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Andy Cabello Bravo

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Tensions of Identity in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*"

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Abstract: The tenor of Catherine Earnshaw throughout *Wuthering Heights* has been construed and revised in many different ways. Gender, psychoanalytic, post-structuralist readings have offered interpretations as to her pilgrimage, her vindications, or her identity; but the core of what Catherine ultimately is and is contained by traces back to her childhood, Heathcliff, and the moors, where she abides by a state of spiritual wholeness. It is in this narrative gap, where no record from Nelly Dean exists, that her identity is formed. The fact that this period is not subjected to language entails that the primary meaning is left intentionally untouched; its content is too strange to be told—it needs to remain unknown. Through her coming of age this wholeness inherent to her past will be lost. Her evolution in the novel, lastly, will represent the struggle born in coexistence of Victorian domestic values with the unconscious desire to be herself again. This essay intends to shed light on the elements that permit us understand Catherine's journey as one of domestication of strangeness, and the tensions of identity that grow in her *self* with it.

Keywords: Catherine Earnshaw, identity, domestication, Heathcliff, moors, strangeness.

ANDY CABELLO BRAVO

The Domestication of Catherine Earnshaw: Tensions of Identity in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

0. Introduction

"Even the female characters excite something of loathing and much of contempt," said one of the early reviewers of *Wuthering Heights* in 1848. "Beautiful and loveable in their childhood, they all, to use a vulgar expression, 'turn out badly' " ("Unsigned review" 232). This anonymous reviewer was trying to draw special attention, presumably, to Catherine Earnshaw. Although the character of Catherine is only physically present during the first half of the novel, she constitutes the driving force of the last insofar as her loss whets Heathcliff's appetite for revenge upon the second generation of characters. The tenor of her part in *Wuthering Heights* is much obscured by the narrative itself. The reader does not have access to her past, thoughts, or voice but through Nelly's report to Lockwood, except for her diary: it breaks the chronology of the novel and provides a direct testimony of the childhood of the protagonists right after the death of Mr Earnshaw. From the opening of Chapter I, she is already dead, and the information we receive about her has suffered a process of sifting by the two narrators.

Catherine's pilgrimage has been looked upon in many ways: as a "sacrifice" to herself so as to finally achieve her "pitiful ambition of becoming the wife of a gentleman of station" ("Unsigned review" 232), as a reinterpretation of the fall of man (Gilbert and Gubar 252–7), as a vindication of femininity and defiance of the patriarchal order (Maggie Berg 28–42), and even as a return to the memories of childhood (Margaret Homans 17–8). This essay intends to integrate these perspectives into the line of analysis to explore the process of domestication of Catherine Earnshaw and how the strangeness inherent to her identity has to be mitigated throughout the course of the narration. A word of explanation may be necessary when defining strangeness. In this case, it implies a disturbing array of personality traits that cannot be pigeonholed within a normative discourse, but which is felt to threaten an established order, politically and psychologically. The latter is the special focus of this analysis, since the threat to undermine or disregard the values of the rest of the characters is going to constitute the first and foremost drive behind the will to tame Catherine. For this reason, it is pivotal to fathom the complexity of the box-within-the-box structure and resort to those passages in which the tensions of identity seep out to the surface of the narrative before, during, and after her domestication. Amongst them are the bulldog's grip on Catherine in Chapter VI, the famous I am Heathcliff in Chapter IX, and the "madwoman" scene in Chapter XII.

1. The Domestication of Catherine Earnshaw before Marriage

There are very few passages set before the death of Mr Earnshaw in October 1777 with little Catherine in them. However, the ones that are presented offer a most valuable picture of her. In order to permit this analysis, we must first accept Lockwood's transcription of Nelly's words as reliable, however unreliable she might have been in retailing them. An early scene described by

Nelly in Chapter IV sets the "old master" about to depart to Liverpool: he asks his children what they would like to have from the city:

> Hindley named a fiddle, and then he asked Miss Cathy; she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip. He did not forget me; for he had a kind heart, though he was rather severe sometimes. He promised to bring me a pocketful of apples and pears, and then he kissed his children, said good-bye, and set off. (Brontë 29)

