

# ‘THIS SHATTERED PRISON’: CONFINEMENT, CONTROL AND GENDER IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

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*The recurrent plot device of confinement, both physical and psychological, as a means of establishing power over others and its consequences in Wuthering Heights are explored within the nineteenth-century social framework of traditional gender roles. The primary instigators of confinement in the novel, Catherine and Heathcliff, exhibit differing gender-related patterns. Catherine primarily views herself in relation to others and her acts of confinement become self-destructive whereas Heathcliff, in valuing hierarchy, is destructive of others. Emily Brontë shows that as both Catherine and Heathcliff follow traditional gender roles, neither is able to achieve the communion they had as children together. A brief review of earlier work on the subject and background in psychological studies are given.*

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Even on a casual reading of *Wuthering Heights*, readers are confronted with numerous instances of confinement in the novel: Lockwood, trapped at Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff, locked in the garret as a boy, Catherine,<sup>1</sup> who imprisons herself, and Nelly and Cathy Linton, who are held at Wuthering Heights by Heathcliff. In fact, almost the entire novel takes place indoors in the confining rooms of Wuthering Heights or Thrushcross Grange. Furthermore, characters become confined mentally and psychologically as well as literally. The effect is quite stifling. So what is the purpose of all these instances of confinement? The most obvious explanation lies in understanding confinement as an issue of control. Characters will lock up others so that, by establishing tight boundaries, the one confined is under control. This control applies most particularly to Catherine and Heathcliff who are the primary instigators of confinement in the novel. They, however, do this in significantly different ways. Catherine and Heathcliff exhibit patterns of confinement that exemplify the different methods which nineteenth-century men and women, operating within traditional gender roles, used to exert power and gain control over others.

Although the topics of confinement and gender roles in *Wuthering Heights* are not new to critical scholarship, their relation to each other has not been thoroughly explored. Two early critics, Albert Guerard<sup>2</sup> and Dorothy Van Ghent,<sup>3</sup> acknowledge the

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various image patterns throughout *Wuthering Heights*, and they have pointed out the frequent imagery of doors, windows and locks, but neither presents a sustained analysis of the topic. Marjorie Burns also considers the recurring imagery of “fettters,” “chains,” and “dungeons” in Emily Brontë’s poetry and the enclosures, barriers, and the series of characters who are exiled or imprisoned in *Wuthering Heights* as they exemplify the theme of freedom and its opposite, imprisonment, in her poetry and fiction.<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Napier considers the topic further in ‘The Problem of Boundaries in *Wuthering Heights*’ in which she claims these boundaries, including walls, windows, hedges, gates, doors and property lines, act as literal reminders of emotional boundaries.<sup>5</sup> She writes that the ‘difficulty of moving physically [...] becomes reflective of a larger emotional entanglement,’ most evidently seen in Catherine and Heathcliff.<sup>6</sup> In ‘Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*,’ Margaret Homans also interprets these images of confinement psychologically, in which ‘the reader becomes accustomed to Emily Brontë’s habitual use of the image of the house, with its windows and doors, variously locked or open, as a figure for varying psychic conditions’.<sup>7</sup> Since this is not the central point of her article, she quickly explains that the closed house signifies some form of entrapment: the entrapment of the soul by the body, the entrapment of society and convention, and the entrapment of one character by the will of another.<sup>8</sup> This entrapment of society and convention, particularly through traditional gender roles, needs further consideration.

A few critics have begun to consider the role of confinement in terms of gender. Carole Gerster, in ‘The Reality of Fantasy: Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*,’ argues that the characters in *Wuthering Heights* are locked up and confined by traditional gender roles. She focuses on Lockwood but does show how Catherine Earnshaw also succumbs to expectations of femininity, especially during her imprisonment at the Grange, which becomes stifling to her.<sup>9</sup> An early but important work on the subject of gender relations in *Wuthering Heights*, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s *The Madwoman in the Attic*, connects the predominance of confinement, not only to *Wuthering Heights*, but as a recurring phenomenon in the works of nineteenth-century women writers in general, indicative of the woman writer’s feeling of confinement, in a literary world ruled by men.<sup>10</sup> Their analysis is particularly insightful into Catherine’s self-imprisonment as a ploy for power. Patsy Stoneman makes a similar insight in her introduction to the Oxford edition of *Wuthering Heights* where she notes that Catherine and Heathcliff follow conventionally gendered means of gaining power and coping with the loss of power; Catherine in particular ‘becomes a prisoner of gentility, starving herself, gnashing her teeth, and showing, in an extreme form, the symptoms of hysteria, a characteristically feminine disorder’.<sup>11</sup> The most complete analysis of gender issues in Emily Brontë’s work comes from Stevie Davies, and she argues that the text of *Wuthering Heights* itself proves to be a boundary which Emily has created metaphorically to lock herself and readers out,<sup>12</sup> but, when getting in, readers find the text is itself a prison from which they would escape.<sup>13</sup> This text as prison also, Davies argues, seeks for a language that will ‘capsize the boundaries and thresholds between self and other,’<sup>14</sup> a desire that is characteristic of a feminine psychology, and which characterizes Catherine’s own strategies within the novel. Like Gilbert and Gubar and Stoneman, Davies also analyzes Catherine’s uses of ‘women’s weapons,’ such as the tantrum and self-harm to combat her growing loss of power.<sup>15</sup> Though these critics are helpful for understanding a few pivotal instances of confinement in the novel as it relates to gender,

