mollify her desire for a fully realized sense of self, therefore driving her to find a new object of potential satisfaction and promised wholeness in the Symbolic order, Catherine's inability (or, perhaps, unwillingness) to let go of Heathcliff renders her only partially assimilated to available social roles. Because of this, Catherine is trapped between what Lacan describes as "two deaths"—stuck in a "state of mortification, of being *dead while alive*" (Hook 247). Her first death, her Symbolic death, occurs when her struggle for and eventual collapse of identity leave her without a place in the structured world. The impending threat of her second, physical death in the near future can be read as a consequence of this loss of social belonging.

In the scenes and conversations with Nelly and Heathcliff shortly before her death, Catherine herself demonstrates her desire to escape the restrictive bounds of any and all identification. The problem of her identity constitutes a lack that has pervaded her entire life, exemplified in her efforts to forge social and personal connections with Heathcliff and Edgar. She laments to Heathcliff and Nelly, "I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there; not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart; but really with it, and in it" (Brontë 162). For Catherine, as an innately lacking subject, the perception of an unattainable wholeness can only be exacted, in her own words, through an "escape" to "that glorious world" and "to be

always there" (Brontë 162). Faced with the futility of her hope for satisfactory Imaginary and Symbolic identification with Heathcliff or Edgar, she turns to the fantasy of landscape, and her inability to locate herself in any of her previous selves gives way to a lofty new desire to be "really with it, and in it." Her declaration that she, in dying, "shall be incomparably beyond and above [them] all" suggests, then, her rejection of the false hope for a fulfillment she once believed could be found in society or external images and objects (Brontë 162). Here, then, Catherine seems to finally come to terms with the fundamental impossibility of escaping from the constrictions of either Symbolic or Imaginary identities other than in death, finding within it a new promise of attaining an eventual wholeness of self.

"Be with Me Always": Identity and the Post-Mortem

While it is in life that these various identities are formed, their constrictions and mediations endure for Catherine even after death, perpetuated through lingering Symbolic connections and Heathcliff's desperate struggle for continued identification with her. After she dies—at last a figure of "perfect peace" and "infinite calm" (Brontë 166)—Heathcliff attempts and ultimately fails to fill the void of desire left by her absence. His explosive reaction to her death initially challenges the assumption of her permanent removal from him:

> Why, she's a liar to the end! Where is she? Not *there*—not in heaven—not perished—where? Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer—I repeat it till my tongue stiffens—Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you—haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh,

> God! it is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul! (Brontë 169)

Heathcliff's use of apostrophe to beseech the deceased Catherine, daring her to haunt him, to "[wander] the earth," to "take any form," and to not go "where [he] cannot find [her]," seems to verbally tie her into his reality. Because a mediated subject is intrinsically lacking, Heathcliff endures the perpetual feeling of having lost "[his] life," "[his] soul," which constitutes Catherine's continued role as Heathcliff's preeminent object of desire. Therefore, despite her own loss of identity and place within the social order, Catherine becomes, in death, a representation of Heathcliff's lack, his own identity, his projected image of completeness, and the *objet petit a* to which he clings and for which he perpetually longs throughout the rest of his life.

In addition to remaining thus symbolized in the two decades after her death, Catherine also appears in the form of a child, haunting the land surrounding Wuthering Heights. When she scratches at his window, Lockwood, the narrator of the novel's frame, confronts her, asking, "Who are you?" "'Catherine Linton,' it replied, shiveringly…'I'm come home, I'd lost my way on the moor!' As it spoke, [he] discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window" (Brontë 25). Catherine's appearance as a ghost child occurs without Symbolic mediation; it serves as a kind of uncanny, interstitial "identity," a blurring of the two visions of self—assuming the physical manifestation of the unruly child on the moors and adopting the name of the socialized "Catherine Linton"—that she lost prior to her death. Indeed, Burns argues, "the ghost child claiming the name of wife and mother obliterates language's capacity to make a difference" in discerning these identities (91). In this uncanny life-after-death, Catherine, who claims she has "lost [her] way," takes on a linguistically mediated figure that impedes, as in life,

her continued search for an identity that can offer wholeness. Though she now appropriates both of these previous versions of herself, she, begging to be let into Wuthering Heights, is still outside society. In this way, her new form draws out the irony of her unhappy search for self; when she was without a stable identity at the end of her life, she longed for nothing more than to escape to the independence she projected upon her childhood, wishing that she "were out of doors" and "a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free" (Brontë 125). A child once again, she can remain *only* on the moors, untethered to the constraints of physical existence within Wuthering Heights. Though she, even as the ghost child, retains the Linton name that gave her social standing, it no longer offers her any sense of Symbolic connection.

