**The Disintegration of Catherine Earnshaw**By Nicolas Wilkes

Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights boasts an impressive catalog of literary criticism, from strict formalism to worldly focused cultural approaches. The rise of computer-technology allows innovative, textual analyses to explore facets of literature previously unexaminable. Perhaps some of the most interesting results stem from a gestalt approach to criticism, mixing forms to create a sophisticated study of heavily reviewed texts. The following critique seeks to merge psychoanalytic, feminist, and corpus textual methods to examine Wuthering Heights innovatively. The methods employed will reveal the hypocoristic name “Cathy” and the full name “Catherine” are relevant markers of Catherine Earnshaw’s developmental progress and attempts to integrate her personality. The subsequent failure to reconcile her desires with societal expectations leads to Cathy’s isolation and eventual death.

As old works fall into the public domain, the availability of digital versions of literature continuously grows. Wuthering Heights too has fallen into the public domain, allowing for the corpus textual analysis of its text. A 2012 study, “Stylistic Analysis of Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights” pulled apart word usage and idiolect of her characters. The author asserts that understanding a text for its own sake requires, “Both ―”Literary Competence” (Jonathan Culler) and ―”Linguistic Competence” (Chomsky), are indispensable criteria,” (Varghese 46). What is most remarkable about this particular study is in proving how careful Bronte was with her choice of dialogue patterns and word choice.

Each character spoke in a pattern unique to the individual, noted, “From Catherine‘s poetic discourse, Heathcliff‘s verbal violence, Lockwood‘s superior literary tone and fashionable cliché, Nelly‘s homiletic rhetoric to Joseph‘s biblical Yorkshire dialect and unintelligible muttering--all producing an interplay of accents and idioms, giving rise to what Bakhtin terms as ―dialogical heteroglossia‖,” (47). The carefulness in which Bronte chooses her wording lends weight to the claim that the pattern of the uses of the names for Catherine versus Cathy is a deliberate decision. Interestingly, it is noted that much of the use of verbs and metaphor occurs using binary opposites (49), suggesting that a full name versus a diminutive version might serve a similar function. If the uses of Catherine or Cathy are meaningful, then it bears running a corpus study to look at the occurrences of each.

Given a lack of available prior research on the subject, I conducted a corpus search of *Wuthering Heights* on my own, counting all the occurrence of the name “Cathy” and “Catherine” as well as dividing them up by their contexts. In total, there were 507 iterations of either name in the text obtained from the Gutenberg Project. The number of occurrences referencing the senior Catherine is relevant to this debate. A chart in the appendix visually displays the differences in Catherine’s name usage compared between her childhood and after her return from her stay with the Lintons. Particularly striking is the opposition found in the use of her names, an almost perfect reflection where the patterns switch as Catherine leaves behind childhood and begins to “grow up.”

As part of the process, not only were names counted but also instances of the incongruous use of Cathy to address the adult Catherine were examined individually. There were 21 total uses of her name “Cathy” as an adult (compared to the 50 uses of her full name). Specific examples of the diminutive form occur most frequently with Heathcliff, who seems to switch back and forth between the two in the middle of a conversation, perhaps a reflection of her troubled self-image. Nelly Dean also does this switching, but hers appears reactionary, slipping out following an outburst or act of obduracy by Catherine, but only doing so while Catherine lived at Wuthering Heights. After she marries Edgar and stays at Thrushcross Grange, Nelly ceases to refer to her by anything other than “Catherine” or “Miss Linton.”

The difference between her names as markers for identity implies each serves as a distinction between who Catherine was and who she attempted to become. Pykett made a similar postulation by differentiating the two identities of Catherine by way of her last name. She noted that the transformation of Catherine’s “personality” does, in fact, start with the return from Thrushcross Grange, coinciding with the switch from referring to her as Cathy to Catherine.

Nelly’s observations on the social climbing of the newly transformed Catherine provide an unwitting comment on the self-division, the “perplexities and untold troubles” that attend the role of the “proper lady.” Catherine’s ambition, we are told, “led her to adopt a *double* character without exactly intending to deceive anyone. (Pykett 470-71)

Pykett associates these changes with Catherine’s later name of Earnshaw after she married Edgar and moves to Thrushcross Grange. The provided table suggests that the shift in referring to her by full name and not the shortened name occurs before the marriage, signifying that this “transformation” into the alternative “adult identity” is one that occurs before her taking Edgar’s last name. The association of the change is not necessarily incompatible, as part of the transformative journey for Catherine included marriage, which entails taking the groom’s family name (as it was at that time). Catherine is trying to change herself, and bringing in psychoanalytic theory to explain the changes clarifies Catherine’s goals.