their findings can be expanded to show that both Heathcliff's and Catherine's patterns of confinement relate to their adoption of traditional gender roles.

Some background in the differing psychology of men and women will help to provide the framework for understanding these different patterns of confinement as displayed by Catherine and Heathcliff. Jean Baker Miller, one of the first psychologists to posit the basic difference in feminine psychology, explains in *Towards a New Psychology*:

One central feature is that women stay with, build on, and develop in a context of attachment and affiliation to others. Indeed, women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and maintain affiliations and relationships. Eventually, for many women the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a threat of disruption but something closer to a loss of self.<sup>16</sup>

Nancy J. Chodorow further explains that this sense of identification through connection arises because girls tend to identify early on with their mothers, and as they grow up they maintain this sense of connection and learn gender roles through relationship.<sup>17</sup> This importance for women to define themselves in connection to others is essential to understanding Catherine's behaviour of confinement throughout the novel. She seeks to find and maintain a place for herself within the web of relationships around her, particularly with Heathcliff, with whom she has the strongest attachment. The early loss of her mother may make her need to define her place relationally more acute. As Stoneman notices, Catherine tries to find solutions to problems in which relationships are preserved and no one is hurt, whereas the men follow patterns of competition.<sup>18</sup> Her acts of confinement always include herself as she attempts to place literal boundaries around herself and others in order to keep a place for herself on the inside within safe emotional boundaries that maintain her relationship with others. However, as Miller points out, this tendency of women can become self-destructive.

A masculine psychology, on the other hand, is shown to be less relational and more oppositional. Chodorow explains that boys, like girls, have an early identification with their mother, but this must be replaced by an identification with their father in order to develop a masculine gender identity. However, because the boy's father is usually more remote than his mother, a boy's gender identification is more 'positional' than 'relational'.<sup>19</sup> He learns his gender role, not so much in close relationship with his father, but by defining it as a negative contrast to his mother. Male gender identity is then largely defined as what is not feminine or involved with women, therefore being more oppositional than female gender identity.<sup>20</sup> Boys learn early on to differentiate between 'me' and 'not me'. Chodorow argues that this 'defensive masculine identity' is what has produced an 'ideology of masculine superiority'.<sup>21</sup> This clearly relates to Heathcliff who, as an orphan and an outsider in the Earnshaw family, learns early on to see himself in opposition to those around him. His need to establish dominance leads him to confine others, always keeping clear boundaries between himself and those within his control, a tendency that becomes destructive of others. These basic gender differences between Catherine and Heathcliff show that, despite a common need to exert control, their differing patterns of confinement spring from different motivations and methods of exerting that control.

The novel opens with images of confinement that display these differences and set the stage for the importance that confinement will play throughout the story. Lockwood himself is the first to become imprisoned at Wuthering Heights, ostensibly by both

Heathcliff and Catherine, which establishes their role in the story as the chief instigators of confinement. Lockwood is trapped at Wuthering Heights when a severe snowstorm has blown in, and Heathcliff will allow no one to guide Lockwood home. Even without a guide, Lockwood attempts to leave on his own but is stopped by Heathcliff's ferocious dogs. Lockwood orders them to let him out, which shows that he already feels trapped, and he falls into a fit. He writes, 'I was sick exceedingly, and dizzy and faint; and thus compelled, perforce, to accept lodgings under his roof' (*WH*, p. 16).<sup>22</sup> His use of the word 'compelled' reveals that that he is being held there against his will. This naturally relates to Heathcliff's control of the situation. He refuses to do anything that would inconvenience him, whether that is sending someone to take Lockwood home or even providing him a place to sleep. Heathcliff says, 'A stranger is a stranger, be he rich or poor — it will not suit me to permit any one the range of the place while I am off guard' (*WH*, p. 15). Lockwood cannot be free to roam around at will, so he must be confined to a room, perfectly under control and within boundaries.

