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Leah Shine January 25, 2018

Women's Spectrality and Identity in Victorian Literature

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Abstract
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In this paper, I examine how ghostly women in Victorian Era literature embody problems that women often faced in a constricted society. Specifically, I investigate how the spectrality of Anne Catherick in *The Woman in White*, Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*, and Catherine Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights* speaks to larger issues of repression and identity for women during the period.

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"It is the fate of a woman

Long to be patient and silent, to wait like a ghost that is speechless,

Till some questioning voice dissolves the spell of its silence."

-Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Women's Spectrality and Identity in Victorian Literature: Introduction

In this thesis, I discuss spectres and spectrality as a figure and an image in Victorian novels by Dickens, Collins, and E. Brontë. I analyze texts in which women appear as ghostly, spectral, and haunting figures in order to better understand how their ghostliness testifies to ways women in the nineteenth century were marginalized by social institutions like the law and marriage. I show that their ghostliness is a product of this marginalization, and that their haunting behavior is a manifestation of it, as they seek outlets for expression when they cannot do so in normal modes of communication. The "ghosts" I read are not coded as actual supernatural phenomena in Collins or Dickens, and in Brontë, their status remains unclear. But the women of these texts nonetheless appear as spectral phenomena. They exist in borderline spaces and times, sometimes because they are imagined that way by others, but also always expressing something of their own suffering and experience as marginalized beings.

In the *Spectralities Reader,* Maria del Pilar Blanco and Esther Pereen articulate the ideas of ghosts as a concept that has come to influence critical work in the humanities: "certain features of ghosts and haunting — such as their liminal position between visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality, and their association with powerful affects like fear and obsession — quickly came to be employed across the humanities and sciences to theorize a variety of social, ethical, and political questions" (Pilar Blanco, Pereen 2). Women's spectrality becomes an important issue in Victorian literature because it draws

attention to inequality and the subjugation of women during the nineteenth century. Spectrality in these novels is the not just a symptom the erasure of women's legal identities but of the oppression of their voices, opinions, and freedom of choice, diminishing them into practical nonexistence, or ghostliness.[1] The characters I look at occupy an uneasy situation between clearly defined oppositions such as those listed by Pilar Blanco and Pereen—visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality , and their situation illuminates social issues of gender inequality and the ethical implication of this inequality. In the context of the Victorian novel these have special bearing on questions of marriage and inheritance. They also take the generic form of the gothic, the genre associated with the supernatural and the uncanny. The novels I analyze are all, in some sense, informed by gothic conventions, and I analyze their gothic qualities to reveal the larger social implications of the "spectral woman." These novels reveal how much the ghostliness of women is a product of societal repression and loss of identity, and also how much the effects of such repression are not only damaging to themselves but to others. Uncanny spectral women have a way of reminding men that they, too, may be spectres.

With these issues in mind, I will be following Pilar Blanco and Pereen, too, in discussing spectrality as a "conceptual metaphor to effect revisions of history…in order to expose and address the way certain subjectivities have been marginalized and disavowed in order to establish and uphold a particular norm, as well as the way such subjectivities can never be completely erased but insist on reappearing to trouble the norm" (310). Spectral women trouble the societal norms of Victorian England by refusing to fade into the background and accept the life that is given to them. Instead, they reappear as a way of protesting unequal rights and

[1] In this way, it makes sense that two of the women discussed are not actual ghosts, but rather figures that haunt other physically, appearing and disappearing, or psychologically, appearing unwanted in the minds of others.

constricting roles for women. Two of spectral women I discuss belonged to the upper-class and are limited to marriage in adulthood, as the sole path to recognized success and membership in their communities. They could not get a job or have a career, without losing their position in society and everything they have always known. The third figure I consider, as a member of the lower-middle class, is also never given the opportunity to have a career as she is shut away in a asylum by a powerful man. All of these women push against their fates by haunting and reappearing to protest the rules that contain them.

I will be examining three women in the books *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins (1860), *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens (1861), and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë (1847). The three novels, although different in sub-genre, (a mystery, a bildungsroman, and a tragedy) share overlapping themes of marriage, identity, morality, loss of freedom, generational cycles, and revenge. More importantly, they also belong to the gothic genre, which arose in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries in a time of religious and scientific exploration, as people began questioning God's existence and turning toward scientific explanations for unnatural phenomena even as they remained uneasy about whether science could fully explain such phenomena. Through gothic conventions, writers like Collins, Dickens, and Brontë were able to incorporate ghosts, death, decay, madness, curses, and other dark themes to "explore fear of the unknown" and what control humans have over the unknown, even as they contextualized the supernatural in naturalistic and psychological explanations. [2]

The Woman in White, considered by some to be the first sensation novel, was originally published as a series in Dickens' journal, *All the Year Round* in November of 1859 (Luckhurst

[2] "The Gothic, a literary movement that focused on ruin, decay, death, terror, and chaos, and privileged irrationality and passion over rationality and reason, grew in response to the historical, sociological, psychological, and political contexts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries", from *encyclopedia.com*

1). It was success, and was published as a novel in 1860, its popularity causing Collins to become a wealthy man (Luckhurst 1). The book combines domestic realism with melodrama and crime, and the Victorian audience devoured the story with "moral outrage and prurience" (Luckhurst 1). Collins was one of the first to combine gothic horror with everyday scenes, where seemingly normal characters find themselves in a tangle of lies and plotting (Luckhurst 1). I chose to include *The Woman in White*[3] because it illustrates the way in which women's identities during the time were fragile, subject to the law and men's manipulation. In the novel, ghostly woman Anne Catherick serves as both a reminder to Sir Percival of his immoral past and a warning to Laura Fairlie of what lies ahead in her life with him. Collins uses her character to bring up forgotten events that may have otherwise gone undiscovered, sacrificing herself in the process. Anne and Laura have their identities swapped unknowingly by Sir Percival and his co-conspirator Count Fosco. The men drug the women and switch their places, placing Laura in a mental asylum and taking Anne to Laura's husband. This is accomplished because Anne is a chronically ill girl who lives on the fringes of society, appears and disappears on fields and cemeteries and rarely makes contact with others, so she is not missed by many. Once Anne dies in Laura's place, Laura's husband gains her inheritance. The ease in which the men accomplish this plan speaks to the fragility of women's identity during the time and how they could be manipulated and taken advantage of through marriage and the law.

Through the other female characters Laura and Marian in addition to Anne, Collins calls attention to married, unmarried, middle and lower class women's issues and concerns during the middle of the nineteenth century. Laura, fortunately, is saved by Marian and Walter, who protect

[3] *The Woman in White* is the first book included in this project because it was published in 1860, a year before *Great Expectations* was published in 1861. *Wuthering Heights*, although published earlier than both in 1847, is the last chapter in this thesis because it was written by a woman author, Emily Brontë, while the first two were written by the male authors Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, respectively.

her, reassure her, and provide her an income. In the end, Laura, Marian, and Walter triumph, returning to Limmeridge House, the beautiful house of the sisters' happy childhood, because Laura gives birth to a son who is the sole inheritor of the estate after her father Mr. Fairlie dies, ensuring the patriarchal system of inheritance. Although Marian continuously supports Laura throughout her marriage to Sir Percival, provides moral and financial support after their separation and rescues Laura from the asylum, it is ultimately through Walter and their son Walter Jr. that they are able to fully reclaim their old lives through inheriting Limmeridge House. Anne Catherick's fate, however, is to die as a young woman from heart disease, alone and among those who wish her ill. She lived most of her life as a ghost, a "woman in white," unseen and disbelieved and is the only non-villainous character to die in the novel, with a death suited for someone that was almost already dead. In Wilkie Collin's *The Woman in White*, erasure of women is visible through this ghost-like figure. The erasure is all the easier because the lower-class Anne has no legitimate father and no connection to the world of property to which Laura at least is bound through father and husband. *The Woman in White* can be seen as a challenge to readers to recall the women who were victimized in Victorian England and as part of the ongoing struggle for legal identity and independence, even as its portrayal of Anne and Laura in some ways reassert the norms of Victorian womanhood.

The second novel in this study, *Great Expectations,* was Dickens' thirteenth novel, published December 1860 to August 1861, also as a serial in Dickens' weekly periodical *All the Year Round*.[4] Indeed it followed almost immediately on the publication of Collins' novel in the journal.[5] In October of 1861, it was published in three volumes.[6] *Great Expectations* was chosen

[4] From Bharat Tandon's *Great Expectations, britannica.com*
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

for this thesis because it has themes comparable to the other works concerning the difficulties faced by women in the face of inheritance and marriage laws, and how those difficulties lead to a loss of social identity. A wealthy widow, Miss Havisham, is tricked into nearly marrying a man who also plots to take her inheritance. He succeeds in gaining her affection and taking some of her money, and she is left at the altar. Miss Havisham's identity is forever changed after her supposed wedding day, as her trauma causes her to preserve the day in her memory. She never changes out of her wedding dress and keeps the clocks in her house frozen to the time she was abandoned. For both *The Woman in White* and *Great Expectations* the spectral woman is the product of manipulation of men and the theft of identity.