The request to know what he should bring to his children already foretells the probing intention of the master; it sets a climate where each answer will be judged as a symbol of their personality. Each object becomes a recipient of the unconscious desires that will be consciously revealed by the children. The reason for this projection of desires may stem from the fact that they do not perceive the covert incisiveness of the question;[1] it is made easier for them to name such object where, apparently, no unconscious resistance is needed. Of course, a bout of suspense succeeds his departure. The reader is able to inhale the air of enigma that pervades the Heights. "It seemed a long while to us all" (29), Nelly exasperates, and not without cause: the expected arrival is to be for them a confirmation or denial of their professed personalities in the shape of the object brought home by their father. His choice will inevitably encroach on Catherine and Hindley's mental construction of who they are. Eventually, Hindley's fiddle will be shattered into splinters; and Catherine's whip, metaphorically present.

The fact that six-year-old Miss Catherine chooses a whip might strike the reader as a sign of her unusual personality: she has projected herself before her father as dominant, as someone who "could ride any horse in the stable" (29). Gilbert and Gubar regard the whip as a "powerless younger daughter's yearning for power" (264). Rather than a sign of her missing power, the whip represents the physical extension of the actual influence she exerts within the family circle, as Nelly's account of her deportment in the following chapters suggests. Eventually, the promised memento turns out to be "a dirty, ragged, black-haired child" (Brontë 30) soon to become, in spite of Catherine's initial reticence, more than a physical appendage of her power: the newcomer, christened Heathcliff, will *be* the key to her own self.

The ensuing years, Mr Earnshaw's health begins to decline. At the same time, Catherine "had ways with her such as I never saw a child take up before; … [h]er spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going—singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same. A wild, wick slip she was," Nelly declares. In the next lines, we learn "[Catherine] was much too fond of Heathcliff. The greatest punishment we could invent for her was to keep her separate from him" (33–4). This instance highlights their reciprocal fondness, one that, in short notice, has provoked Catherine's impulses to

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[1] Rev. Patrick Brontë recalls an anecdote that could have inspired this passage. As Elizabeth Gaskell compiles, Mr Brontë once summoned his children one by one, and "in order to make them speak with less timidity," "told them all to stand and speak boldly from under cover of the mask [that was in the house]." Emily (aged around five) was asked "what I had best do with her brother Branwell, who was sometimes a naughty boy; she answered, 'Reason with him, and when he won't listen to reason, whip him' " (47).

bond together with Heathcliff's so profoundly that the slightest risk of separation would entail a hazardous uprooting.

These roots of unity are to be found in a black narrative space. Everything that Ellen Dean can tell Lockwood about their early childhood is that "it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day" (37), a habit which is ratified by Catherine's diary when she writes, "[Heathcliff] is impatient, and proposes that we should appropriate the dairy woman's cloak, and have a scamper on the moors, under its shelter. A pleasant suggestion …" (18). In both sentences, the moors are imbued with a sense of strangeness, of the unspeakable. They create a lacuna in the chronology of the story, as no version is furnished when its core takes place in them. For some reason, the moors need to remain unknown. In this respect, Homans avers that,

> Ordinarily, a word presents itself as coming first to the reader, putting its referent in second place. The only way to preserve the priority of something is not to have it named, so that what is primary is just that which is left out of the text, and surely these omissions of descriptions of events in nature are significant holes. (11)

In the end, Catherine, Heathcliff, and the moors are one single entity, and their self is so elusive to the narrative that it has to be excluded in order to *be* or, as Homans puts it, to preserve its priority. It is worth underlining that the time when the two of them blend into one with the moors is without report, dark to the inquisitive eyes of both narrators. As a mythical space framed within a chronology, it endorses what cannot be spoken, *viz.* the construction of Catherine and Heathcliff's single identity, which remains secluded outside the borders of history. Hence the apprehension felt by the rest of the characters, who do not grasp the meaning of their communion: disturbed by the feeling of strangeness, they will undertake a quest to domesticate the two companions, of whom Catherine will be the more impinged on.