Furthermore, Lockwood feels imprisoned at Wuthering Heights when Zilla shows him to Catherine's old room, where he must sleep in the enclosed bed and where he dreams of her ghost at the window. The ghost child holds on to his arms, crying 'Let me in' (*WH*, p. 23), and he responds, 'Let *me* go, if you want me to let you in' (*WH*, p. 23). The only way he can escape the grasp of the ghost is by rubbing her wrists on the broken glass 'till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes' (*WH*, p. 23). Evidently, Lockwood is not only trapped at Wuthering Heights by Heathcliff, but by Catherine as well, although Catherine wants *in*. Even as a ghost, Catherine seeks to find a place within Wuthering Heights, and her hold on Lockwood is a desperate attempt to get inside.

Catherine's and Heathcliff's tendency to exert control by confining others is developed during their childhood because they were controlled and confined by Hindley and Joseph. This can be seen in Catherine's diary entries that Lockwood reads while in her old bed, in which her writing in the books 'covered every morsel of blank that the printer had left' (*WH*, p. 18). Her writing itself is confined to the margins, just as she is marginalized within her own family, a motherless girl in a home dominated by men, and she must strive to create a space for herself.<sup>23</sup> Her account describes a rainy Sunday which keeps them from church, so she and Heathcliff are confined to the garret for three hours where they must listen to Joseph's sermon (*WH*, p. 19). Heathcliff and Catherine try to escape Hindley's control by hiding themselves in the dresser and then decide to have a 'scamper on the moors' (*WH*, p. 20). The space which Catherine and Heathcliff create for themselves, away from the control of Hindley, is out on the moors. The freedom they find there contrasts sharply with the imprisonment they face in the Heights. Nelly says, 'It was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day' (*WH*, p. 44). Later in the novel, Catherine looks back to these romps on the moors as the only time and place where she feels free and unconstrained by those who seek to control her, and she feels her connection with Heathcliff most strongly there.

As Catherine and Heathcliff are both controlled as young children, they both develop a need to be in control. As children, though, before either is forced into gender roles, their methods of gaining control are similar, without the necessity of confining anyone. Heathcliff, the petted favourite of Mr Earnshaw, uses this to exert his control over

Hindley. He reveals this control most particularly when he blackmails Hindley into trading horses with him by threatening, 'You must exchange horses with me; I don't like mine, and if you won't I shall tell your father of the three thrashings you've given me this week, and show him my arm, which is black to the shoulder' (*WH*, p. 37). Catherine, also as a child, begins to show a need to be in control. Nelly says, 'In play, she liked, exceedingly, to act the little mistress, using her hands freely, and commanding her companions' (*WH*, p. 40). Significantly, at this point, Catherine has control over Heathcliff; he 'would do her bidding in anything' but only Mr Earnshaw's 'when it suited his own inclination' (*WH*, p. 41). Acting together in what Gilbert and Gubar call an androgynous whole,<sup>24</sup> the two children are able to carve out a small piece of power within the household politics.

Catherine's confinement at the Grange begins her confinement within the traditional female gender role that permanently alters her means for asserting control. On one of those dreary Sundays, perhaps the same one she mentions in her diary, Catherine's and Heathcliff's ramble on the moor leads them to Thrushcross Grange, where they peek into the window at Edgar and Isabella. However, they are caught by the Linton's bulldog, who seizes Catherine by the ankle. The Lintons take pity on Catherine, but they threaten to lock up Heathcliff because of his dark skin and bad language. Isabella cries out, 'Frightful thing! Put him in the cellar, papa' (*WH*, p. 48). Heathcliff, however, is not imprisoned at the Grange; he escapes back to the Heights, thus eluding the new confinement which Catherine undergoes. Catherine is confined to the Grange for five weeks while her foot heals. During that time, she is petted and pampered, given fine new dresses, and taught how to be a lady. She is inducted into the world of society and taught her place as a woman. Gilbert and Gubar remind us that 'Though many readers overlook this point, Catherine does not go to the Grange when she is twelve years old. On the contrary, the Grange seizes and "holds [her] fast."<sup>25</sup> The bulldog that bit her, they say, is symbolic of the patriarchal oppression which she succumbs to while at the Grange.<sup>26</sup> Later on Catherine recalls this event and says it was like she 'had been wrenched from the Heights [. . .] and been converted at a stroke into Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange' (*WH*, p. 125). Catherine's confinement at the Grange, while not literally forced on her, is symbolically forced on her as she is pressed into adolescence and the confining position of a lady in society. Presumably, even the new lady-like clothes she is given are confining, symbolizing that she 'must learn to rule herself, [. . .] must learn to repress her own impulses, must girdle her own energies with the iron stays of "reason."<sup>27</sup> Catherine returns to *Wuthering Heights* a different girl, and, significantly, her attempts at control through confinement will always include herself, since she must now control herself, while attempting to reclaim whatever sense of control she lost when accepting her new role as a woman.