Miss Havisham's heartbreak leads to the creation of another troubled woman, her adopted daughter Estella. Miss Havisham takes on the role of a denatured mother, or a mother without natural qualities of love, protectiveness, and encouragement of growth. She creates a girl in her idealized image, that is, who is able to spurn the affections of men as Miss Havisham cannot do herself. Miss Havisham feeds off of this ability of Estella, letting it become her driving life force. Ironically, it is when she is actually dying that she is more genuinely alive, capable of forgiveness or at least asking forgiveness, capable of not being in thrall to the past. Her last words ask Pip to forgive her, and shows her ability to feel remorse. In death, Miss Havisham almost becomes new person, a real person in terms of the novel. Alive she had been the ghostly embodiment of a fixation to the past. *In novels full of lost, shifting, and uncovered identities, it is only the men who have any freedom, however limited, to choose how they want their identity to be constructed*. Appearing and disappearing, physically and psychologically, the women haunt the lives they could have had.

Though Dickens and Collins are in some ways astute in their representations of the social and psychic issues that inform the spectral women in their novels, they also tell stories that typically restore the social norms that they also criticize. Anne Catherick dies so that Laura can give birth to the male heir of Limmeridge house; Miss Havisham learns to forgive and let go of her anger, seemingly becoming less ghostly and more real in the process. For my final chapter I turn to the work of a Victorian woman writer who is perhaps less willing to have her characters give up their ghostly obsessions. *Wuthering Heights*, written between October 1845 and June 1846, was published under Emily Brontë's pseudonym Ellis Bell; Brontë died the following year at thirty years old.[7] Her sister Charlotte edited the manuscripts after Emily's death and arranged for them to be published as a second edition in 1850.[8] *Wuthering Heights* addresses many of the same issues as the later novels—stolen and unstable identities and the spectral woman. But its ghostly woman is possibly the one "actual" ghost of the three novels, and the novel allows one to take a sympathetic view of her anger and her obsessions, emphasizing her mistreatment by her father and older brother in her youth, positing that is this why Catherine grows into an unhappy, angry woman, mistreating those around her.

This is a novel in which major characters embrace ghosts rather than flee from them or trying to overcome them. When Catherine dies as a young woman after childbirth, she haunts her bereaved lover Heathcliff at his request. Although the novel never explicitly says that Catherine's ghost is present, the reader infers that Heathcliff is being haunted by her spirit and is eventually called back to her, and dies in ecstasy to be finally joined with her as a fellow spirit haunting the moors. Catherine haunts Heathcliff because she is trying to access a life that was

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[7] From *Publication of Wuthering Heights and Its Contemporary Critical Reception*, *academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu*
[8] Ibid.

previously forbidden to her because of her station as a woman of the upper-class. In death, she is finally free to be with Heathcliff who was too poor for her to originally marry. The novel carries a strong message in the plot, saying that women are only truly free after they die. Brontë also provides a unique perspective on gothic tradition, with the haunted asking to be haunted, instead of fearing the ghost or treating the ghost as an object of horror. This provides a contrast to the other novels in which the two spectral women appear unwanted in the lives or minds of those they haunt. Yet, this romanticized yet brutal ghost story shocked contemporary reviewers who thought that a woman like Brontë would not have been capable of writing such a tragedy full of immoral characters, which sheds light on the naiveté and innocence women were expected to have in the era.[9]

In considering the unease raised by these spectral figures (in Catherine's case the unease she raised in Victorian readers, but in the other cases within the novels themselves), one may read them as making a strong ethical demand. A ghost or ghost-like figure within a novel can imply a certain "answerability" that is, an obligation of those being haunted to answer for a past misdeed. Thus, the ghost draws attention to a lack of ethical behavior on the part of the haunted (Derrida 33). One philosopher I draw from, Jaqcues Derrida, does not see a ghost figure as something to fear, repress, or to destroy. Rather, a ghost with a secret may be a doorway to understanding voices of the past or possibilities of the future. In *The Woman In White*, Anne's presence indicates that one of the antagonists is hiding that he is not a baronet, a crime punishable by death. But she is also a doorway onto an entire world of feminine vulnerability in the novel. Indeed these spectral women do not just reveal wrongdoings of others, but also negatively affect those that they are close to. Miss Havisham's obsession with her past influences

[9] From Paul Thompson's Contemporary Reviews of Wuthering Heights, *A Reader's Guide to Wuthering Heights*

her to raise her daughter Estella without the ability to love, so that Estella may cause men the heartbreak that Miss Havisham suffered. In doing so, she ruins the lives of Estella and her would-be husband Pip. In these stories, repression negatively affects more people than just the spectral woman herself.

In addition to Derrida, I also draw from theorists Sigmund Freud, Nicholas Royle, Judith Butler, Julian Wolfreys, Elizabeth Bronfen and Ann Gaylin to support my ideas. Particularly, Freud and Butler in addition to Derrida contributed to my analysis of the works. Freud's ideas on the uncanny provide a structure for the last chapters, as it deals with questions of disturbed identity, and the "mark of the return of the repressed" (Freud 217). Although the "repressed" can mean repressed memories or experiences, I explore how, in a more literal sense, the spectral women have been repressed by the social forces shown at work in the novels. In turn, they become figures who embody the repressed fears of the men they haunt, primarily feelings of guilt. Sigmund Freud's essay *The Uncanny* (1919) breaks down the term's origination and meaning, helping one to detail the qualities of uncanny fiction. The word uncanny originates from the opposition of the German words *heimlich* (known, familiar) and *unheimlich* (unknown, unfamiliar). Freud's thesis lays out that the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, is a revelation of what is private and concealed, of what is hidden, not only from others, but also from the self (Freud 217). The spectral women reveal feelings that men in the books, particularly Sir Percival, Pip, and Heathcliff, hide from themselves. But also feelings that they, too, cannot express without the appearance of eccentricity, madness, or impropriety.

Butler's ideas also support my thesis as her writings on spectrality and gender performativity support the idea that women in the Victorian era lack mature identities due to patriarchal institutions that undergird Victorian marriage and medicine. In *Bodies that Matter*

(1993), she argues that gender is a type of performance, something that does rather than is, and that bodies and gender are two separate things. Divorcing discourse and social norms from biology, Butler deconstructs the thought that gender is something one is born with rather than acquired. She argues that performativity is "culturally-scripted character of identity, which is generated by power through repeated citations of norms and their transgression" (Boucher 113). Butler's gender performativity theories show that those who subvert traditional gender performances free themselves from the constraint of traditional gender discourse. In line with this thinking, the spectral women push against typical expressions of the female gender and are freer to express themselves in a way they would not have been able to if they stayed in their allotted path in life.

The Spectral Woman and the Erasure of Identity in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*

Introduction

Theorist Roger Luckhurst suggests that "spookiness" in gothic novels indicates some sort of oppressiveness in the law, writing, "surely what the contemporary London Gothic most evidently articulates is not simply empty structural repetitions of polytemporal spookiness: they are themselves symptoms of the curious mix of tyranny and farce that constitutes London governance" (Luckhurst 527-546). Women's spectrality, or ghostliness, in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860) is at least in part an indirect reflection of the era's constricting marriage laws that did not just constrain women's legal identities but oppressed their voices, opinions, and freedom of choice, diminishing them into practical nonexistence, or ghostliness. Wilkie Collins does not write about marriage laws completely accurately, but they remain a key to interpreting *The Woman in White* and this chapter is first framed by the legal context in which the story takes place. It will then discuss the paths of women in the novel and the specific erasure of their identities: namely, the woman in white herself (and the worst symptom of this erasure) Anne Catherick, her mirror character Laura Fairlie, and Laura's sister Marian Halcombe.[10] Disempowerment and ghostliness is apparent in each of these women's stories, from the mysterious disappearances and reappearances of white-clothed Anne, the fragile and voiceless Laura, and the re-feminization of Marian and the removal of her narrative voice at the end

[10] Marian Halcombe and Laura Fairlie are sisters who live in the care of their uncle, Frederick Fairlie, after their parents pass away. Their father is also the father of Anne Catherick, a woman who is locked in an asylum for most of her youth at the behest of baronet Sir Percival Glyde, who fears Anne knows he forged his birth records (with the help of Anne's mother) and that he is not truly a baronet. Sir Percival courts Laura and becomes her husband despite Anne's warnings to Laura. Sir Percival and co-conspirator Count Fosco plot to switch Laura and Anne's identities so that when the terminally ill Anne dies, it will seem that Laura has died, and they will inherit Laura's wealth. Walter Hartright is the male protagonist who loves Laura and avenges these misdeeds, restoring her right to property and identity.

of the novel. Their identities become subdued, and they gradually lose agency, because of the systemic way in which the men in the novel, Sir Percival Glyde, Count Fosco, Mr. Fairlie, Mr. Gilmore, and others, control their money, family, relationships, and even their deaths, in Laura and Anne's case. The chapter's discussion of theorists Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler's ideas on spectrality and gender performativity, respectively, will also support the idea that women in the Victorian era lack mature identities due to patriarchal institutions that undergird Victorian marriage and medicine.