The first step of the taming will be taken, curiously enough, by an outsider. When Hindley comes home to the funeral of his father, the reader discovers he has married during his absence and kept the union a secret. His wife, Frances, is the glaring prototype of the angel in the house. On the one hand, it is remarkable that her perpetual condition of sickness (Nelly describes her quick breath and troublesome cough in Chapter VI) confines her to the realm of the domestic. On the other hand, her presence brings a standardised model of feminine deportment and affection into the undomestic Heights. Soon, "[Frances] expressed pleasure, too, at finding a sister among her new acquaintance; and she prattled to Catherine, and kissed her, and ran about with her, and gave her quantities of presents" (Brontë 37). By ushering in the Victorian paradigm of femininity,[2] Hindley is underhandedly supplying the culturally desirable *whip* to tame Catherine's instincts. The latter's diary hoards a moment when, after pulling Heathcliff's hair, Frances "went and seated herself on [Hindley]'s knee, and there they were, like two babies, kissing and talking nonsense by the hour" (17). The scene fairly parallels Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853–4), which displays a woman *coyly* ensconcing

[2] Although the timespan of the novel comprises only from 1771 to 1802, the body of values presented has a glaring correspondence with the Victorian ethos.

herself upon her husband's lap. The matching is not an innocent one, for Frances' entrance into the Heights supposes the entrance of sexuality into Catherine's life. More than that, it signifies a fundamental path to her domestication: the *awakening conscience* of the sexual desire that was not present in those idiosyncratic years with Heathcliff.

That Miss Catherine witnesses the realisation of homely endearment when she is twelve years old shapes the way she will respond to that same feeling in the future. Her brother and sister-in-law set a kind of oppressive *parental* example, even if closer to a fairy-tale (Gilbert and Gubar 269). Thus, it is safe to say that her *step-parents* are translating to the Heights the institution of marriage through a prototype which is ultimately themselves. These months make up Catherine's rite of passage to adolescence; she will unconsciously imbibe the values then set forth and embrace them in due course. Amongst them, it has been seen, lurks the identification of ladyhood with sickness. Nevertheless, it is not only the ingress of the Victorian angel in the house that aims at maiming her sense of identity; the separation of Catherine and Heathcliff decreed by now master Hindley is, too, another medium. It fulfils two main purposes: first, it reinstates the order that a decent home had to possess in the public sphere; secondly, it truncates the metaphorical whip Catherine had been wielding until Mr Earnshaw's death and retrieves the shattered fiddle of his childhood in the form of a dainty wife who, analogously, will suffer the same fate as the instrument.

The second step towards Catherine's domestication is more radical and visually striking. Described by Heathcliff himself (amongst the very few spoken disclosures by him), it abounds in symbolism and has consequently gained the attention of many critics. The scene in question—another rite of passage—opens when the two companions sneak into Thrushcross Park and prowl around the manor-house: busy in beholding the occupation of the Lintons, they happen to be noticed. Soon the dwellers of the Grange let the bulldog loose:

> The devil had seized her ankle, Nelly: I heard his abominable snorting. She did not yell out—no! She would have scorned to do it, if she had been spitted on the horns of a mad cow. I did, though; I vociferated curses enough to annihilate any fiend in Christendom, and I got a stone and thrust it between his jaws, and tried with all my might to cram it down his throat. … The dog was throttled off, his huge, purple tongue hanging half a foot out of his mouth, and his pendent lips streaming with bloody slaver. The [servant] took Cathy up; she was sick: not from fear, I'm certain, but from pain. (Brontë 39)

The image of the dog's snorting, its lips full of blood, and Catherine's bleeding ankle is physically aggressive and sexually disturbing in the narrative. The aforementioned symbolism comes into play when, five weeks later, Catherine reappears donned in a ladylike attire, holding her dress with her hands, her hair curled. She has been, as Berg puts it, "subjected to a program of feminization" (78); has apparently abandoned her entrenched wildness and substituted the attributes of Victorian dignity for it. The dog's bite can be said to represent the actual seizure society exerts upon the subject: the superego (the bulldog) restrains the individual's id (Catherine's identity) and instils the desire for culturally

sanctioned objects. This view is further emphasised the moment the servant takes her in his arms and carries her indoors, as if, once the work had been done, society proceeded to claim its prize. Gilbert and Gubar treat this episode as a sort of kidnapping. They contend that "Catherine does not *go* to the Grange when she is twelve years old. On the contrary, the Grange seizes her and 'holds [her] fast,' a metaphoric action which emphasizes the turbulent and inexorable nature of the psychosexual *rites de passage Wuthering Heights* describes" (271).