Heathcliff enters a similar confinement that signifies his entrance into adolescence and the adoption of a traditionally masculine gender role. On one occasion when Edgar comes to call on Catherine, Hindley locks Heathcliff up in the garret to keep him out of the way, telling Joseph, 'Keep the fellow out of the room — send him into the garret till dinner is over' (*WH*, p. 57). Hindley sees Heathcliff, a possible suitor for Catherine, as a threat to the more advantageous suit that Edgar offers; therefore, Hindley must prevent Heathcliff from doing anything that would ruin the developing relationship between Catherine and Edgar. This competition of men over a woman initiates Heathcliff in the

power struggle for male dominance. He is pushed out at this time, but it prompts his predilection for locking up others in order to establish his dominance and right to Catherine. From this point on, Catherine and Heathcliff, now separated, begin a long course of trying to control one another. Their androgynous whole is broken as they each assume their respective gender roles and enter a stage of sexual politics. This can be seen in Heathcliff's desire to control Catherine's time. He has noticed that she spends less and less time with him and more with Edgar. He pulls out a calendar on which he has marked the days she has spent with Edgar and the days she has spent with him: 'The crosses are for the evenings you have spent with the Lintons, and the dots for those you have spent with me — Do you see, I've marked every day' (*WH*, p. 69). He attempts to control Catherine by emotional blackmail, making her feel guilty for not doing as he wishes.

Heathcliff's attempt to control her pushes her out of an equal relationship, establishing an emotional barrier between them that positions him in hierarchy over her. Catherine's feminine response is then an attempt to regain control by erasing that barrier and reestablishing the connection between them. The control that Heathcliff wields over Catherine pushes her into an engagement and subsequent marriage to Edgar, whom she knows she does not really love. Her famous speech to Nelly revealing her engagement to Edgar contains many clues to understanding Catherine's diminishing sense of control and her attempts to regain that control. Catherine readily admits her greater love for Heathcliff, but she has already been so indoctrinated in society's rules that she says it would degrade her to marry Heathcliff (*WH*, p. 80). In several statements, Catherine asserts a special unity and connection with Heathcliff that show an underlying loss of power. She tells Nelly, 'He's more myself than I am' (*WH*, p. 80), and 'If all else perished, and he remained, I should continue to be' (*WH*, p. 82). Clearly, from these statements Catherine sees her identity as existing in Heathcliff, even more than it exists in herself. She even goes on to say, 'Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff' (*WH*, p. 82). This interesting assertion shows not just a bond and unity which exist between them, but that she has submerged her identity into Heathcliff's. In this sentence, she makes the subject into the object, which is significantly different from saying 'Heathcliff is me'. Even if she is unconscious of it, she has revealed a loss of identity and a loss of control. As Miller remarks, this 'disruption of an affiliation' is indeed 'something closer to a loss of self'.<sup>28</sup> This loss of self goes a long way in explaining her decision to marry Edgar, even though it goes against her heart. Mary Burgan states that 'Cathy's choice of Edgar Linton as her husband must also be read as an act of lacerating self-preservation against Heathcliff's need to become the sole justification for her existence'.<sup>29</sup> Her marriage is a way to get out from under Heathcliff's attempt to possess her emotionally and to reestablish a mutual relationship. Stephen Vine points out, 'Cathy's declaration that her miseries have been Heathcliff's miseries is both an identification with Heathcliff's story and a radical loss of her own story, since for Cathy self-identity coincides with self-loss'.<sup>30</sup> As Heathcliff usurps her identity, she feels a growing identification with him, but only as she loses her own identity.

Just as Catherine's statements represent a growing loss of control, they also show a need to assert her own control. She does not propose to marry to Edgar in order to separate herself from Heathcliff but to establish a position of equality and power in the relationship. She supposes that this marriage will erase the barrier between them that



created the imbalance of power. She clearly says, 'Who is to separate us, pray? [...] Not as long as I live' (*WH*, p. 81). T. E. Apter states, 'This vicious struggle for possession undermines Catherine's assertion that she *is* Heathcliff; but because she believes this herself, she thinks it safe for her to marry Edgar Linton; Heathcliff is within her soul, therefore nothing can dislodge him'.<sup>31</sup> Apter has noticed that Catherine's marriage to Edgar is a power play to gain control over Heathcliff. Although conducted under erroneous understanding and thus ultimately unsuccessful, her engagement and marriage are desperate attempts to regain the control that she has lost since her adolescence.

Catherine's marriage shows her need to establish some control again in her life. She marries Edgar because she can control him, whereas she has lost control of Heathcliff. Similarly, she never finds a place for herself within Wuthering Heights, but she is the undeniable mistress of Thrushcross Grange. The image that Nelly paints is 'not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing the thorn. There were no mutual concessions; one stood erect, and the others yielded' (*WH*, p. 91). Davies notes the precarious nature of this power; 'Catherine dominates the household with her moods and desires, her passionate self-will being perceived as a threat by the Linton siblings,' who in turn maintain order within the household by placating Catherine's tantrums and controlling the conditions that would kindle them.<sup>32</sup> Thus, Catherine creates this small modicum of power using the only weapons available to her as a woman and within the limited sphere offered to her as a woman.