The psychoanalytic theory of *Wuthering Heights* is not a new approach for the novel. Phillip K. Wion used Freudian theories in “The Absent Mother in Wuthering Heights.” His essay draws heavily from outmoded Freudian research and a particular emphasis on Emily Bronte’s life, suggesting that the close relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine are that of a “Symbiotic relationship between mother and child,” (Wion 366). Wion correctly examines Catherine’s poor boundaries when he notes, “The boundary between Catherine and her world is ambiguous and problematic,” (Wion 366). However, he goes in the wrong direction by faulting it on her lack of a relationship with a mother “Just as it is for a child undergoing the separation-individuation process,” (366). Wion ties this with Bronte’s loss of her mother at a young age, going so far as to assert that the writing of *Wuthering Heights* is but a “psychological strategy she developed to deal with the loss of her mother at this crucial point of her development,” (366).

While an examination from beyond the text can offer some insights into the authorial intent, giving preference to the text first is more likely to result in a fair interpretation. Just as poet separates his or herself from the poem by way of the speaker, most authors write stories without looking to work out private, interior issues. What is or is not known of Emily’s life is debatable at best, and the novel is too rich in characterization to owe its focus solely to that of a pained artist working out her loss of a mother. Wion’s observation that mothers’ absence from the novel might be a deliberate choice on Bronte’s part due to her childhood is a valid one. However, using (disproven) theoretical models to explain the nature of the novel itself fails to explain the multitude of personalities and interactions encompassed within *Wuthering Heights.* This does not mean that the psychological approach is without merit, only that Wion’s approached invoked the work of the wrong set of psychologists.

Emily Bronte wrote in a time before psychology rose to prominence, especially of theories pertaining to personality and development. However, her rich characterization of individual character portrayals, as noted by a corpus textual analysis by Dr. Varghese suggests that Bronte must have had an observant eye for people—how else does someone known for staying in having such a wide array of character speech patterns? While Bronte may not have the academic knowledge of psychology unavailable for more than a hundred years, she seemed to know enough of people to pick up their expressions, speech habits, and patterns of behavior. Certainly, she could have seen the way adults develop and their personalities change.

Phillip K. Wion went astray in using debunked Freudian literature to explain the psychology of *Wuthering Heights,* relying too heavily on Bronte’s (contested) history. Jungian psychological theories wrestle with the concept of identity, as part of the process of developing into a healthy adult, which integrates societal expectations with both the positive and negative aspects of the self. Jung described a five-step process for the integration of the ego, whereupon a person develops fully. The process entails addressing what he referred to as “The shadow” or the darker half the self, one ruled by impulsivity, instincts, and socially undesirable qualities (Kotzé 515).

First, the individual begins to realize that society has expectations, and attempts to align their behaviors and actions with those qualities. Second, the individual then begins to explore their identity and personal attributes, seeking to understand the differences between the self and that which comes from the outside. Third, the person starts to develop their sense of morality by exploring inner qualities and testing their ethical proclivities against the boundaries set up by society. The fourth stage is a period of alienation, where the individual begins to see the world as it truly is, and must reconcile this with their expectations and values for the self. Lastly, the individual can integrate all of this information, confront their shadow, and then integrate the duality of their personality into the ego (515).

Evidence of Catherine Earnshaw’s attempt to integrate occurs during the text. The first stage comes about as she realizes the expectations put on her by society, by way of the Earnshaws working to “refine her” and then Hindley’s wife Frances continuing the process thereafter. She is always reminded of what the outside world demands of her in spite of her desires. For a time, she aligns herself with the values, acting with manners and etiquette, addressing people correctly and trying to engage by these rules. However, in times she begins to question this, as Heathcliff imposes upon her demands to return to participate in their previous style of play, and using his calendar to point out to her that she spends decreasing amounts of time with him.

The incongruence of her desires with what society demands best reveals itself in the way of her dream that she shares with Nelly. She remarks that she dreamt she had died and gone to heaven but felt unhappy residing among the angels, feeling out of place. While Nelly is quick to dismiss her dreams as “guilt for not belonging there,” but what Catherine shares does not sound like guilt, but a rejection of what Heaven (and by extension, society) represents.

'I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy. (Bronte 86)

To Catherine, Heaven represents society and what it demands. Heaven is an amalgamation of duty and obedience. To belong to that place is to give up the parts of herself she sees as incompatible. The essay “The Circumambient Universe,” noted this difference as well, in discussing differences between character’s ideas of Heaven and Hell. Goodridge takes note that, “Throughout out the Novel’s intricate pattern, a number of private heavens and hells are contrasted, each throwing the others’ into sharper relief,” (74). His observations support that the idea of personal heavens and hell amount to different things, with society having its concept of heaven that contrasts significantly with Catherine’s conceptualization.

Despite her misgivings, Catherine recognizes that the “heaven” created by the framework of society requires that she marry someone with money and power, forgoing her desire to marry Heathcliff. She correctly realizes that marriage is a means of lifting herself up, gaining power in some fashion, in which she hopes to improve not just her standing but that of Heathcliff as well. She notes this to Nelly after sharing her dream.