Whether a kidnapping or not, the stay at Thrushcross Grange is also the birth of a new Catherine: polished and refined, she will have to cope with her now repressed desires and maintain a ladylike deportment before her peers. The first contact she has with Heathcliff on her arrival shows how a prettily dressed Catherine—"a bright, graceful damsel," in Nelly's words (Brontë 42)—already breeds tensions due to the difference in their attire. The instant she alights from the carriage—whereupon she hurries to bestow a stock of kisses on him—she remarks on his dirtiness; Heathcliff, unchanged, reassures his pride in the roughness that used to be common to them both: " 'You needn't have touched me!' he answered, following her eye and snatching away his hand. 'I shall be as dirty as I please, and I like to be dirty, and I will be dirty' " (43). Here, any dispute occasioned by difference entails a gradual divergence in them whenever an external condition is causing their mutual identification to sunder. The change in Catherine's attitude supposes a breach of their mutual self, and that allows her to stretch her vision of the world and open her mind to the economic and cultural demands of society. Although she will still share a part in the tribulations of Heathcliff, her time and sense of belonging will be divided into the mythical trio with the moors and the present friendship with the reputable Lintons.

Eventually, it will be the latter acquaintance which will thrive. Yet the reader is informed that "[Catherine] had a wondrous constancy to old attachments: even Heathcliff kept his hold on her affections unalterably; and young Linton, with all his superiority, found it difficult to make an equally deep impression" (52). Because the tensions deriving therefrom are not to be mitigated with the continuation of both attachments, they cannot but escalate, and so she develops a strategy by which she can maintain her hold on both suitors. This suggests she is more aware of the path she is ploughing for her sake than it could look at first sight. Catherine is in fact using social conventions consciously to add to her benefit: while she will not hear of parting with her former associations, she makes the most of having Edgar Linton at hand. True enough, middle-class women were in need of securing a means to living, and that means had to be found, preferably, in a husband. As Berg contends, "Catherine's decision to marry Edgar represents her recognition of the impossibility of escaping the conventions of middle-class womanhood: she regards Edgar as a means to respectability for herself" (80). However, there is no evidence that Catherine is being enforced the law of patriarchy at that time; rather, she is availing herself of all the resources she possesses for guaranteeing her comfort. Edgar Linton being the closest, she proceeds to utilise it in a way that suits convention.

When Nelly asks Catherine about her reasons for loving Edgar in Chapter IX—a number of expeditious reasons being over with—Catherine retorts: "[Because] he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of

having such a husband" (Brontë 61). Her commentary indicates that the social ambitions that were instilled into her constitute the drive behind the acceptance of his hand: she has matured in a cultural environment insofar as she is able to realise the consequences of the match and prioritise them over her more emotional side. Furthermore, she shows awareness of the social conditions that surround her, as her words to Nelly evince: "If there be any [other handsome, rich young men in the world; handsomer, possibly, and richer than he is], they are out of my way: I've seen none like Edgar" (62). One could reason that, now, it is in her to fend for herself and embrace the principles governing her ascension in rank.

As Lockwood learns afterwards, Catherine's marriage to Edgar precipitates her own downfall. Because she did confess to Nelly Dean her feelings about her decision—albeit it had already been made—it is plausible to think Nelly might have influenced the couple's outcome in some way; Mrs Dean's domestication is cloaked under the semblance of misreading. On the one hand, she does not perform the role of a good confessor. She is too superstitious to even listen to Catherine's oneiric ejection from heaven, let alone to conjure up an answer fit for it; all the while Nelly is haunted by her mistress' eerie talk. It seems too strange to her that someone may experience dreams so fully as to eclipse reality, and thus she refuses to listen lest she "might shape a prophecy, and foresee a fearful catastrophe" (63). On the other hand, when Nelly does lend an ear to her newly betrothed mistress, she is unable to construe the meaning her confessee is striving to comprehend herself through her disclosure; instead, she catechises her. This last is best epitomised after Catherine's avowal of her being Heathcliff:

> I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is, or should be, an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it. … Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff!—He's always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but, as my own being—so, don't talk of our separation again—it is impracticable. (Brontë 64–5)

For the speaker of this speech, the metaphysical reasoning of *being* in different bodies dashes forth naturally. The growing distortion of identity occupies her mind once she knows she has made a decision unnatural to her and chosen her future with a man she *is* not. Catherine *is* not Edgar; she cannot imagine her soul to be contained in the body of someone who has not partaken in the unspeakable, in everything she feels to be her home and childhood. Linton is as strange to the moors as Heathcliff is to the realm of the speakable: hence that only one of them can be contained and contain the other at the same time. That is why she would still *continue to be* should Heathcliff remain on Earth, for she has seen and sees herself as a physical extension of him exactly as the whip (Heathcliff metaphorically) was the physical extension of her personality. They are a materialisation of what *is* and *corresponds* to the self of one single entity. The destruction of Heathcliff,

conversely, would prove the destruction of her existence on this Universe: she—her soul—would be left without recipient, would be effaced from Earth as well. It is feasible to assert, then, that she can only describe his feelings for Heathcliff in terms of something so elusive to language as her own being. To be separated from him, from something as indescribable as the moors, equals a space of nothingness where she can no longer tell or exist.

The strife to shed light on her love for Heathcliff is also an attempt to understand who she is, and it drives her to realise the state of affairs between them. That her speech is delivered in a nervous, agitated manner—the last part being especially remarkable in that it is full of dashes and interrupted utterances—underlines the prospect that, in making the revelation, she is gradually conceding the impossibility to keep the mythical gap of her childhood together with the embrace of social privileges, that is, to keep Heathcliff together with Edgar. Gilbert and Gubar address this conflict as a clash of interests when they aver that "Catherine's assertion that Heathcliff was *herself* quite reasonably summarized, after all, her understanding that she was being transformed into a lady while Heathcliff retained the ferocity of her primordial half-savage self" (293).

This is, of course, a critical moment for Catherine Earnshaw in which Nelly Dean does not live up to the requirements of a good confessor. She has read the disclosure as an evaluation of the benefits succeeding the marriage to Edgar Linton, not as an attempt to self-knowledge. She does not provide a suitable answer, nor does she try to find one: Nelly prioritises her own psychic stability. " 'If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss,' [Nelly] said, 'it only goes to convince me that you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl. But trouble me with no more secrets: I'll not promise to keep them' " (Brontë 65). As of the beginning of the confession, she employs a strategy whereby she denies everything which is too strange or unsettling for the unconscious to take in; thus she denies, too, the relief of her confessee. All through the oral intercourse, Nelly favours Catherine's repression while taming her drive to knowledge.

2. The Domestication of Catherine Earnshaw after Marriage and Death

For three years since this last episode, Heathcliff withdraws from sight. Yet, the halcyon days near an end. The time of Heathcliff's arrival comes; and with it, a new occasion for Catherine's conflicting identity to detonate. Homans contends that the blockade that stood between one and the other thanks to his departure now succumbs, troubling her mental health and forcing her anew to repress what had remained in quiet, *viz.* her past, Heathcliff, and nature (17) or, as this analysis would propose, her actual *self* (which contains, of course, the three elements mentioned). The passage in which the tensions of identity seep out to the surface in a gush is the one commonly dubbed as "the madwoman scene" or "the lapwing scene." In it, Catherine's behaviour and speech turn unstable yet energetic and fluid as ever. All the emotions repressed since childhood are released precisely because no conscious resistance is opposed—ill as she is when the scene takes place. After a tussle between Heathcliff and Edgar, and the latter's request to cease her intimacy with the former, Catherine confines herself to a three-day fasting within her chamber. Her health worsens when she is apprised that her husband diverts his attention in the library while she is, as she

foresees, about to exhale her last breath. During the state of delirium, she makes rents of the feathers inside her pillow and disposes them for the species they once belonged to. Her delusive talk soon diverges to the incoherent associations that frame the commencement of the passage:

> "That's a turkey's," she murmured to herself; "and this is a wild duck's; and this is a pigeon's. Ah, they put pigeons' feathers in the pillows—no wonder I couldn't die! Let me take care to throw it on the floor when I lie down. And here is a moor-cock's; and this—I should know it among a thousand—it's a lapwing's. Bonny bird; wheeling over our heads in the middle of the moor. It wanted to get to its nest, for the clouds had touched the swells, and it felt rain coming. This feather was picked up from the heath, the bird was not shot; we saw its nest in the winter, full of little skeletons. Heathcliff set a trap over it, and the old ones dared not come. I made him promise he'd never shoot a lapwing after that, and he didn't. Yes, here are more! Did he shoot my lapwings, Nelly? Are they red, any of them? Let me look." (Brontë 95)

One could regard this as a no-return-to-sanity point. The strain produced by the repression bursts out of the imposed boundaries, damaging the psyche of Catherine with no chance of recovery. Her trance-like state is manifested in the stray associations that "mix the lucid and discursive with the enigmatic, oracular, and metaphoric" (Lukits 105). It is pivotal to understand her cryptic speech as a meaningful token of her unconscious, especially because it signifies a cry of utmost prophetic qualities over the past, the present, and the future. Indeed, what may at first seem the ramblings of a deranged woman actually follows a consistent pattern: the return to childhood memories. In the above excerpt, Catherine regresses six years in time, when she and Heathcliff roamed over the moors. More instances can be found where she does the same thing, such as the remembrance of Peninstone Crags—a favourite spot of her infancy—and the black press at the Heights. The repetition of this pattern obeys an impulse to extricate herself from the present sources of anxiety, a view that is borne out by Homans when she asserts that "[Catherine] is portraying to herself a memory of childhood that now seems relatively idyllic, because its only sorrowful moments came from an external and readily detestable agent. Regression to childhood is her escape from, and refutation of, a difficult adult present that is of her own making" (18).

Again, it is to the past that she resorts—to another narrative gap which breaks the linearity of narration. In it, she does not need to repress Heathcliff: all the elements that constitute her id are alive and astir in one single representation. Every time Catherine's identity is partially or totally at stake, her unconscious falls back on the mythical space which provided her wholeness of yore. Despite this, the presence of the tellurian element linking past to present and foreseeing her future should not be overlooked. Catherine mentions the nest of a lapwing over which Heathcliff set a trap, hindering the advent of the old lapwings and the escape of the brood that perish in consequence. The image of parents not being able to assist their offspring is not exclusive to the birds; Catherine is pregnant at the time when she delivers the "madwoman" speech, and the outcome of the feathered animals much resembles her own. Although the daughter survives the mother, in both cases

pregnancy/incubation leads to a catastrophic fate. The actor that triggers this fate is in both episodes the same. This shows Heathcliff is identified with the tellurian violence unavoidable in nature. It is feasible to assert, then, that any change brought on by exiting the cycle Catherine-Heathcliff-moors will disturb its balance and eventually engender death. "The lapwing story," Homans states, "shows that love and violence, love and death are identified in him and in the medium of their relationship; it gives her to herself suicidally" (18). More than that, in breaking the cycle of identity, it gives him to himself suicidally too. After the death of Catherine, no prospect is left for Heathcliff to regain his will to life. For him, the Universe has turned a strange place where he can no longer define himself against his other *I*. Eighteen years later, he starves himself to death.

All along the scene, Catherine longs to be out of the Grange and demands that the windows be opened. It is in nature that she sees herself as fully existent. "I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free; … Why am I so changed? Why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills" (Brontë 98). But to be herself anew implies going back seven years, the same seven years that have domesticated her into an outcast of what she once embodied. Because this regression is impracticable, the reunion of her soul with the mythical space can only be achieved in one way. At long last, her mortal frame is abandoned. Through death, she has been able to regain the wholeness that was irreconcilable with her life as Mrs Linton.

Nelly's part during her mistress' illness should not be left astray. It is another example of the domestication she practises upon the strange. Her reaction against Catherine's insane furor is to bolt the windows of the house so that no wind can rush in, no one go out, a procedure that represents the incarceration of the meaning which is not understood. Furthermore, she covers with a shawl the mirror in which Catherine does not recognise her face, inhibiting the latter from figuring out who she is in her currently distorted reality. By preventing movement in and out of the chamber, not only is Ellen Dean denying the strange; she is also confining her patient to her own compass of prescriptions and interpretations.