Her reign of power lasts until Heathcliff's return, and once again she is locked into a struggle for power that leads her to confine others as well as herself. Her control over Edgar is seen when Heathcliff returns, and she demands that he be accepted, so Edgar reluctantly acquiesces (*WH*, p. 95). Her control over Isabella is even more pronounced since Isabella is the first person Catherine confines. After Isabella confesses her attraction to Heathcliff, Catherine ruthlessly takes advantage of her, locking Isabella in the room with Heathcliff so that it would be 'too late to attempt an escape' (*WH*, p. 104) and announcing to Heathcliff Isabella's feelings. She grabs Isabella and forcibly detains her, saying, 'You shan't run off' (*WH*, p. 104). In attempting to confine Isabella, she is really trying to confirm her power over Heathcliff, to prove that he still loves her. Significantly, she locks herself in the room with the others in order to maintain and display her place in this web of relationships.

Catherine also imprisons herself with Edgar and Heathcliff in an attempt to exert her control over them. She locks them in the kitchen, even throwing the key into the fire, in an effort to force a reconciliation between them, through which she could preserve control over both. The kitchen is a traditionally feminine space where Catherine can exert some power, and she locks these men with herself there in order to keep them within her sphere of influence. However, her efforts fail; Edgar escapes after having hit Heathcliff, and Heathcliff smashes the lock to get out. In trying to force a reconciliation, she tries to destroy the barriers between Heathcliff, Edgar and herself and regain a connection and equality among them. Her plan only leads to Edgar forcing a choice from her, in which he demands to know: 'Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be *my* friend and *his* at the same time. I absolutely *require* to know which you choose' (*WH*, p. 118). The plot backfires because the men must have a hierarchy of power; somebody must win. Catherine is then left with control of neither Edgar nor Heathcliff.

In one of the most powerful scenes of confinement in the novel that shows both Catherine's utter loss of control and her last-ditch attempt to regain it, Catherine imprisons herself in her room at the Grange and starves herself for three days. Her plot is originally to draw attention to herself, and by hurting herself, to hurt those who love her. She says, 'I'm in danger of being seriously ill — I wish it may prove true [...]' (*WH*, p. 116), and then, 'Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend — if Edgar will be mean and jealous — I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own' (*WH*, p. 117). Clearly this is still her attempt to gain control, and in a way to get back at the two men she loves. The only leverage she has left is herself, her own body. On the third day of her fast, she finally emerges only to ask for more water (*WH*, p. 120). Gilbert and Gubar point out that anorexia, or self-starvation, is associated with females and feelings of powerlessness and rage. It is a 'struggle for control'.<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Davies writes that Catherine's hunger strike which is 'designed to coerce her husband and lover into unity' is 'impotence's last throw'.<sup>34</sup> Feeling powerless to hold her control over Edgar and Heathcliff, her self-imprisonment and starvation are a desperate attempt to regain control. But Nelly, who knows her illness is only a plot, has never even told Edgar. Failing then to receive the sympathy she expected, Catherine falls into a serious illness.

While imprisoned in her own room, her delirium conveys the powerlessness and emotional confinement of her life. Although she has imprisoned herself in her room at the Grange, she imagines she is back in her old room at Wuthering Heights on the first night that she was separated from Heathcliff and not allowed to sleep with him. She says, 'I thought [...] I was enclosed in the oak-panelled bed at home. [...] My father was just buried, and my misery arose from the separation that Hindley had ordered between me and Heathcliff — I was laid alone for the first time' (*WH*, p. 125). She remembers this confinement when, entering adolescence and stepping into the role of a woman, she is forced to sleep alone, thus breaking the unity she had with Heathcliff. Significantly, she connects her present self-imposed imprisonment with an earlier feeling of being enclosed and separated from Heathcliff, which is just what Edgar has demanded of her. In fact, the time between that separation and enclosure and the present separation and enclosure has collapsed for Catherine as if it had not existed, and she says, 'Supposing at twelve years old I had been wrenched from the Heights, and every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and converted at a stroke into Mrs. Linton, the Lady of Thrushcross Grange, and the wife of a stranger' (*WH*, p. 125). She cannot even recognize her own face in the mirror (*WH*, p. 124), suggesting that her new gender identity has become completely foreign. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that this mirror image of herself, as well as the oak-panelled bed, is 'one more symbol of the cell in which Catherine has been imprisoned by herself and society'.<sup>35</sup> The last time she remembers being whole and free was as a pre-adolescent child.

