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E349S - The Brontës

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### A Unified Spirit: Reincarnating Carl Jung's Syzygy in *Wuthering Heights*

The central characters of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) seem to reflect each other to such a degree that separating them becomes a daunting task. The Earnshaws and Heathcliff comprise the first generation inhabiting *Wuthering Heights*. Applying the model of the Psyche proposed by Carl Jung, the eminent 19th- and 20th-century psychologist, shows that Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff emulate Jung's "Syzygy," or "divine pair" (Jung 64). However, the Lintons at Thrushcross Grange interfere with Catherine's and Heathcliff's unification, and so the Syzygy never comes to fruition. The spirit of the divine pair reincarnates into their respective children—Catherine's daughter, Cathy; and Heathcliff's ward, Hareton. In the second generation, Cathy and Hareton come together and bring the divine pair into being.

Discussing Jung's Syzygy must begin with his theory of the psychological "Anima" or "Animus," which are "the contra-sexual archetypes of the psyche....[O]ne looks for the reflection of one's anima or animus in a potential mate, accounting for the phenomenon of love at first sight" ("The Jungian Model" n.p). The archetype of the divine pair represents the complete unification of the masculine and feminine sides, and therefore represents the integration of the Anima and Animus. The Anima/us archetype sheds light on Catherine's and Heathcliff's apparently inextricable relationship. While Jung states that people look for a *reflection* of their Anima in potential partners, the destructively possessive behavior that Catherine and Heathcliff display in *Wuthering Heights* suggests that they are physical

manifestations of each other's Anima/us—not mere reflections. Both Heathcliff and Catherine frequently refer to each other in terms of their own selves. He calls her “my life” (Brontë 130), and Catherine claims that “he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same” (69). Heathcliff's utter despair after Catherine's death further emphasizes their intense spiritual attachment. Disregarding Nelly's presence, he apostrophizes to Catherine, “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!” (137). In Heathcliff's head, Catherine *is* his soul. She was an integral part of his Psyche, though physically a separate human being, and her departure creates an irreparable schism within Heathcliff. By his own admission, he is now soulless, stripped of his Anima. Heathcliff and Catherine together would have formed the Syzygy. However, Catherine alienates herself from Heathcliff, through marriage and through death, and so the divine pair never unifies. The consequences of Heathcliff's subsequent bereavement play out through the rest of *Wuthering Heights* and compound the misery of its central characters.

Through Jung's idea of “Individuation,” which is the “quest for wholeness that the human psyche invariably undertakes, the journey to become conscious of his or herself as a unique human being” (“The Jungian Model” n.p.), a plausible explanation emerges for the bizarre, seemingly unexplainable nature of Catherine's and Heathcliff's deaths. By virtue of their entanglement, neither Catherine nor Heathcliff can call themselves “unique human beings.” Their inseparable state does not go unnoticed, for Nelly finds Heathcliff without Catherine and states, “[I]t gave me a start to see him alone” (Brontë 41). If Catherine and Heathcliff had remained isolated within *Wuthering Heights*, they would have become the divine pair. Alas, the

Linton family inhabits the nearby estate of Thrushcross Grange. Edgar Linton's burgeoning relationship with Catherine interferes with the Syzygy. She becomes stricken with the need for societal advancement after spending weeks at the Grange surrounded by the Lintons' relative affluence, causing her to lament to Nelly, "[I]t would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him" (69). She agrees to marry Edgar, but she pleads with Nelly to confirm whether she made the right decision. Nelly supports the marriage and asks Catherine where the obstacle is, prompting her to strike "one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast" and proclaim "in whichever place the soul lives. In my soul and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong!" (67). Catherine knows that Heathcliff is her Animus, the other half of their divine pair, and that by marrying Edgar she could potentiate a spiritual wound that would not heal.

After Nelly interrogates her, Catherine's motivation for wanting to marry Edgar reveals itself to be about *Heathcliff*, for Catherine claims, "if I marry Linton I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother's power" (69). In order to achieve this marriage, Catherine must use a "Persona," the "mask of the actor" (Jung 20). The Persona arises "for reasons of adaptation or personal convenience;" however, "those who identify too strongly with their personas...can run into problems" ("The Jungian Model"). Catherine's time at Thrushcross Grange changes her; she returns to Wuthering Heights having matured and possessing a determination to endear herself to Edgar, who is unaware of her volatility. She therefore has to put forth her best qualities, but her attempts are shaky. Her personality is fiery and untamable, and she and Heathcliff "promised to grow up fair and rude as savages" (Brontë 41). Jung claims those who identify too much with their Personae encounter problems, for they lose themselves in