Beyond her mournful lingering on the moors, Catherine remains bound to Wuthering Heights as a second kind of haunting presence through Heathcliff's own projection of her image onto his reality. In a brief moment of rationality, he acknowledges their enduring separation while he remains alive:

> what is not connected with her to me? what does not recall her? I cannot look down to this floor, but her features are shaped in 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 image! The most ordinary faces of men and women—my own features—mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her! (Brontë 323-324)

The figural identification that Heathcliff finds in "every cloud, in every tree" emphasizes the uncanniness of his continued Imaginary connection with Catherine as it does not fit within any Symbolic mediation or conventional notion of a beloved. Instead, he associates her with images that exist outside and beyond her, in nature, other people, Wuthering Heights, and himself. As

long as Catherine remains—as a woman, as a symbol, as a ghost—subject to the Imaginary order, her uncanny "identity" will be limited and determined by the absolute lack that inhibits not only her unification with Heathcliff, but also Heathcliff's own ability to find contentment in this continued identification, constantly "surrounded by her image" yet always apart from her.

Escape from this torturous mediation necessitates, for Heathcliff, an absolute eradication of his means of participation in the Symbolic order. Unlike Catherine, who is born into a social position, the unconnected Heathcliff must forge his own place, as "the problematics of naming and inheritance are paralleled by that of perpetual exile" from society (Jacobs 73). While Catherine constructs a social identity through marriage to Edgar, Heathcliff, lacking in family name or Symbolic connection, creates a kind of socioeconomic identity of his own, combatting this threat of "perpetual exile" through the questionable acquisition of property and participation in capitalist accumulation. However, this usurped, illegitimate identity fails to satisfy the role of true, unattainable object of desire that Catherine ultimately occupies. It is only through Heathcliff's own "two deaths" towards the end of Brontë's novel that the potential arises for him, and, by extension, Catherine, to escape the bounds of the Symbolic and Imaginary, and end the perpetual search for self-realization. His first death occurs through relinquishing his Symbolic participation in the economic sphere (and "[wishing] [he] could annihilate it from the face of the earth" [Brontë 332]), followed by his second, literal death, which ensues from gradual starvation ("I take so little interest in my daily life, that I hardly remember to eat and drink" [Brontë 323]).

Despite the fatal culmination of this process, the conclusion of the novel overturns the usual implication of death's finality as Lockwood learns of rumors concerning the deceased "Heathcliff and a woman, yonder, under t' Nab" (Brontë 337). In removing themselves from the Symbolic and Imaginary orders, both in life and through death, Catherine and Heathcliff do not

achieve eternal peace, but rather exact a kind of inversion of the traditional idea of death as, according to Lockwood, "[slumbering]" in "quiet earth" (Brontë 337). The two assume a supernatural, uncanny form of life-without-life as they wander the paths between the Grange and Wuthering Heights. The liminality of this final scene depicting the undead Catherine and Heathcliff speaks to the ambiguity of the novel's resolution. Though Brontë's conclusion seems to suggest that this uncanny experience of death upholds the instability of self-coincidence and answers their desire to be always together, they remain distinct beings despite no longer falling prey to the restrictions intrinsic to the problem of mediated identity that forced their separation in life.

Conclusion

From the failure of her pre-social origins in childhood, to interpellation at Thrushcross Grange, to the eventual fragmentation of her identity as wife and mother and lady, to her post-mortem existence alongside Heathcliff, Catherine embodies the ongoing conflict between the Imaginary and the Symbolic registers. The work of Lacan offers a framework for reading *Wuthering Heights* in a way that exposes the fundamental inability of these identifiers to satisfy or account for our own inherent lack. With this in mind, Catherine exemplifies not only the consequences of alienation from these Symbolic and Imaginary modes, but also the uncanniness of how, as Terry Castle describes, "the more one understands, the less clear—one finds—things are" (19). Through a cycle of search and collapse, the transformation of Catherine's various identities both within and outside hegemonic ideals reveals the impossibility of finding herself in either the Symbolic expectations of wife and mother and lady or the failed embodiment of an Imaginary self "as Heathcliff." Instead, my Lacanian reading of *Wuthering Heights* suggests that

it is only in death that one may truly escape the suffocating constraints of mediated identity and, at long last, realize the fantasy of wholeness.

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