The confinement of the room and her own life become so stifling that she begs several times for a window to be opened. Catherine shouts, 'Oh I am burning! I wish I were out of doors. I wish I were a girl again, half-savage and hardy, and free [...] I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills [...] Open the window again wide, fasten it open!' (*WH*, p. 126). The open window is the only escape from her stifling room, just as she imagines a return to her childhood and the freedom she and Heathcliff had on the moors would be the only escape from the confining and powerless life she has now. Apter states, 'The hot, closed room at Thrushcross Grange becomes a



prison. Repeatedly, she begs Nelly to open a window. Her sense of being stifled by the illness and emotional conflict, her vision of the Heights as she leans out of the window, set her within a world impossibly out of control with the world in which she must live'.<sup>36</sup> Just as the Heights really is impossible to see from her window, her past as an androgynous child is impossible to return to. She is still locked within the stifling room and her own powerlessness as a woman.

In Catherine's death scene her growing sense of powerlessness is evident since she views her own female body as imprisoning her. During Heathcliff's final visit to her, she tells him, 'The thing that irks me the most is this shattered prison after all. 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 walls of aching heart, but really with it, and in it' (*WH*, p. 160). The confining spaces of her life become so restricting that even her own body becomes a prison to her, and in trying to erase boundaries, she now tries, by starvation, to erase her own body to find freedom from her body, her life, her marriage, and everything that confines and restricts her. According to Linda Gold, 'Catherine seeks death as a release from the undesirable tension created by her inability to synthesize the fragmented segments of her personality, a fragmentation necessitated by the constricting environment which provides no outlet for her psychic energy'.<sup>37</sup> Catherine cannot synthesize the fragments of her life because she finds she cannot control everyone around her, and she is unable to accept that. Even in her final days, she still tries to hold onto and control Heathcliff. When Heathcliff fails to show the love she expects, she responds, 'Well, never mind! That is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me — he's in my soul' (*WH*, p. 160). She clings to an ideal Heathcliff, the one she loves, the one she can take with her, since the actual Heathcliff is beyond her grasp. She imagines she will take him with her into death where she will find a new space, her soul, within which she can exist in union with Heathcliff.

Following the means of gaining control that are consistent with the traditional female gender role, Catherine's confinements are essentially self-destructive, whereas Heathcliff, following a traditionally male gender role, engages in a pattern of confinement that is destructive of others as he attempts to possess Catherine and establish control over anyone who would stand in his way. Davies recognizes this pattern, noting that the men in *Wuthering Heights* 'tend to conform to stereotype by retaliating with violence directed outward'.<sup>38</sup> This can first be seen during Catherine's death. When Heathcliff hears of her illness, he immediately takes control of her situation, threatening to imprison Nelly and force himself into Catherine's room if Nelly does not help him do it: 'In that case, I'll take measure to secure you, woman! [...] you shall not leave Wuthering Heights till tomorrow evening' (*WH*, p. 153). Nelly warns that a visit from him will probably cause Catherine's death, but this seems to have little effect on him (*WH*, p. 153). When Heathcliff does see her, even his embrace of her shows his ruthless control over her. Nelly says, 'They were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive [...], he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy' (*WH*, p. 160). His embrace attempts to control and restrict her, treating her as a desired possession.

Even after Catherine's death, Heathcliff continues to try to possess her, whether that is her ghost, her dead body, her child or her house. Shortly after Catherine's death, Nelly hears him raving, 'You said I killed you — haunt me then! [...] 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!’ (WH, p. 167). Heathcliff’s statement here has often been compared with Catherine’s statement earlier, ‘I *am* Heathcliff’ (WH, p. 82). Significantly, Catherine submerges her identity into Heathcliff’s, and he does exactly the same thing, submerging her identity into his. His statement is possessive — *my* life, *my* soul. Even in her death, he believes he can still possess her, at least her ghost, the same ghost that he desperately tries to let in after Lockwood’s dream: ‘Come in! Come in! Cathy, do come. Oh *do* — *once* more! Oh! my heart’s darling, hear me *this* time — Catherine, at last!’ (WH, p. 27). Vine writes, ‘What Heathcliff is unable to endure after her departure from the Heights and her death, is Catherine’s *otherness*: the fact that she eludes him in life and death [. . .] and the fact that her desire and her body exceed his narcissistic grasp’.<sup>39</sup> It seems, though, that he has been unable to possess her ghost just as he was unable to possess her body since he is still calling to her eighteen years later. By treating her as a possession, he effectively destroys the unity with her that he really desires.