their false identity—Catherine has the opposite issue. She, perhaps, identifies with her Persona too *little*. Her problem is never more evident than in her behavior toward Nelly: “She, supposing Edgar could not see her, snatched the cloth from my hand, and pinched me. . . . She never had the power to conceal her passion, it always set her whole complexion in a blaze” (60). Catherine uses a Persona to charm Edgar and other interlopers within Wuthering Heights, but the Persona is never stable—the “maniac’s fury” is ever-present in her face, and that fury is volatile and apt to escape its host (107). Yet, she manages to maintain the facade long enough to marry Edgar. Catherine’s true Persona only manifests when she dies giving birth to her daughter Cathy. Cathy embodies her mother’s positive qualities without succumbing to the detrimental flaws, such as her mother’s penchant for physical violence and wild behavior. She reminds Nelly of Catherine through her “capacity for intense attachments” and because “her spirit was high, though not rough”; however, unlike her mother, “her anger was never furious” (154). Cathy has the capacity for occasional cruelty—especially toward Hareton in most of their earlier interactions—but the instances are exceptions rather than the rule. Cathy in essence is her mother’s ideal Persona. In Cathy, Catherine’s heightened anger and passion are tempered without sacrificing her free spirit. Her stability later allows her to teach Hareton to read and foster the bond between them that would result in the completion of the divine pair.

Catherine intends to marry Edgar in order to raise Heathcliff’s position in society, but her good intentions have serious spiritual repercussions—Catherine’s mental and physical decline begins with her marriage. Years in the future, her appearance in Lockwood’s dream confirms that her marriage to Edgar tore her spiritually from Heathcliff and begat the death of her physical body. According to Jacqueline Simpson in her essay, “The Function of Folklore in *Jane Eyre* and

*Wuthering Heights*,” aspects of Lockwood’s dream about Catherine’s ghost “show that Emily Bronte meant [Catherine’s ghost] to be taken as a real apparition...for it contains elements that can not come from Lockwood's subconscious” (Simpson 54). The ghost wails that she has “been a waif for twenty years!” (Brontë 25). At the time of his dream, “it is in fact only seventeen years since Catherine's physical death, but twenty since by deciding to marry Edgar she made herself 'an exile, an outcast' from her true world” (Simpson 54). Her true world, the one where Catherine could find the completion of her soul, must involve Heathcliff. The marriage irreversibly wrenches Catherine from him and precipitates her decline. Susan McKinstry writes in her essay, “Desire’s Dreams: Power and Passion in *Wuthering Heights*,” that Catherine’s decision to choose “material desire over emotional desire” means that “she marries Edgar without love and loses Heathcliff” (McKinstry 143). The event causes madness to eventually settle in her Psyche, leading her to isolate and starve herself. Heathcliff knows intuitively that Catherine will not recover, and upon meeting with her again he desperately pleads, “‘*Why* did you despise me? *Why* did you betray your own heart, Catherine?... You have killed yourself? ...[N]othing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, *you*, of your own will, did it” (Brontë 132). Separating from her Animus and failing to successfully Individuate take a toll on Catherine, who dies shortly after her final interaction with Heathcliff.

However, if attempting to Individuate—and thereby permanently separate herself from Heathcliff—leads to Catherine’s death, then surely that same severance should in turn cause Heathcliff’s demise. The Individuation does indeed kill Heathcliff, but the catalyst for his death is different than that which killed Catherine. Heathcliff also marries a Linton—in fact, he marries Isabella after Catherine marries Edgar, in a strange reflection of Catherine’s inherent dismissal of

him. His intention in marrying Isabella is the main difference between the two marriages. Heathcliff marries her without the attachment Catherine claims to feel for Edgar, and with an ulterior design. Isabella herself reveals Heathcliff's motive, for she tells Nelly, "[Heathcliff] wishes to provoke Edgar to desperation: he says he has married me on purpose to obtain power over him" (125). Heathcliff merely uses Isabella as an avenue for revenge against the Linton who stole Catherine from him, and Heathcliff is happy to admit it. After Catherine dies, Heathcliff can still live on because Catherine's spirit still exists within him. He sees her everywhere, "in every cloud, in every tree—filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object by day" (259). Catherine's perceived presence combined with the need for revenge against Hindley Earnshaw and Edgar Linton, both of whom impeded his relationship with Catherine, drives Heathcliff's continued existence. The remnants of Catherine's volatile, vengeful spirit cling to Heathcliff, preventing the destructive Individuation and fueling his revenge.

Heathcliff clearly has no interest in Personae, for "he took a grim pleasure, apparently, in exciting the aversion rather than the esteem of his few acquaintances" (58). He delights in indulging his malice and does not try to endear himself to the inhabitants of Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights. Rather than a Persona, Heathcliff manages to use Hareton to create his "Shadow," the archetype of the Jungian Psyche that encompasses "[T]hose traits that we dislike, or would rather ignore" ("The Jungian Model"). While Hindley was alive, Heathcliff is interested in Hareton solely to turn him against his father. The young boy shocks Nelly when she approaches Wuthering Heights one day, for from his lips emerged "a string of curses" that "distorted his baby features into a shocking expression of malignity" (Brontë 92). Hareton is not even five years old, for Catherine's daughter is yet unborn. Already, Heathcliff's poison is at