Wilkie Collins, considered a feminist by some theorists,[11] writes a sympathetic response to women's concerns during the mid-19th century, calling attention to their issues with *The Woman in White*. Ironically, he gives voice to women's subjugation by stifling their voices at the end of the novel. For example, Walter takes over Marian Halcombe's diary at the end of the novel as he solves the mystery of Sir Percival's secret, and the reader no longer hears the story from Marian's or any other woman's point of view. In this way, Collins appears complicit with the patriarchy he criticizes. But perhaps this is Collins' metaphorical nod to the way that women's voices are ultimately erased, and the way that men dominate situations and are portrayed as the heroes because they are the ones telling the story.

Victorian Era Marriage Laws

To understand the paths of the female characters in *The Woman in White*, it is important to know the legal context in which the story operates. During the Victorian era (1837-1901), women, especially those who were married, were limited by law in what they could own and inherit. In the early 19th century, English law defined the role of the wife as a femme covert (literally meaning covered woman) stemming from the laws of coverture, legal doctrines that

[11] For example, Bachman.

stipulate that after marriage, a woman's legal rights and obligations were subsumed by those of her husband (Mallett 159-189). The wife was under the protection and influence of her husband, giving up any legal identity; under the law, the wife and the husband became one person, an idea stemming from William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, published in 1765:

> By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband (Blackstone 442-445).

In accordance with coverture laws, property of the wife was to be surrendered to the husband unless specified that it was for her own separate use, and the wife was also unable to write a will or dispose of any property without her husband's consent (Hill). Women who were unmarried or widowed (femme sole) could maintain control over their property and inheritance, own land, and could disperse property as they wished. However, if there was a dissolution of a marriage, it usually left the divorced woman impoverished, as the law offered them no rights to marital property (Mallett 159-189).

Not only did married women sign over what they already owned, but they were also limited in what they could inherit. While men were more likely to receive real estate like land, women were limited to inheriting personal property like clothing, jewelry, furniture, food, and other moveable goods (Brinjikji). English primogeniture laws automatically gave the oldest son the right to all the real property, and the daughter only inherited the property if there was no male heir. Large landed estates were entailed, which required property to be inherited instead of sold. The intestate primogeniture laws remained the same until 1925 when property legislation was updated (Brinjikji).

In 1836, the Caroline Norton case highlighted the injustice of English property laws and

generated support for reform that eventually resulted in the first Married Women's Property Act (Brinjikji). After Norton's separation from her abusive husband, she was denied rights to her children and her property. In 1854, after years of campaigning for women's rights, she published a book called *English Law for Women in the Nineteenth Century* among other pamphlets and letters to Queen Victoria, eventually influencing the Matrimonial Causes Act (1857), which contained 68 clauses, four of which came from Norton's pamphlets. These four clauses were as follows: A wife deserted by her husband might be protected by the possession of her earnings from any claim of her husband upon them (clause 21); the courts were able to direct payment of separate maintenance to a wife or to her trustee (clause 24); a wife was able to inherit and bequeath property like a single woman (clause 25); a wife separated from her husband was given the power of contract and suing, and being sued, in any civil proceeding (clause 26) (Forster).

However, the fight for married women's rights was a slow one, and the first Married Women's Property Act was not enacted until 1870. This Act of Parliament allowed married women to be the legal owners of the money they earned and to inherit property (Mallett 159-189). It was not until the second Married Women's Property Act (1882) that English law regarding the property rights of married women was altered. After years of political lobbying, this second act changed the law doctrine of coverture to include the wife's right to own, buy and sell her separate property (Mallett 159-189). In the wake of this law, women had the right to sue (and be sued). Married women could hold stock in their own names, be liable for their own debts, and any outside trade they owned could be subject to bankruptcy laws (Mallett 159-189).

Thus, women's independence and legal identity slowly developed over a period of approximately 50 years. During this time, women gradually accumulated legal rights and responsibilities, as various types of financial autonomy were progressively won. Written in 1859,

and published in 1860, *The Woman in White* mentions the Great Exhibition that brought many foreigners to London in the course of its events, which places the final events of the novel in the second half of 1851. The setting is thus taking place while the fight for women's legal identity was still being negotiated.

The Oppression of Laura Fairlie

Laura Fairlie is a character from a wealthy family who suffers from her legal non-identity and whose destiny is controlled by the men around her. Laura's plight serves as an illustration of the oppression of Victorian women, even among women with status and family. In the context of the novel, Laura serves as mirror image of the woman in white, Anne Catherick, who equally suffers from lack of identity but does not enjoy the support of family or inheritance. Laura Fairlie's marriage occurs before the Married Women's Property Acts were enacted, leaving her vulnerable to the decisions of her uncle Mr. Fairlie, husband Sir Percival Glyde, his lawyer Mr. Merriman, and businessman Count Fosco. It is not just that the men in control of Laura's life are either foolish (such as her father), or manipulative (her fiancé), but that even kind men like Laura's lawyer Mr. Gilmore (who tries to protect her interests) seem oblivious to patriarchal inequality and are certainly unwilling to challenge it. Upon a meeting with Laura, Mr. Gilmore does not understand the source of her grief, seeing no issue with the arranged marriage. The issue at stake is systemic one, ultimately leading to Laura's destitution and prolonged unhappiness. Mr. Gilmore does see the potential financial disadvantages of the marriage.

Sir Percival's intentions of taking control of Laura's inheritance are revealed during the drawing up of their marriage contract. The correspondence between his lawyer Mr. Merriman, and Mr. Gilmore, sheds light on the relative powerlessness Mr. Gilmore has in handling Laura's affairs. Mr. Gilmore writes,

> [Mr. Merriman's] objections, in general proved to be the most trifling and technical kind, until he came to the clause relating to the twenty thousand pounds. Against this there were double lines drawn in red ink, and the following note was appended to them: "Not admissible. The principle to go to Sir Percival Glyde. In the event of his surviving Lady Glyde, and there being no issue." That is to say, not one farthing of the twenty thousand pounds was to go to Miss Halcombe, or to any other relative or friend of Lady Glyde's. The whole sum, if she left no children, was to slip into the pockets of her husband (Collins 158).

Mr. Merriman sees it appropriate to joke about dealing away Laura's inheritance when he visits Mr. Gilmore and says "'the least we will take is nineteen thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine pounds and nineteen shillings, and eleven-pence three farthings. Ha! Ha! Ha! Excuse me, Mr. Gilmore, I must have my little joke'" (Collins 161). This scene also reveals the forceful nature in which Sir Percival's lawyer was acting on his behalf, and how clear his instructions were to create a contract in which Laura is left with no control over her fortune after her death.

Laura is not only victim to the legal system, but also the poor decisions of her legal guardian Mr. Fairlie, the only person that would have been able to help Laura during the drawing of the marriage contract. A frivolous, weak-minded and selfish man, he either does not care that Sir Percival was abrogating any remnant of Laura's legal and financial independence or sees it as socially appropriate. When pleaded to for help by Mr. Gilmore, Mr. Fairlie excuses himself from the matter by accusing Mr. Gilmore of being a radical and hating Sir Percival because Sir Percival is of "rank and family", or a baronet (Collins 167).

Although her lawyer Mr. Gilmore advocates on Laura's behalf, the loss of Laura's fortune was unavoidable at the hands of the controlling men in her life. Mr. Gilmore writes

remorsefully, "On the Tuesday I sent in the altered settlement, which practically disinherited the very persons whom Miss Fairlie's own lips had informed me she was most anxious to benefit. I had no choice. Another lawyer would have drawn up the deed if I had refused to undertake it" (Collins 169). Later, Mr. Gilmore admits, "seriously and sorrowfully, I repeat the parting words I spoke at Limmeridge House: - No daughter of mine should have been married to any man alive under such a settlement as I was compelled to make for Laura Fairlie" (Collins 170).

Of Mr. Merriman, Mr. Fairlie, and Sir Percival, the man perhaps most responsible for taking away Laura's rights is Count Fosco. The Count is interested in Laura's money because his wife, Laura's aunt, will inherit 10,000 of the 30,000 pounds Laura leaves after her death, money she believes should have been left to her directly from Laura's father. (Laura's father left a will that assigns her money in a way that bypassed Countess Fosco, but also left her as a possible inheritor.) Consequently, Count Fosco aims to gain the money back for his both his sake and his wife's sake. The fact that Count Fosco can even deal with his wife's affairs is due to constricting marriage laws that leave the Countess's finances in Count Fosco's control.