Heathcliff also tries on several occasions to hold her dead body. First, on the day of her burial, he digs up her grave in order to have her in his arms again, but stops short, thinking he feels her presence near him (WH, p. 289). Eighteen years later, on Edgar’s burial, he digs up her grave and knocks one side of the coffin loose and bribes the sexton to do the same to his coffin when he dies so that their bodies would mingle together in death (WH, p. 288). Commenting on this scene, Napier explains, ‘When Heathcliff speaks of “absorbing” Cathy and “dissolving” with her, so when Linton comes to the grave, he says, he will no longer know “which is which,” he is alluding not simply to the all-encompassing quality of his love, but to a procedure of identification and merging which encompasses and annihilates the individual self’.<sup>40</sup> Heathcliff’s love, whether in life or death, is devouring; he wants to consume and possess her completely, just as in death he wants his decaying body to mingle with hers so that they become inseparable.

The main way in which Heathcliff tries to possess and control Catherine after her death is through his plot of revenge to subordinate, and thus confine, anyone who is connected to her — Hindley, Isabella, Edgar, Hareton, Linton and Cathy. Vine reminds us that Heathcliff himself ‘describes his return to the Heights and his elaborate plan of revenge as a failed attempt “to *hold* my right, my degradation, my pride, my happiness, my anguish” (WH, p. 324 emphasis added); to hold Cathy, that is as “his” against her assimilation to the world of the Lintons’.<sup>41</sup> In a sense, Heathcliff is still trying to establish his dominance and thus his right to Catherine, so now that he cannot have her, he plots revenge against all who he believes took her away from him.

Heathcliff’s first plan of revenge is to increase his property by marrying and subsequently confining Isabella. He reveals that he actually hates her, but he marries her because of her money and to obtain power over Edgar (WH, p. 152). Their marriage quickly turns into a prison for Isabella; in fact, she is literally imprisoned at Wuthering Heights. While Heathcliff says that she is free to leave, Isabella says he is a ‘lying fiend’; ‘I’ve made the attempt [. . .] but I dare not repeat it’ (WH, p. 152). Heathcliff evidently controls her enough that she must run away in the night and hide herself in London, which Gilbert and Gubar call her self-imprisonment, in order to escape his control.<sup>42</sup>

Heathcliff’s revenge also includes his confining Hareton and Linton, both whom he views as his property. His revenge on Hareton is actually against Hindley, who was

responsible for keeping him from Catherine, preferring Edgar's suit. He says, 'Now, my bonny lad, you are *mine!* And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same twist in it!' (*WH*, p. 186). Hareton, while not confined physically by Heathcliff, is confined mentally by not being given an education and being treated as a brute (*WH*, p. 219). Linton comes into Heathcliff's control when he is twelve years old, and Heathcliff refers to him as 'my property' (*WH*, p. 207). His reasons for wanting Linton become quite clear: 'He's *mine*, and I want the triumph of seeing *my* descendant fairly lord of their estates; my children hiring their children to till their father's land for wages' (*WH*, p. 208). Linton, supposedly due to his illness, is literally confined at Wuthering Heights, rarely allowed to go outside. Again, Heathcliff's need for control is evident. Through his son, he plans to gain control of Thrushcross Grange and its inhabitants who stole Catherine from him.

To gain further power, Heathcliff also acts in revenge against Cathy Linton. This includes imprisoning her and Nelly at Wuthering Heights. In one of Cathy's escapades to visit Linton, Heathcliff lures her and Nelly inside and then shuts and locks the door (*WH*, p. 270). His plot is to force Cathy to marry Linton. He explains, 'As to your promise to marry Linton, I'll take care you shall keep it; for you shall not quit the place till that is fulfilled' (*WH*, p. 274). However, even after Cathy's agreed-upon marriage, she is still forcibly detained there. Nelly is also locked up in Zilla's chamber, and she recounts, 'And there I remained enclosed, the whole day, and the whole night; and another, and another, five nights and four days I remained, altogether, seeing nobody but Hareton, once every morning, and he was a model jailor — surly, and dumb and deaf to every attempt at moving his sense of justice or compassion' (*WH*, p. 277). Linton, now Cathy's husband, refuses to let her leave: 'she shan't go home!' (*WH*, p. 279). She, however, escapes out of the window in her mother's old room just in time to see her father before his death. Evidently, this confinement of Cathy and her forced marriage are part of Heathcliff's larger plan of revenge. He not only leads Edgar to a quicker death in worry for his daughter, but his greater plan is to gain control of the Grange and all of its possessions. Once Cathy is married, all of her possessions belong legally to Linton, who on his death wills them to Heathcliff. All of his acts of confinement are a calculated method to gain him power over others. Yet, despite Heathcliff's elaborate plot to possess Catherine after her death, she seems to elude him as she did in life.