That will do to explain my secret, as well as the other. I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire.' (Bronte 86)

She will make the “socially sanctioned choice,” as Pykett once described it (469), setting off a chain of events that will come about as consequences of that decision. Pykett correctly notes that Catherine is learning, “to be a woman as defined by the society in which she lives,” (470), which lends support to her experiencing the third stage of personality development. Society is imposing its boundaries onto Catherine, and soon she will push back, leading to the third stage.

Catherine tests these boundaries by trying to have Heathcliff in her life despite marrying someone else. It violates social propriety of the time, Nelly quick to point out the lack of decorum it shows.

They humour you—I know what there would be to do if they did not! You can well afford to indulge their passing whims, as long as their business is to anticipate your desires—You may, however, fall out, at last, over something of equal consequence to both sides; and, then those you term weak are very capable of being as obstinate as you! (Bronte 101).

Despite Nelly’s warnings that interactions between these two men would inevitably lead to conflicts, Catherine chooses to push against the boundaries nevertheless, trying to have her life both ways, with both Edgar and Heathcliff in her life. As Nelly predicted, the men clash, and the lack of reconciliation between the lifestyles manifests itself in physical confrontations between the two, with Catherine caught in the middle. She tests the boundaries and discovers where the limits lie, and cannot bring herself to accept the limitations. She moves to the fourth stage, one where isolation must occur so that the person can integrate their better qualities, their shadow, and the expectations of society.

Catherine’s isolation leads to a rapid descension of her psyche and physical health. Whereas a healthy individual eventually comes out of their isolation a “whole person,” Catherine remains shut-in her room, where others allow her self-imposed exile to continue with little interference. The servants and her husband employ the only intervention they have learned to use with some measure of success—giving her time and space, which turned out to be the wrong course of action. Catherine’s personality disintegrates, her behaviors deteriorate, and as a result, her physical health declines until she dies in childbirth. Her physical death is a literal manifestation of her failure to integrate all aspects of her personality and to reconcile both halves of her person. Catherine never came equipped with the tools necessary for completing this process.

The development of the skills necessary for healthy emotional processing is a continuing topic of interest in psychology. Finding how to help dysfunctional adults acquire the skills required to resolve their struggles without continued therapeutic intervention should the goal of a healthy, therapeutic alliance. Although genetics play some role, what bears relevancy to a literary analysis is the effect of the environment on an individual. Catherine Earnshaw grew up in a home that did not equip her with the necessary skills to develop meaningful relationships and resolve conflicts. Jung wrote some on the topic, but it Carl Rogers, someone greatly influenced by his works that examined the necessary conditions for healthy human development.

Carl Rogers noted that for a human being to reach a state of actualization, that is, the healthiest and most developed person they can become, they need an environment that supports healthy emotional development, including meeting basic needs and encouraging prosocial behaviors (Patterson and Joseph 120-21). A lack of meeting basic needs can stunt emotional growth, as a constant effort to meet needs such as finding food, shelter, companionship, or validation can interfere with development. *Wuthering Heights* does not give reasons to believe that Catherine Earnshaw’s physiological needs went unmet, but there are definite instances of her emotional needs going unfulfilled.

Nelly describes the Earnshaws’ father as a man with “a kind heart, though he was rather severe, sometimes,” (Bronte 51). He demonstrates his quick manner with how he attends to lapses in behavior when he backhands Catherine for teasing Heathcliff after bringing him home. He later elevates Heathcliff to a status even above Catherine, “petting him up far above Cathy, who was too mischievous and wayward for a favorite,” (Bronte 53). Later, as the father begins to decline, Joseph steps in to fill his master with tales of the children’s misbehaviors, taking pains to appeal to his master’s expectations by “heaping the heaviest blame on the last [Catherine],” (Bronte 55). Joseph’s efforts added strain to an already strained relationship between Catherine and her father.

Catherine continues to push against her father, as children are wont to do. She finds amusement in getting a rise from him, which seems to be her primary means of getting attention. A critical passage that demonstrates the degree of emotional harm the man caused her is when her father would turn away her attempts at affection, a positive form of attention seeking, by saying, “Nay, Cathy, I cannot love thee; thou’rt worse than they brother. Go, say they prayers, child, and ask God’s pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!” (Bronte 56). Such comments to a young child have the potential to leave lasting scars. In light of Rogers’s observations about development, these conditions did not warrant healthy early development with interactions between Cathy and her Father. Things would only get worse after her brother Henley loses his wife, and becomes a drunk tyrant in the home.