However, Count Fosco is not just an accomplice to Sir Percival and his schemes, but orchestrates them by controlling Sir Percival and his actions, all while putting on a good-hearted, jovial façade to lull Laura and her sister Marian into a false sense of security. Marian at first convinces herself that Count Fosco is a man to be admired, and acknowledges the fact that if she were his wife, she would do his bidding with no protest, as his own wife the Countess Fosco does, because of the strange power he commands over others. The case of Count Fosco's wife is perhaps one of the biggest indicators of Count Fosco's manipulative power over almost every person he encounters. His wife seems to be suffering from a case of Stockholm Syndrome under

the Count's endless psychological abuse. Marian sums up the Countess's odd transformation since getting married:

> Clad in quiet black or gray gowns, made high round the throat—dresses that she would have laughed at, or screamed at, as the whim of the moment inclined her, in her maiden days—she sits speechless in corners; her dry white hands […] incessantly engaged, either in monotonous embroidery work, or in rolling up endless little cigarettes for the count's own particular smoking (Collins 229).

Through every moment in the novel, the Countess wordlessly does the Count bidding, viciously defending him and obeying his every whim, including ceaselessly rolling his cigarettes. Although the reader could feel particularly sympathetic to Countess Fosco, Collins suggests that her relationship with her husband is far from an anomaly. In a letter toward the end of the novel, Count Fosco writes that although he controls his wife, that his relationship with her is no different than the typical English marriage. He writes, "I ask if a woman's marriage obligations in [England] provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly to love, honour, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done. I stand here on a supreme moral elevation, and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties" (Collins). He makes his abusive marriage an emblem of typical English marriage. Here, Collins could be forcing the reader to recognize that Count Fosco and his wife's relationship is perhaps just a representation of the typical English marriage. Madame Fosco, unequal to the power of her husband, and Laura, unequal to the power of her uncle, her fiancé, his lawyer, and the Count, are doomed.

Anne Catherick as the Spectral Woman

Laura Fairlie's inheritance and marriage rights are subject to the controlling men in her life, but Anne Catherick, destitute, without family and with little-to-no resources, is fated to exist in the background as an unmarried woman of a lower class. Living on the fringes of society, she is repressed into obscurity, becoming ghost-like in appearance and behavior. Anne's first appearance in the novel occurs in the first chapter, within the first few pages, indicating the importance of her presence in the story to come. The novel's hero (as well as its first and its last narrator) Walter Hartright describes his encounter with her on the road to London:

> In one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me. There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road — there, as if it had that moment suddenly sprung out of earth or dropped from the heaven — stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments; her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her (Collins 17).

Anne's unnerving figure appears in the middle of the road as if out of nowhere, a lone figure dressed in a white outfit, raising her hand and pointing toward the city ahead, almost as if issuing a warning for troubles ahead. Her first appearance, as an escaped asylum patient, physically interrupting Walter's path as he walks down a road, is perhaps a metaphor for Anne's role in the novel, reappearing in the paths of the character's lives, to issue warnings of potential danger.

The course of Anne's life is determined by a man's desire to protect his financial and legal status. Anne's mother initially accepts gifts from Sir Percival as flattery, and then eventually helps him forge his birth records, a crime she did not realize could be punishable by death. The gifts she continues to receive after the deed are a bribe to keep the Sir Percival's secret. As a child, Anne overhears her mother call Sir Percival a "low imposter whom I could

ruin for life" (Collins 582). Upon provocation and without understanding the impact of her words, Anne repeats her mother's threat, saying to Sir Percival, "I'll let out your secret. I can ruin you for life, if I choose to open my lips" (Collins 583). Shaken to the core, Sir Percival is fearful that his secret will be revealed. If his forgery of high-class birth were discovered, then he would not only lose his social position and property, but he could be sentenced to death. Sir Percival immediately decides to place Anne in an insane asylum. The traumatic decision is supported by Anne's mother, a non-maternal figure.

For the rest of Anne's life, the mention of Sir Percival's name has a profound impact on her. She expresses fear and hatred for the man who ruined her life to protect his. Walter remarks her extreme reaction to any mention of him:

> Her face, at all ordinary times so touching to look at, in its nervous sensitiveness, weakness and uncertainty, became suddenly darkened by an expression of maniacally intense hatred and fear, which communicated a wild, unnatural force to every feature. Her eyes dilated in the evening light like the eyes of a wild animal. She caught up the cloth that had fallen at her side, as if it had been a living creature she could kill, and crushed it in both her hands with such convulsive strength that the few drops of moisture left in it trickled down on the stone beneath her (Collins 107).

After spending years in an asylum, Anne is a deeply broken and nervous woman. The stress, fear, and paranoia that she experiences living in hiding after escaping holds her back from interacting with other people and reintegrating herself as a member of society.

Ethical Implications of the Spectral Woman

A ghost or ghost-like figure within a novel can imply a certain "answerability" that is, an obligation of those being haunted to answer for a past misdeed. Thus, the ghost draws attention

to a lack of ethical behavior on the part of the haunted (Derrida 33). French philosophical theorist Jacques Derrida wrote extensively on the subject of ghosts and specters. According to Colin Davis, "Derrida wants…to encounter what is strange, unheard, other, about the ghost. For Derrida the secret is…the structural openness of address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future" (Davis 373-379). In other words, Derrida does not see a ghost figure as something to fear, repress, or to destroy. Davis goes on to elaborate; "Derrida calls on us to endeavor to speak and listen to the spectre, despite the reluctance inherited from our intellectual traditions…it may open us up to the experience of secrecy as such: an essential unknowing which underlies and may undermine what we think we know." A ghost with a secret may thus be a doorway to understanding voices of the past or possibilities of the future. For Laura and her sister Marian, Anne Catherick—though not a literal ghost—is just that – a spectre that holds a secret that will unlock the insidious plot being formed around them by Sir Percival and Count Fosco. For Derrida the issue is not a particular secret or a particular misdeed in quite the way it is for Collins; his concerns are with a more pervasive structure of haunting. But his way of writing about the spectre suggests why Collins's mystery has a larger resonance for thinking about responsibility in the Victorian novel.

In a dialogue with philosopher Bernard Stiegler, Derrida says, "[t]o be haunted by a ghost is to remember what one has never lived in the present, to remember what, in essence, has never had the form of presence" (Derrida 38). Anne is a woman who has never had a presence in others' houses, families, or lives; nor was her voice heard. She never had the opportunity to express her thoughts, feelings, or opinions due to her repression by Sir Percival. Although Anne is silent, her spectral presence is a constant reminder of the misdeeds he committed years ago and his marriage to Laura is plagued by Anne's constant attempt to warn of his deceitful

character. Derrida forces us to question whether anyone achieves a full and present identity, and therefore whether Anne Catherick's vagrant condition and Percival's forged baronetcy does not speak to the instability and fictiveness of even the most authoritative Victorian norms including the ideal male protector represented by Walter Hartright. But for Collins, as indicated already, the focus is on the peculiar vulnerability and fragility of women—though one might wonder if there is no room in the novel to ask why and how Percival's illegitimacy should disinherit him any more than Anne should be banished to the realm of the insane asylum.

Anne Catherick's first attempt to warn Laura Fairlie about Sir Percival comes through an ominous letter addressed to Laura about a dream she had about Laura's impending wedding to Sir Percival: "I saw down into [Sir Percival's] inmost heart. It was black as night; and on it were written, in the red flaming letters which are the handwriting of the fallen angel; 'Without pity and with remorse. He has strewn with misery the paths of others, and he will live to strew with misery the path of this woman by his side' …believe too, Miss Fairlie, — I beg of you, for your own sake, believe as I do" (Collins 80). Laura and Marian are alarmed by the letter, but ultimately push it aside as a false warning written by a mentally unstable woman. Anne's frightened and paranoid behavior causes those around her to consider that she might belong in the asylum from which she escaped. Anne is unable to be physically present, out of fear of capture and is further unable to make her voice heard.

After Laura and Sir Percival marry and move to his estate, Anne realizes she must try to make contact with Laura, although in each of her appearances, she never quite manages to reveal Sir Percival's secret. Her appearances are like more like those of someone from another realm, never fully appearing to those who wait for it:

> A living figure was moving over the waste of heath in the distance. It crossed our range or view from the boat house, and passed darkly along the outer edge of the mist. It stopped far off, in front of us — waited — and passed on; moving slowly, with the white cloud mist behind it and above it — slowly, slowly, till it glided by the edge of the boat house, and we saw it no more (Collins 280).

Anne, ghost-like, continuously attempts to make contact with others yet never quite manages to do so.[12] While Anne struggles to make contact with others, she also struggles to have clarity of her own. After all, she does not actually know Sir Percival's secret and she does not know she is Laura's sister and that they share a father — she only knows she must warn Laura of some unknown evil on Sir Percival's part.