Until now, this analysis has focused on Catherine's struggle for identity and Nelly's analogous domestication. Nevertheless, the process of taming carried out hitherto does not meet an end with the former's death. When Lockwood arrives at the Grange and encourages its housekeeper to amuse him with the story of the inhabitants of the Heights, the intensity and anguish that were past have to be hauled back to the present. The act of narration implies that Nelly will have to cull what material is to be used and craft a device to express it. In doing so, she is imposing a frame on the primary content: by naming what she dreads in Catherine, Nelly is denying its meaning, imprisoning content within the boundaries of the word. The signified is therefore contained in the signifier—the eerie subjected to the levelling power of language. The act of revelation to Lockwood will further provide her with the relief that a perturbation has finally been mitigated. In telling the story as she pleases to do, she is putting limits to its quintessence and accomplishing sublimation. As for the traits of her narrative, Krupat avers:

> The emotional range displayed in Nelly's speech is extremely limited; for to display varying emotions is to change from one occasion to the next, and Nelly does not change. It is as if the world were exceedingly dangerous, so that change could only be to something unspeakable—quite literally unspeakable. And so her diction is a careful defensive construct against the unspeakable, as if to deny it words were to deny it being. To tell her story truthfully, Nelly must name the many violent upheavals in her world; but to tell her story safely, she must name them as conventionally as she can, with determined and persistent equanimity. (Krupat 274)

In terms of change as opposed to equanimity, Krupat describes Nelly's quest for order as a resource to control the unspeakable material she is employing for her story. Little does this process differ from Lockwood's; the likeness of their intention and their refusal to embrace the unconventional are what makes them "share a single bland speech" (Krupat 273), that is, use language for the same purpose: to domesticate strangeness. Curiously enough, Lockwood's first contact with Catherine takes place through language. In Chapter III, he is taken into Catherine's old oak case to rest until dawn. There he finds a way of diversion in perusing Catherine's diary, the only instance wherein he listens directly to her words, without intermediaries, written in the margins of a Testament. Since she was still part of the mythical realm (her separation from Heathcliff not yet effected), her voice did emerge from the aforementioned gap Heathcliff-moors-herself or, as Maggie Berg puts it, "the gaps of the patriarchal tomes" (35), what history cannot record or control. The fact that Lockwood attempts a penetration into her thoughts, into that inaccessible space, backfires on him during his sleep, as though the text rejected intruders. In his second dream, he is disturbed by the rattling of a fir bough on the window-panes. He proceeds to grab it, but instead he seizes the fingers of a human hand. "The intense horror of nightmare came over me," he says on hearing Catherine's sobs to let her in. The repetition of the plea heightens the trepidation, which reaches a climax when Lockwood tries to rid himself of her "tenacious gripe, almost maddening me with fear" (Brontë 21). On waking up, he discovers he has yelled aloud in his sleep. The feeling of the strange here converges with the uncanny: he was indeed familiarised with Catherine and had fantasised about her image. Even if this passage belongs to the oneiric realm, the reader can appreciate how disturbed in real life Lockwood is by the event.

He is driven to appease it in consequence: a man of letters himself, his domestication will be the last brushstroke of Mrs Dean's tale. When Nelly's voice switches to his in Chapter XXXIV, he bids farewell to the kirk where Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar are buried. The last words of the novel, uttered in this graveyard setting, are Lockwood's—he puts a full stop to any prorogation of meaning in *Wuthering Heights* and gives it the format of his own diary. As Patricia Parker avers, his ending, a depiction of the tranquillity of nature,[3] serves as "a defensive closure device, … a desire to maintain the proper boundary lines" in a narrative which threatens "to break down such partitions" (qtd. in Lukits 112). Diction has

[3] "I lingered round them, under that benign sky; watched the moths fluttering among the heath and harebells, listened to the soft wind breathing through the grass; and wondered how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (Brontë 256).

accomplished its function, and the wild material of the story is contained within pages, ink, a frame of meaning ready to be edited by Ellis Bell. Lockwood's wondering "how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (Brontë 256) constitutes the ultimate testimony that he has expelled every trace of the strange: he can now approach the Gothic remnants that lie within the dead.