Henley took over the home at first left Cathy and Heathcliff mainly to their own devices, running wild in the county side. The interlude is interrupted by her brief stay at Thrushcross Grange, where she is introduced to “proper society.” As she spends time both with Heathcliff and the Lintons, Henley’s wife passes, and he takes to alcohol to drown out his sorrows, becoming increasingly verbally (and possibly physically) violent. Cathy’s early childhood is one characterized by conditional love, unclear boundaries and expectations, and emotional abuse. Her later youth is under the rule of a deteriorating alcoholic brother. These conditions fail to provide her with the environment needed for her to develop into a functional adult with the skills to integrate her two halves and reconcile personal goals with societal expectations.

Cathy’s failure to integrate manifests itself in the duality of her names and their usage. The diminutive form of her name represents the young, immature Cathy, while her full name, Catherine, stands as the adult who fits within society’s expectations. The use of each name switches proportions as she ages and attempts to leave behind her younger self for an adult, but her failure to integrate her two halves leads to the disintegration of her personality. She fails in this endeavor because of the childhood conditions in which she experienced while growing up, failing to develop the skills necessary for healthily reaching adulthood. The opposite proves valid for the next generation, as Catherine Linton does integrate by the end of the novel.

As noted throughout this essay, Emily Bronte seemed to employ the use of opposites as a means of exploring characters and themes. Catherine Linton is no exception to this, as she undergoes her struggle as a teenager. Unlike her mother, Catherine Linton grows up in a healthy household with a supportive family network. Nelly remarks of Edgar’s interactions with his daughter, “I don’t believe he ever did speak a harsh word to her,” (Bronte, 172). Edgar also personally saw to her education and took the girl on walks. Nelly referred to her time in helping rear the child for her first thirteen years as, “the happiest of my life,” (171). The setting where Catherine Linton grows up is ideal for actualization, with a loving environment and opportunities to grow and develop.

Catherine Linton too goes through these five stages as described by Jung. She learns of societal rules and expectations and at first aligns herself with those rules, by obeying her father and Nelly Dean. She begins to explore the differences between society’s expectations and her desires when she ventures out on her property, finding her way to Wuthering Heights. She undergoes a long third stage where she maintains communications with her cousin at Wuthering Heights, despite her father’s wishes. Her continued interaction leads to Heathcliff succeeding in wresting her way from Thrushcross Grange and forcing her to marry Linton, his son and her cousin, a case of society forcing its will upon her.

Catherine Linton’s period of isolation comes about by her forced stay at Wuthering Heights, where she is not even allowed to go past the games while Heathcliff maintains control. She continues to struggle with expectations and her identity, often lashing out at others. However, unlike her mother, she finds a way to reconcile her shadow (the negative qualities she inherited from her mother, such as being “saucy”), societal pressures (marriage, maintaining a home) and her desire to be happy. At the story’s conclusion, she has integrated her personality and moved past where her mother failed. She finds happiness and has plans to marry the person who makes her happy.

Catherine Linton’s journey reflects that of her mother. Like the elder Catherine, she marries someone she does not desire, thrust upon her by “society,” represented by Heathcliff, who imposed his will on her through threats. The elder Catherine married Edgar due to the pressures imposed upon her by actual societal expectations coupled with a poor home environment created by the dysfunctional Henley. However, unlike her mother, Catherine Linton is psychologically well adjusted, raised in an environment conducive for actualization, and grew into an emotionally functional adult.

Appendix

Names of Address, Catherine Earnshaw

Figure 1Notice how the name used almost reflects each other. As she transitions to "adulthood,” the use of her old nick-name becomes as fleeting as the use of her full name in childhood.

Works Cited

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives.* Edited by Linda H. Peterson, Bedford Books, 2003.

Goodridge, J F. “The Circumambient Universe.” *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Wuthering Heights: A Collection of Critical Essays*. Edited by Thomas A. Vogler, Prentice Hall, 1968, pp. 69-77.

Kotzé, Zacharias. “Jung, Individuation, and Moral Relativity in Qohelet 7:16–17.” *Journal of Religion and Health*, vol. 53, no. 2, 27 Oct. 2012, pp. 511–519. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1007/s10943-012-9655-0.

Patterson, Thomas G., and Stephen Joseph. “Person-Centered Personality Theory: Support from Self-Determination Theory And Positive Psychology.” *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, vol. 47, no. 1, Jan. 2007, pp. 117–139. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1177/0022167806293008.

Pykett, Lyn. “Changing the Names: The Two Catherines.” *Wuthering Heights: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Edited by Linda H. Peterson, Bedford Books, 2003, pp. 468-77.

Varghese, Dr. Lata Marina. “Stylistic Analysis of Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights.” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 2, no. 5, 2012, pp. 46–50. *JSTOR*, doi:10.9790/0837-0254650.

Wion, Phillip K. “The Absent Mother in *Wuthering Heights*.” *Wuthering Heights: Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Edited by Linda H. Peterson, Bedford Books, 2003, pp. 364-78.