Although the novel downplays the transgressions of Laura and Anne's father, Anne is also a reminder of his misdeeds. He left Anne's mother, Jane Catherick, without care that she might be pregnant and that Anne might exist. Laura's mother is the only person to show Anne kindness in her childhood, and the one Anne remembers with love. His friendship with Sir Percival and willingness to arrange Laura's marriage to a man so much older than she also at least raises questions about his judgment as the novel later indicates that Percival has no friends among his neighbors. His behavior suggests that he is a less obvious villain, and reveals that his marriage and Limmeridge House were not as idyllic as it might seem. In other words, the world the novel celebrates as the ideal and the world of Sir Percival and Fosco are less clearly opposed than may first appear to be the case. The ghost of Anne Catherick haunts more than the Baronet.

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[12] One may feel that Sir Percival also suffers throughout the novel by what Derrida calls the visor effect, or the sensation of being observed. According to Derrida, "[t]he ghost looks at or watches us, the ghost concerns us. The specter is not simply someone we see coming back, it is someone by whom we feel ourselves watched, observed, surveyed as if by the law…" (Derrida 40). Sir Percival knows he has broken the law by forging his birth records, fearing that Anne's eye is always silently upon him, judging him for his crimes when the actual law does not.

Without a real presence or voice and, as Walter eventually learns, without real knowledge of what Percival has done, Anne is never able to explicitly reveal Sir Percival's secret. However, her warnings cause deep unease and suspicion, prompting research by a man with more resources. Upon discovering the forgery of Percival's birth records, Walter exclaims:

> The idea that he was not Sir Percival Glyde at all, that he had no more claim to the baronetcy and to Blackwater Park than the poorest laborer who worked on the estate, had never once crossed my mind. The paltry means by which the fraud had been effected, the magnitude and daring of the crime that it represented, the horror of the consequences involved in its discovery, overwhelmed me. Who could wonder now at the brute-restlessness of the wretch's life; at his desperate alternations between abject duplicity and reckless violence; at the madness of guilty distrust which had made him imprison Anne Catherick in the asylum, and had given him over to the vile conspiracy against his wife… (Collins 552).

In poetic justice, Sir Percival dies in a fire when he tries to burn the records.

Count Fosco's transgressions are also revealed and punished in a similarly moral fashion. Walter describes his confrontation with Count Fosco:

> His face still betrayed plain traces of shock that had overwhelmed him at the Opera. His fat cheeks hung loose; his cold gray eyes were furtively vigilant; his voice, look, and manner were all sharply suspiciously alike, as he advanced a step to meet me, and requested, with distant civility, that I would take a chair (Collins 636).

Even in the moment he is revealed to be guilty of abandonment and treachery, Count Fosco maintains a façade of composure, revealing his tremendous ability to conceal his emotions. Earlier in the novel, Laura correctly accuses him of being a "spy", meaning that he was spying

on her and Marian's behavior for Sir Percival. The Countess overhears Laura make this accusation to Marian, and thinks that Laura knows that the Count is truly a spy, and has betrayed the Italian secret society to which he once belonged. In another instance of poetic justice, he is forced to return to Italy by Walter and is eventually assassinated by the leftist revolutionaries for his betrayal.

Although the two evil-doers receive their just deserts, their punishment pales in comparison to the lifetime of trauma to which they subject Anne and even Laura. Anne and Laura do not get much restitution, but their story is memorialized in the diaries of the survivors. As Derrida writes, "we are striving to recall the victims, but this means also to call them back, not just for the sake of a present, but for an ongoing struggle, and thus for a future" (Derrida 22-24). *The Woman in White* can be seen as a way to recall the women who were victimized in Victorian England and as part of the ongoing struggle for legal identity and independence.

Changing Identities

Identity is an important theme in Victorian novels (MacKeigan and Rohan, Kaston and Bernstein, Prodromou and Larocco), often explored in conjunction with gender. Ann Gaylin notes that *The Woman in White* reveals "sometimes contradictory attitudes toward the complex relations among gender, identity, and narrative agency" (330). A close reading of women's and men's identities in the novel shows that the three main women struggle to achieve a sense of identity as mature autonomous women, yet even the men's identities are based on fraudulent representations. That is, no "identity" in the novel is unhaunted by uncertainty and illegitimacy.

Of the women, Marian's masculine behavior and appearance suggest autonomy and she protects her more fragile sister. Laura's childlike identity is defined by others; after being traumatized by her marriage to Sir Percival, she is coddled by Marian and Walter. Anne's

identity is fractured, as is reflected in her splintered personality. Forced to live on the fringes of society, she nearly becomes non-existent. The women's identities are characterized in terms of masculinity, childishness, and ephemerality. In sum, "[t]hose individuals who threaten and transgress conventional boundaries of law, narrative, and gender are punished" (Gaylin 303).

Marian expresses shrewdness, perception, and boldness; therefore she is perceived as a masculine character both in her physical appearance as well as mental and emotional capabilities. Marian has traits that the novel's hero and main narrator Walter Hartright characterizes repeatedly as masculine as indeed she sometimes characterizes herself. He portrays her character as strong-willed, bold, decisive, and clear-headed compared to Laura's more conventionally feminine portrayal — emotional, naïve, and easily persuaded. Walter describes his first impressions of Marian's appearance:

> Never was the old conventional maxim, that Nature cannot err, more flatly contradicted - never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the head and face that crowned it. The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a mustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal black hair, growing unusually low on her forehead (Collins 30).

In her masculinity, Marian is considered ugly, with dark and prominent facial features. Collins makes it obvious that Marian does not comply with the era's ideal of beauty, compared to her sister Laura's blonde curls, blue eyes, and delicate features that instantly attract Walter.

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), feminist theorist Judith Butler argues that gender is a type of performance, something that does rather than is, and that bodies and gender are two separate things. Divorcing discourse and social norms from biology, Butler deconstructs the thought that

gender is something one is born with rather than acquired. She argues that performativity is "culturally-scripted character of identity, which is generated by power through repeated citations of norms and their transgression" (Boucher 113). In the text, Marian does not define her behavior as a "subversive tactic," but arguably she exemplifies such subversion. She steals out of her room to crawl over a roof to listen to Count Fosco and Sir Percival's plots, and remains there even when cold rain begins to pour. Walter relies on Marian's strength to protect Laura and take care of her in his absence, which she does in every instance when Laura might need comfort or reassurance. Count Fosco is oddly infatuated with Marian, perhaps because he regards her as one of his equals in her intelligent and resilient nature. He does not regard Marian as he regards his wife, for example, a weaker being that he can mold to obey his whims.

However, as strong willed as Marian is, she writes to Laura, "Who else is left to you? No father, no brother-no living creature but the helpless, useless woman who writes these sad lines, and watched by you for the morning in sorrow that she cannot compose, in doubt that she cannot conquer" (Collins 206). Marian laments that no matter how resilient or protective she is, she will never be able to provide the aid of a man. The novel re-feminizes Marian, perhaps to show that women can never truly act outside the constrictions of their gender. After her spying episode on the roof, she contracts typhus and is extremely ill and weak, giving Count Fosco the opportunity to read all of her diary entries and discover that she was slowly piecing together his plot. Marian is violated when Count Fosco reads her words, and even writes in her diary his own entry, commending Marian for her effort in protecting Laura, but pointing out there was no way she would succeed, especially in her illness. Another one of the ways the novel contains Marian's subversiveness is that she does the housework while in hiding (while Walter goes off to avenge Laura), and in the end, settles for being a maiden aunt.

Blurring and yet restoring the lines of gender identity is one facet of the question of identity in *The Woman in White*; the novel also deals with lost identity. Laura's identity is so reduced as to render her childlike and passive. At the end of the novel, when she lives with Walter and Marian, they treat her extremely delicately, as Marian describes, "We helped her mind slowly by this simple means; we took her out between us to walk, on fine days, in a quiet old City square, near at hand, where nothing could confuse or alarm her …we amused her in the evenings with children's games at cards" (Collins 470). Later Marian placates her sister who wants to contribute to the household, saying, "I raised her head, and smoothed away the tangled hair that fell over her face, and kissed her—my poor, faded flower! my lost, afflicted sister!" (Collins 518). Laura has become a child, cared for, amused, and lacking an occupation. Laura's infantile existence is further emphasized as she is one of the few characters who never writes a section in the story - the reader never hears the story in her own words. Although some theorists argue that "female characters in Victorian fictions substantiate their sense of self through apparent tactics of submission and sacrifice," Laura seeks to become productive and earn an income, begging Marian and Walter not treat her like a child (Prodromou and Larocco). Yet her desire for productivity is indulged by Marian and Walter in the same overprotective fashion as her other needs, reducing her to the status of a child. They pretend to sell her amateurish drawings rather than finding work that she is qualified to do or confronting her with the reality of her limitations.