Therefore, both Catherine and Heathcliff, acting within their traditional gender roles, use different methods of confinement to exert control, yet neither gains the power they are seeking. Emily Brontë, however, suggests that perhaps with Heathcliff's death, they finally achieve the freedom and wholeness they desired and which they could not achieve when confined by the traditional gender roles they are forced to adopt. When Nelly discovers Heathcliff, he is dead in the panelled bed with the window open, his hand on the window sill, soaked with rain (*WH*, p. 335). This scene clearly recalls that scene earlier in the book when, from the same window, he calls to Catherine's spirit to come in. One is led to believe that Catherine has finally come in and found her place as they are united in death. Or, his spirit could have been let out of the window to join her finally in the moors that they loved. Emily Brontë suggests both as possible endings to the novel. Lockwood sees the graves and believes that they sleep peacefully, wondering 'how one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth' (*WH*, p. 338). But the country folk believe he walks, and one boy says he saw Heathcliff and

a woman together (*WH*, p. 338). Perhaps, if they really have achieved their freedom, then they do not lie confined in their graves, but walk peacefully in the freedom of the moors. Only in death can they return to the place they loved as children in androgynous wholeness. While Emily Brontë envisions a unity for Catherine and Heathcliff and freedom from the confines of traditional gender roles, this reality, she shows, does not exist in this life, only perhaps in the next.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> I have chosen for sake of clarity and conciseness to refer to the elder Catherine Earnshaw Linton as Catherine and the younger Catherine Linton Earnshaw as Cathy.

<sup>2</sup> Albert J. Guerard, 'Preface to *Wuthering Heights*,' in *Twentieth-Century Interpretations of Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Thomas A. Vogler (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 63–68.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Van Ghent, 'The Window Figure and the Two-Children Figure in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 7 (1952), 189–97.

<sup>4</sup> Marjory Burns, "'This Shattered Prison': Versions of Eden in *Wuthering Heights*,' in *The Nineteenth Century British Novel*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorne. Stratford-Upon-Avon Studies. Second Series (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 31–46 (pp. 42–43).

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Napier, 'The Problem of Boundaries in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Philological Quarterly*, 63 (1984), 95–107 (p. 95).

<sup>6</sup> Napier, p. 97.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret Homans, 'Repression and Sublimation of Nature in *Wuthering Heights*,' *PMLA* 93 (1978), 9–19 (p. 11).

<sup>8</sup> Homans, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Carole Gerster, 'The Reality of Fantasy: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*,' in *Spectrum of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Sixth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. by Donal Palumbo (Greenwood, 1988), pp. 71–80.

<sup>10</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: the Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> Patsy Stoneman, Introduction to *Wuthering Heights*, ed. by Ian Jack (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998), p. xxi.

<sup>12</sup> Stevie Davies, *Emily Brontë* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), pp. 2–3; *Emily Brontë: Heretic* (London: The Women's Press, 1994), p. 72.

<sup>13</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, p. 79.

<sup>14</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë*, p. 53.

<sup>15</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, p. 188.

<sup>16</sup> Jean Baker Miller, *Toward a New Psychology of Women* (Boston: Beacon, 1976), p. 83.

<sup>17</sup> Nancy J. Chodorow, *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 49.

<sup>18</sup> Stoneman, p. xxxvii. Stoneman's argument here utilizes the theories of Carol Gilligan in *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) which in turn utilizes the work of Chodorow. Stoneman's assertion that Emily Brontë adopts the free love principles of the Shelleys in her portrayal of Catherine's conviction that she can maintain the love of both Heathcliff and Edgar is an extreme enactment of the theories expounded by Miller, Chodorow and Gilligan.

<sup>19</sup> Chodorow, p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> Chodorow, p. 51.

<sup>21</sup> Chodorow, p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); hereafter *WH*.

<sup>23</sup> Stoneman, p. xiv; Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, p. 151.

<sup>24</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 265.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 271.

<sup>26</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 271.

<sup>27</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 274; Davies makes a similar argument in *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, p. 41.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> Mary Burgan, "'Some Fit Parentage': Identity and the Cycle of Generations in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Philological Quarterly*, 64 (1982), 395–413 (p. 401).

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Vine, 'The Wuther of the Other in *Wuthering Heights*,' *Nineteenth Century Literature*, 49 (1994), 339–59 (p. 350).

<sup>31</sup> T. E. Apter, 'Romanticism and Romantic Love in *Wuthering Heights*,' in *The Art of Emily Brontë*, ed. by Anne Smith (London: Vision Press, 1976), pp. 205–22 (p. 213).

- <sup>32</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, pp. 188–89.  
<sup>33</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 283.  
<sup>34</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, p. 210.  
<sup>35</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 284.  
<sup>36</sup> Apter, p. 215.  
<sup>37</sup> Linda Gold, 'Catherine Earnshaw: Mother and Daughter,' *English Journal*, 74.3 (1985), 68–73 (pp. 70–71).  
<sup>38</sup> Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic*, p. 210.  
<sup>39</sup> Vine, pp. 353–54.  
<sup>40</sup> Napier, p. 102.  
<sup>41</sup> Vine, p. 353.  
<sup>42</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 288.

### *Biographical note*

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