work, and Hareton only worsens once he is relinquished to Heathcliff's care, "reduced to a state of complete dependence on his father's inveterate enemy" (153). Heathcliff's makes his intentions with Hareton explicit—at Hindley's funeral, Heathcliff tells the child, "Now, my bonny lad, you are *mine*! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" (152). Before he left Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff was wild and brutish in the eyes of his caretakers and surrogate family—Hindley treated him terribly, and Nelly thought little of him, referring to him as "it" (34). His time abroad diminishes some of his early strangeness and he returns a "well-formed man" (81), but the history of those interactions and of his young personality cannot be erased. Heathcliff, who had fought often and violently with Hindley, is now in possession of Hindley's son, and he wastes no time in spoiling him in his quest for revenge against Hareton's father. Heathcliff imbues him with those brutish qualities he was accused of as a child, for "he was never taught to read or write; never rebuked for any bad habit which did not annoy his keeper; never led a single step towards virtue, or guarded by a single precept against vice" (160). In denying Hareton education and moral guidance, Heathcliff effectively molds him into his Shadow, projecting his negative relationship with Hindley onto the young man to enact his vengeance.

Catherine and Heathcliff should have been the Syzygy, for the pair were essentially the same spirit occupying separate bodies. However, Catherine's attempt to raise Heathcliff's station by marrying Edgar backfires—she separates herself from Heathcliff and eventually dies. Heathcliff dies years later, once the spirit of revenge keeping him tied to Catherine fails him. Their spirits do not end with their deaths, for they carry on in their children. Heathcliff imparts his negative qualities onto Hareton and thus creates his Shadow, while Cathy shows herself to

represent her mother's true Persona. Linton, Heathcliff's biological son, stands in for his uncle's role in the triumvirate of romantic tension, and thus, "[T]he tale of triangular desire is, effectively, reenacted in this second generation" (McKinstry 143). Heathcliff encourages a marriage between Linton and Cathy in order to further his control over both estates, but Linton is no spiritual match for Cathy. Their conception of a perfect day points to a fundamental difference between them, for while Cathy "wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee," Linton "wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace," static and "half-alive" (Brontë 199). Catherine is strong and energetic—Linton is weak and feeble. Initially, it appears that the cycle that ensnared Catherine and Heathcliff is bound to repeat with Cathy and Hareton, for Cathy and Linton marry. However, the interloper dies. Linton's removal from the equation leaves only Cathy and Hareton together, the Persona and the Shadow. As the extreme positive and the extreme negative, these two archetypes of the Psyche must be present to balance each other. Jung's conception of the Shadow and the Persona meant that in order "[T]o truly grow as a person, one must cease... willful blindness to one's Shadow and attempt to balance it with the Persona" ("The Jungian Model"). Indeed, Cathy's presence as the Persona begins to affect change in Hareton, who "had been content with daily labour and rough animal enjoyments, till Catherine crossed his path. Shame at her scorn, and hope of her approval, were his first prompters to higher pursuits" (Brontë 243). Before Linton, Cathy had been fond of Hareton. After Linton dies, her Persona finds its way back to Hareton's Shadow and they are able to reach a spiritual stability.

Cathy's brief marriage to Linton gives Heathcliff control of the Grange; he can finally enact his revenge by preventing Cathy's union with Hareton, the son of his hated enemy. Yet, at the critical moment he finds that the ability to enact his revenge has left him: "I find the will to



lift a slate off either roof as vanished!...I have lost the faculty of enjoying their destruction” (258). The vengeful spirit that propelled Heathcliff’s miserable existence departs. With its departure goes also Heathcliff’s last earthly tie to Catherine. In the end, the separation from Catherine, the Individuation, also claims Heathcliff. His inability to act creates a shift in his behavior, and “[H]is restlessness becomes acute towards the end of March, the season of Catherine’s death” (Simpson 59). After Heathcliff dies, a boy sobs to Lockwood, “there’s Heathcliff and a woman yonder” (Brontë 268). In death, Heathcliff reunites with the other half of his soul. The child would not have known this woman to be Catherine, but there is no other spirit that Heathcliff would walk with upon the moors. Nelly judges Hareton and Cathy to be about to “issue out and have a walk on the moors” (267), in a moment of foreshadowing that speaks to the reincarnation of the Syzygy. There are no intervening societal pressures—Edgar, Isabella, and Linton, all interlopers and hinderances to the unity of the divine pair, have died. Heathcliff lives, but he is unable to further destroy the lives of his charges, and thus Cathy and Hareton remain in peace. The Syzygy, initially foiled in its conception, finds itself completed in Cathy and Hareton—together, they join the Persona and the Shadow, and the Animus and Anima.

Catherine and Heathcliff may be separate individuals, but their behavior toward the other and their mutual obsession begs the question of how disparate they really are. Applying a Jungian lens to their relationship reveals them to be psychological projections of each other—the same soul in separate bodies. Injuring that soul or tearing it asunder ultimately leads to death, as is evident in the tragic end of Catherine, and later Heathcliff. Their Animus and Anima passes down to Cathy and Hareton, who by the end of *Wuthering Heights* have become ideal, tamer versions of Catherine and Heathcliff. Without the interloping Lintons, so detrimental to the

unification of the first Syzygy, the reincarnated spirit of the divine pair is able to emerge in Cathy's and Hareton's happiness together—and in the reuniting of Catherine's and Heathcliff's bereft spirits.

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