Anne Catherick has a fractured identity from her childhood and the asylum, and exhibits sharp changes in behavior, from being fearful and paranoid to angry and vengeful in a moment. She "represents mental disorder" as "*The Woman in White* simultaneously presents and criticizes the Victorian system of benevolent, paternal 'moral management' to care for her mental and

physical illness" (Gaylin 303). Anne's ephemeral appearance suggests that she disappear at any moment, scared off or incited to madness by the mention of Sir Percival's name.

However, the men, Count Fosco and Sir Percival, have the freedom and power to create and even fabricate identities out of whole cloth, deluding others and even themselves. Count Fosco's character creates an entire false identity; he appears to be a jovial businessman, constantly in good spirits, when in truth he is on the run from an Italian spy organization for betraying their cause. He enjoys attempting to pull off grand plots to confuse and manipulate others, even revels in it, a master manipulator, writing, "I carried with me all the clothes Anne Catherick had worn on coming into my house—they were destined to assist the resurrection of the woman who was dead in the person of the woman who was living. What a situation! I suggest it to the rising romance writers of England" (Collins 663). Ironically, Count Fosco's enormous ego leads him to believe that he is a rare type of person who shows his true character, when he spends most of the novel trying to trick Marian and Laura. He is delusional about his own accomplishments and behavior, exclaiming, "I say what other people only think; and when all the rest of the world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for the true face, mine is the rash hand that tears off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath" (Collins 251).

As for Sir Percival, he begins with an attempt to act like a loving, caring husband, but soon fades into the bad-tempered, impatient, greedy man he truly is after he marries Laura and is impatient to locate Anne and inherit Laura's fortune. Even dogs recognize his evil nature – "The little beast, cowardly and cross-grained as pet-dogs usually are, looked up at him sharply, shrank away from his outstretched hand, whined, shivered, and hid itself under a sofa" (Collins 139). In a novel full of lost, shifting, and uncovered identities, it is only the men who have any freedom to choose how they want their identity to be constructed, yet even their freedom is limited. In the

world of primogeniture, Percival's illegitimacy (not unlike Anne's hidden illegitimacy) haunts his existence in the person of Anne Catherick.

Conclusion

In *The Woman in White*, Anne Catherick serves as both a reminder to Sir Percival of his immoral past and a warning to Laura of what lays ahead in her life with him. Collins uses her character to bring up forgotten events that may have otherwise gone undiscovered, sacrificing herself in the process.

Butler's gender performativity theories show that those who subvert traditional gender performances free themselves from the constraint of traditional gender discourse. Marian Halcombe, strong and resilient, bold and logical, with dark and masculine facial features is not perceived as womanly or feminine by those around her, and plays protector to her weaker, more emotional sister Laura — at least until the novel allows Walter Hartright to take over that position. Marian's portrayal suggests that masculine women, able to act and speak more freely than typically feminine women like Laura, free themselves from classic gender discourse by freeing her body and behavior from her sex. In the novel, she does not marry and shows no interest in living a domestic life as a wife.

Lastly, women in the Victorian Era do not have a mature identity due to patriarchal institutions such as marriage. In this novel, Anne could be considered a paler version of Laura, indicative of how Laura's life might have been had she fewer resources, and representative of the lives of other women with less money and no family. They look strikingly similar, and when Laura's health starts to fail, she becomes more and more like Anne in appearance, with pale skin, sunken eyes, and frail stature. That is, Laura becomes ghostly, as if she were indeed ceasing to exist. Collins suggests the women in the novel are ultimately ghosts of their true selves.

Laura, fortunately, is saved by Marian and Walter, who protect her, reassure her, and provide her an income. In the end, Laura, Marian, and Walter triumph, returning to Limmeridge House, the beautiful house of the sisters' happy childhood, because Laura gives birth to a son who is the sole inheritor of the estate after her father Mr. Fairlie dies, ensuring the patriarchal system of inheritance. Although Marian continuously supports Laura throughout her marriage to Sir Percival, provides moral and financial support after their separation and rescues Laura from the asylum, it is ultimately through Walter and their son Walter Jr. that they are able to fully reclaim their old lives through inheriting the Limmeridge House. Anne Catherick's fate, however, is to die as a young woman from heart disease, alone and among those who wish her ill. She lived most of her life as a ghost, unseen and disbelieved and is the only non-villainous character to die in the novel, with a death suited for someone that was almost already dead. In Wilkie Collin's *The Woman in White*, erasure of women is visible through the ghost-like figure.

Wilkie Collins calls attention to married, unmarried, middle and lower class women's issues and concerns during the mid-19th century with *The Woman in White*. Ironically, he gives voice to women's subjugation by partly stifling their voices. Laura's narrative voice never appears in the novel, and portrayed as weak and emotional, she is only described through other characters' accounts. Her lack of presence in the novel suggests that she exists only through other people, and that her being consists of others' thoughts and opinions of her. Even maids and smaller characters have their entries in the diary, and Laura's absence from these emphasizes how ghostly her existence is. Marian's writing, that narrates most of the novel, is first interjected by Count Fosco's narrative while she lays ill, in a violation of her story and her identity. Later, her story is overtaken by Walter Hartright (the only narrative voice in the last pages) describing how Marian performs the housework while he investigates Sir Percival. Walter's telling of the

resolution and their triumph is telling of the way men dominate the story and are portrayed as the heroes because they are the ones who control the story. This erasure and the creation of ghostly identities is perhaps Collins' indication of the way that women's voices are ultimately expunged.

The Spectral Woman and the Uncanny in Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*

Introduction

Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* (1861) is a gothic bildungsroman that balances humor and tragedy, a "grotesque tragi-comic conception" (Dickens in a letter to John Forster, 1860) following the life of the protagonist Pip (Williams 2). It was first published as a serial in Dickens's weekly periodical *All the Year Round* from 1860 to 1861. Set in Kent and London in the early to mid-19th century, *Great Expectations* addresses issues of wealth and poverty, love and rejection, and guilt and innocence. Central to the novel are its gothic elements, characterized by moments of fear, gloom, horror, and death.[13] In the novel, wealthy spinster Miss Havisham is representative of the gothic because she personifies death and decay, inspiring horror in Pip, as he describes her eerie appearance repeatedly using the words waxwork and skeleton. The supernatural and the seemingly supernatural are also defining elements of Gothic literature, exemplified by Miss Havisham, who resembles and behaves like a ghost, with white hair, wearing a faded white wedding dress and veil, and creating an image that haunts the other characters.[14] But she is no literal ghost. The nature of her spectrality, the way she haunts, is psychological more than physical, as she repeatedly appears in the minds and imagination of Pip and her half-brother Arthur. Miss Havisham's gothic qualities are part of the uncanny in the novel, or all that arouses "dread and creeping horror" (Freud 1). She embodies uncanny characteristics including uncertain identity, obsessive repetition, and fascination with death and decay.

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[13] "The Gothic, a literary movement that focused on ruin, decay, death, terror, and chaos, and privileged irrationality and passion over rationality and reason, grew in response to the historical, sociological, psychological, and political contexts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries", from *encyclopedia.com*.

[14] In the late 18th century, writer Ann Radcliffe's novels popularized a strain of the gothic in which supernatural elements turn out to be natural and subject to rational explanation.

The gothic also evokes the monstrous, expressed by Miss Havisham as she takes on the role of the denatured mother, or a mother without natural qualities of love, protectiveness, and encouragement of growth. She raises her adoptive daughter Estella without the ability to love, so that she might cause a man the pain that Miss Havisham was a victim to herself. However, once Miss Havisham discovers that Estella withholds love not only from men but also from herself, she becomes fearful of her and ultimately remorseful for raising her as a means for revenge against the man who rejected her.[15]

However, Miss Havisham, while she possesses immoral qualities, is not entirely the monster she may appear. As an upper-class, respected woman, she cannot travel where she pleases without a husband, and is expected to remain unemployed. As will be discussed later, her position as an unmarried older woman from a wealthy family limits her options and creates a more sympathetic or complex perspective on her situation. In this context, her gothic, monstrous qualities suggest a return of the suppressed energies that her social position does not permit her to express and that instead take the form of psychic disturbance and range.