3. Conclusion

The analysis so far conducted has tried to accompany Catherine throughout her life, from her childhood in the Heights to adulthood in Thrushcross Grange, and weaved a relation between the events that prompt the change of location. The process by which the trinomial Heathcliff-moors-herself evolves is yet obscure, inaccessible. Emily Brontë's narrative rejects openness even when revelatory disclosures are made. Accordingly, her characters do not manifest a clear-cut conflict with the external world or themselves; rather, they retain the obscurity that is inherent to their self. Their personality is rooted deep inside a timeless realm analogous to literary creation: the product, Nelly's tale, is there; but the key to understand it cannot be rebuilt through words. In the mythical space inhabited by Catherine and Heathcliff, encoded by the moors, history is given no chance to record; language is given no opportunity to separate or cancel original meaning. To enter the cycle of identity embodied by the trio would imply to form part of the same gap and therefore to be clouded from language. To know them is equivalent to being what they are, whenever they are, however they are, in the obscurity they permanently abide.

Tracing the process whereby a stock of characters attempts to instil conventional traits of personality into Catherine has been very similar to exploring the application of the Victorian corset on any young nineteenth-century woman. The presence of Frances, the grip of the bulldog, the comforts of marriage and social mobility row in the same direction, which is ultimately reassuring the hegemony of culture over instinct. The conflict identity-domestication that takes place in Catherine is not without antecedent or successor. Her background, nevertheless, does bestow the right to claim for a more complex interpretation. Soon in the novel, she embraces the privileges of adhering to convention; yet it is seen how her unconscious does not benefit from worldly pleasures. Instead, it craves to return to the spiritual wholeness of the past. The failure in regaining a previous state of being triggers repression; and the tensions of the self grow in accordance with the neglect of the id, *viz.* complying with the unconscious desire to join Heathcliff, to embody anew what he represents. This neglect is strengthened by the domestication enforced upon her, especially Ellen Dean's, which adds to Catherine's downfall insofar as Nelly does not see that her mistress exists despite and beyond a fixed stand. Analogously, Catherine does not grasp the risk in dividing herself into two opposites and precipitates her own downfall into the abyss of psychic illness.

As for her sense of existence, this essay has contended that it exists outside record. The domestication is enacted because it was felt to be expedient. Ranging from her brother to Lockwood, Catherine's strangeness has unsettled the cultural environment of patriarchy. She resists standardised models of deportment even when she has become Mrs Linton. The

change of last name allays the control she could have over who she is but does not incapacitate it. In other words, that she works herself into Mrs Linton confines her real *I* to the nooks of the unconscious; yet there is no deracination, as shows the recurrent motif of childhood, identified with her authentic self, in her dreams and illness. This accounts for the swelling drive to be herself again, a situation that clashes against an augmented repression. All the boundaries imposed to maintain the figure of a lady suppose the enactment of the other characters' domestication. At long last, the unconscious resistance bursts, and all the repressed emotions overflow her, leading to the only way she has of regaining the mythical wholeness of the past: her own death.

After all, how can she *be* but wild with Heathcliff "yonder, under t' Nab" (Brontë 255), as a lad reports? Surely there is no frame or definition that can be imposed on this character without limiting her ethos. An attempt to deeper insight will replicate Lockwood's misreadings; and that, however, constitutes the core of the text. What the trinomial Catherine-Heathcliff-moors *is* cannot be answered by any analysis. The author has chosen not to contain authentic meaning, to let us wonder at its creative silence. To do so is to wonder at the mastery of Emily Brontë's pen and, all the while, to acknowledge the uniqueness of Catherine Earnshaw.

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Bioprofile of the author: Andy Cabello Bravo is currently a second-year student in the undergraduate degree programme of English Studies at the Complutense University. A devotee of the rural, he is also an avid reader of Spanish and Anglo-American literature. The Brontës are his main focus in English. Outside university, he has conducted published research on art, studied psychoanalysis, taken courses on Spanish as a Foreign Language, and is currently plunging into editing and translation. He teaches English to young and adult learners.

Contact: < andcabel@ucm.es >