Miss Havisham as the Spectral Woman

Haunting is a motif that repeatedly appears in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and wealthy spinster Miss Havisham is perhaps the clearest embodiment of a ghost-like figure in the novel. Left at the altar on her wedding day by a con man named Compeyson, Miss Havisham is impaired by the trauma of this abandonment. Compeyson had a great ability to charm and

[15] Miss Havisham grew up in a wealthy family, her father a successful brewer. After her mother died shortly after her birth, her father remarried a cook who gave birth to Miss Havisham's half-brother Arthur. Miss Havisham did not have a good relationship with her brother, so when she inherited most of her father's fortune, Arthur became jealous and plotted with con man Compeyson to rob her. She was warned by her cousin Matthew Pocket to watch out for Compeyson, but Miss Havisham was in love with him and could not see the danger. On the morning her marriage was to take place, Miss Havisham received a letter from Compeyson and realized he had defrauded and abandoned her.

deceive, and led Miss Havisham to believe that he was in love with her, but he was actually in league with Miss Havisham's disinherited younger half-brother Arthur, to defraud her of part of her fortune. Compeyson left her the morning of the day they were to be married, after preying on her for her wealth and escaping at the last moment. The deep pain that Miss Havisham experienced caused her to commit this betrayal to memory and preserve its imprint. She remains fixed in the moment of her wedding trauma, and lets her appearance and her estate rot in decay. Pip describes his first impressions of her striking appearance:

> She was dressed in rich materials – satins, and lace, and silks – all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had bridal flowers in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels lay sparkling on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table… I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and the like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone…waxwork and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me (Dickens 57, 58).

Thirty years after she was betrayed, Miss Havisham still wears her wedding dress and keeps the same items lying around her that were present when she was dressing to be married. The incongruities of wealth and youth contrasted with decay horrify Pip — the wedding dress, the dress a young woman would wear, now hangs on an aged body, the richness of the silk and lace material contrasting with the decaying figure within; the once-blooming flowers now withered; the sparkling jewels strewn about haphazardly — all are images indicating the rot that has taken over Miss Havisham and her surroundings. Pip says that Miss Havisham is like a wax figure and

a skeleton, two images that he remembers seeing from childhood at a fair and graveyard, respectively. In the metaphor, the uncanny, or something familiar and yet unfamiliar, takes hold of Pip as he recognizes these familiar figures in an unfamiliar setting, one of a bride in her bridal chamber. Pip repeats the simple words hair, dress, bride, white, brightness as if cannot let go of what he sees, foreshadowing that he is destined to return over again to the house and to the room (Bowen 1). This "strange incantation," ending with the exclamation "I should have cried out, if I could" — portraying Pip's fear — is another instance of Miss Havisham's uncanniness, as Pip does keep returning to the Satis House, seeing Miss Havisham decomposing further each time (Bowen 1, Dickens 58).[16] After a later visit to Miss Havisham as a young man, Pip has a vision of her — the yellowing rich silk, satin, and lace of her dress have become more dead, and he likens the material to "earthly paper", signifying how much closer to the earth, dirt, and death Miss Havisham has become in his mind (Dickens 64).

In addition to her ghostly, skeletal, half-dead image, her posture and voice are those of someone already living a premature death:

> Her chest dropped, so that she stooped; and her voice had dropped, so that she spoke low, and with a dead lull upon her; altogether she had the appearance of being dropped, body and soul, within and without, under the weight of a crushing blow (Dickens 61).

Never recovering from her betrothed's treacherous blow, Miss Havisham's broken heart has caused the rest of her body and mind to disintegrate as well. Throughout the novel she is repeatedly likened to a spectre by Pip, because of her pale skin, untouched by sunlight for years, and the mass of her yellowish-white discolored wedding dress, veil, and shoes. Miss Havisham's faded white appearance, combined with the air of perpetual decay create a spectral image that

[16] Satis house is Miss Havisham's mansion.

haunts Pip's memory to adulthood — a lady who is dead, yet not dead, balancing between life and death.

When Miss Havisham is introduced, she strikes fear into Pip's heart because her image is ghastly and grotesque, an indication of the sickness of her mind and mental state. However, despite her frightening countenance, she is also the physical manifestation of tragedy and sorrow. She has stopped all the clocks in her house at 9:20 a.m., the minute of her abandonment, freezing time, so she is always reliving the trauma of Compeyson's betrayal. Perhaps Miss Havisham has not stopped the clocks just to relive the day, but because in some sense she has not absorbed it. On some level, she is still waiting for her groom.

The Nature of Spectrality and the Uncanny in *Great Expectations*

Miss Havisham's haunting behavior is different from that of Anne Catherick in *The Woman in White* because it is not through physical appearance and disappearance that Miss Havisham haunts people. Instead, she infiltrates others' thoughts. For example, Pip is so struck by her sunken image that after their first encounter he imagines her hanging from a wooden beam in the yard of her estate, the Satis House:

> I turned my eyes – a little dimmed by looking up at the frosty light – towards a great wooden beam in a low nook of the building near me on my right hand, and I saw a figure hanging there by the neck. A figure in all yellow white, with but one shoe on the feet; and it hung so, that I could see that the face was Miss Havisham's with a movement going over the countenance as if she were trying call to me (Dickens 64).

This occurrence happens twice, as Pip later again imagines her figure hanging from a building. Some critics suggest that Pip's vision is actually a fantasy, as Miss Havisham mentally haunts him, his mind conjures up a way to punish her as he would never be able to actually harm her. In

Julian Moynahan's essay *The Hero's Guilt: The Case of Great Expectations*, he explains that "[t]he fantasy returns only when [Pip]'s eyes have been opened to the fact that nothing has come to him from Miss Havisham except unhappiness" (Moynahan 75). Despite her otherworldly appearance, it is not supernatural but rather psychological haunting Miss Havisham inspires. It is also later revealed that her half-brother Arthur dreams that Miss Havisham is looming over him. And he begs Comeyson's wife, Sally to believe him:

> Sally, she really is up-stairs alonger, me, now, and I can't get rid of her. She's in all white…wi' white flowers in her hair, and she's awful mad and she's got a shroud hanging over her arm, and she says she put it on me at five in the morning…and over where her heart's broke – *you* broke it! – there's drops of blood (Dickens 349).

Seemingly overridden with guilt and horror, he dies after he imagines her in his bedroom

Her presence can be described as pervasive and insidious, appearing unwanted in the minds of others. In both Pip and Arthur's cases, their feelings — whether conscious or unconscious — incorporate culpability and regret. Miss Havisham is a focal point for their guilt and their "expectations." Pip's first memory is of being in a graveyard looking at his parent's tombstone, and Miss Havisham reminds him of a skeleton. Perhaps she reminds him of his missing parents and the life he could have had with them instead of his abusive sister and her husband. She is also the first rich person Pip is exposed to, and he spends his youth thinking of Miss Havisham and Estella as the epitome of wealth and class. Miss Havisham spurs Pip's dream to become an educated gentleman, and when he does live up to these expectations, he still finds himself unworthy in her eyes. In this way, Miss Havisham haunts Pip, reminding that he will never quite reach his goal of becoming sophisticated enough to marry Estella. In her view, he remains the rough, uneducated, lower-class boy called to entertain Estella. As for Arthur, his

guilt for plotting with Compeyson and traumatizing his sister is strong enough to kill him, as he dies in shock at the vision of his sister in her wedding dress with blood dripping from her heart. Although his expectation of stealing Miss Havisham's fortune is met, he is overcome with a crippling sense of blame that he cannot extirpate, as is evident in the line, "I can't get rid of her" (Dicken 349).

Ironically, Miss Havisham has a strong "voice" (in contrast to the voiceless women of *The Woman in White*) even though she is not physically present in the lives of anyone apart from Pip and Estella, and never leaves her home. Disempowered in life, she gains power indirectly through the way her image haunts others. Her half-brother, Compeyson's associate, experiences the sight of Miss Havisham, an unfamiliar figure, in his bedroom, a familiar place. The feeling of the unfamiliar in a familiar place or memory is part of a phenomenon often discussed in psychoanalysis as *the uncanny* and that is characteristic of the gothic as a literary genre. As Julian Wolfreys writes, the gothic is "one name for acts of spectral troping which we otherwise name the ghostly, the uncanny, the phantom" (Wolfreys 14). The uncanny is important to *Great Expectations* because it deals with the questions of disturbed identity (a central theme in the novel as will be discussed later) and is the "mark of the return of the repressed" (Freud 217). Although the "repressed" can mean repressed memories or experiences, in a more literal sense, Miss Havisham has herself been repressed by the social forces shown at work in the novel. In turn, she becomes a figure who embodies the repressed fears of Pip and Arthur—not just guilt, but in Pip's case at least, his earliest memories of loss and death. Sigmund Freud's essay *The Uncanny* (1919) breaks down the term's origination and meaning, detailing the qualities of uncanny fiction. The word uncanny originates from the opposition of the German words *heimlich* (known, familiar) and *unheimlich* (unknown, unfamiliar). Freud's thesis lays out

that the *unheimlich*, the uncanny, is a revelation of what is private and concealed, of what is hidden, not only from others, but also from the self (Freud 217). Discussed in detail later, Miss Havisham reveals what Pip hides from himself, feelings of anger and his sense of abandonment as an orphan.

Julian Wolfreys also connects haunting and the uncanny to questions of identity, writing that "haunting remains…a powerful force of displacement, as that disfiguring of the present, as the trace of non-identity within identity . . . through the signs of alterity, otherness, abjection or revenance" (Wolfreys 1). Here, Wolfreys explains how haunting causes a sense of dislocation—a sense that identity is not what it seems. In *Great Expectations* it is Miss Havisham who reminds us (and the other characters, too, perhaps) that identity itself is haunted, spectral; that it is never entirely stable. Additionally, her identity and the way she seems to embody Wolfreys "trace of non-identity within identity" is linked to experiences that are gendered. For example, Miss Havisham's obsessive reliving of her trauma is an almost parodic embodiment of the way her identity has become entwined with Compeyson's. Miss Havisham's entire purpose is to seek revenge on Compeyson, and her identity is completely consumed by that of the heart-broken (now vengeful) bride. She is, so to speak, as wedded to her revenge on the man who abandoned her as she once hoped to be wedded to *him*. Ironically, however, this obsessive binding to her past, seems to endow her with a power over the imaginations of others in the novel. The past that takes hold of Miss Havisham, in turn haunts Pip and Arthur. The woman comes back to haunt male identity (Arthur, Pip) and expose how they, too, are bound to the past and bound to others in ways they can never entirely control.

Key to the power of the uncanny is the way, that like Miss Havisham with her daily ritual of putting on her wedding dress, it repeats. In his book *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle, a

contemporary reader of Freud's work, gives a Derridean unpacking of Freud's essay. Royle describes the uncanny as "indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or 'coming back' — the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat" (Royle 2). Miss Havisham consistently appears in Pip's thoughts and overtakes his imagination, causing him to have vivid hallucinations of her hovering over him as he sleeps. In this sense, she represents the return of Pip's repressed feelings of his past — his sense of abandonment as an orphan, and the echo of Miss Havisham's abandonment of him, withholding the fortune he envisioned. His repressed — conscious or unconscious — desires to kill or harm her is brought forth in this vision because he would never act on them in reality. Miss Havisham's age also lends itself to the feeling that this recurrence is eternal, and that even after she physically dies, her haunting will continue. Even in life, Miss Havisham is like death, from the way she looks, to the way she behaves, to where she resides, where all things are dead and decaying around her.

Another facet of Royle's interpretation also applies to Miss Havisham: "at some level the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with…a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a desire (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive" (Royle 2). Miss Havisham fantasizes about her death, mentioning more than once her desire to be laid out on her bridal table to complete the curse on Compeyson: "'When the ruin is complete,' said she, with a ghastly look, and when they see me dead, in my bride's dress on the bride's table — which shall be done, and which will be the finished curse upon him — so much the better if it is done on this day!'" (89). Pip and Miss Havisham's family look on in horror, witnesses to the premature rehearsal of her death. Pip has some vague idea that she might get on the table and die at that very moment. Toward the end of the novel, Miss Havisham is badly wounded by catching fire from her fireplace. Pip rushes in to

help beat the flames from her old veil and dress that catch fire quickly. As she is laid upon the table she previously referred to, suffering from burns, she continuously repeats the same phrases over and over again (‘“What have I done”, “When she first came, I meant to save her from a misery like mine”, “Take a pencil and write under my name ‘I forgive her’”).

At the end of her life, Miss Havisham wishes for death not solely to solidify a curse upon Compeyson, but to end her suffering, realizing the extent of damage she has caused Pip and Estella. Ironically, in her delirium from the fire, Miss Havisham's repeated sentences are moments of sanity that take on the obsessive, uncanny quality of her earlier revenge fantasties. Bronfen elaborates; “Miss Havisham's displayed dying body, incessantly repeating these three sentences, is possibly one of the most ghastly images for the way the triadic desire — for death, for a lover and for self-representation — inscribes itself in the feminine body” (358). Miss Havisham's death drive, another aspect of her uncanniness, is a consistent desire in her character.

The Gender Problem

Pip and Miss Havisham's stories are similar in several ways; they both have expectations of what life should bring them in terms of love and wealth. Pip's expectations to become a wealthy man who marries Estella are destroyed — he falls into debt after too much spending and realizes he was never meant to marry Estella. Although his expectations are dashed, Pip becomes a better person because of it, working diligently with his friend Herbert in order to bring himself out of debt, and accepting that he will never marry Estella, without looking down upon Miss Havisham with hate or vengeance in mind for misleading him. Miss Havisham's expectations are also shattered; she expects to marry her love and live prosperously with him, but instead is jilted and her fortune stolen. Unlike Pip, she becomes consumed by her collapsed expectations and lives the rest of her life in decay, seeking revenge on the man that wronged her.

At first look, it appears that Pip is the better character, not allowing the obstacles in his life to override his success and contentment the way Miss Havisham does, nor does he ruin lives as she does parts of Pip and Estella's lives. However, the difference in these characters' trajectories may have less to do strength of character and more to do with gender. Miss Havisham is not just a spoiled woman who grew up in a wealthy family. When Pip starts to have financial troubles, he travels to Cairo and becomes a partner in Herbert's shipping firm, but as an upper-class woman, Miss Havisham's options are more limited — specifically to marriage. A respectable single woman would not be able to travel abroad alone, and because she is from an upper-class family, she cannot not find a job and go to work, like other female characters in the novel such as Pip's school teacher Biddy. Without her fortune, even Miss Havisham's chance at another marriage is seemingly lost and her choices limited. The novel thus invites us to consider how the impact of disappointed expectations plays itself out in gendered ways. At the same time, insofar as Miss Havisham haunts Pip's imagination, she seems to express an obsession with the past that he may also share in ways that are not fully acknowledged by his narrative.

The Denatured Mother: Ethical Implications of the Spectral Woman

Miss Havisham brings up her adopted daughter Estella to be heartless and cold, spurning the affection of any suitor, including Pip. In *Over Her Dead Body*, Elisabeth Bronfen writes that Miss Havisham "uses the lives of others to feed her desire for revenge on the man who misused her, by recreating her adoptive daughter into her artificial double who embodies what she lacks" (Bronfen 354). Estella, dressed in fine clothes and jewels, makes Pip feel ashamed that he is from a poor blacksmith's family. From the moment he meets Estella at Miss Havisham's house, he entertains dreams that he will become a gentleman and win over Estella's affections, just as Miss Havisham hopes. Pip, unknowingly, has been chosen as the "first victim to test the

effectiveness of the monster which Miss Havisham, not unlike Frankenstein, has molded in midst her mansion of decay" (Bronfen 354). Young and naïve, Pip falls for Estella, only finding her more desirable because she looks down upon him as her inferior. Miss Havisham takes joy in his affliction, madly whispering to him, "love her, love her!" on several occasions while Pip is in Estella's presence. She inspires or feeds Pip's imagination, "[l]ike Dracula, who transforms the women he bites into revenants, [Miss Havisham] gives Pip some of her spectral blood in the sense that she engenders in his mind other, potential images of the self" (Bronfen 354). Miss Havisham's treatment of Estella raises several ethical questions, and causes the seeming victim, Miss Havisham, to turn into a villain. Single-mindedly pursing her goal, Miss Havisham does not realize the extent of her damage to Estella, primarily seeing her as a tool to hurt men that might pursue her. As Estella grows into a young woman, Miss Havisham realizes that not only can Estella not love any man, she cannot love any person, including Miss Havisham herself. She is stunned at this realization, which takes place in a scene during which she laments that Estella is cold to her and does not love her. Estella responds;

> Mother by adoption, I have said that I owe everything to you. All I possess is freely yours, all that you have given me, is at your command to have again. Beyond that, I have nothing. And if you ask me to give you what you never gave me, my gratitude and duty cannot do impossibilities (Dickens 305).

It is only after this speech that Miss Havisham fully appreciates the emotional and psychological damage she has done to her and later remorsefully tells Pip "I stole her heart away and put ice in its place" (Dickens 399). She expresses regret, but only much later after Estella is married to a high born but brutish man named Bentley Drummle, whom Estella does not love and who is said to abuse her, making Miss Havisham's regret and possible repentance too late to matter to

Estella.[17] Miss Havisham sees her sorrow reflected in Estella and "it 'kills' her hysterical self-representation as a vindictive, spectral bride; puts an end to her wild resentment, to her wounded pride, to the fetishisation of her sorrow and her desire for vengeance" (Bronfen 356). The reality of Estella's deficiency forces Miss Havisham to give up dwelling on her own misery.

However, for most of the novel, Miss Havisham plays the role of a de-natured mother and twists her daughter into an unfeeling creature by depriving her of love and teaching her that it is her enemy. Although Miss Havisham is compared to a vampire ("the admission of the natural light of day would have struck her to dust"), ghost, skeleton, waxwork, and spectre, the role she plays as Estella's adoptive mother is the most troubling. Her attempt to reproduce the past in reverse takes her from victimized sister to monstrous mother. Miss Havisham is portrayed as immoral especially because she could have provided Estella with the love, support, and confidence that she did not have herself, but instead turns Estella into an instrument for the revenge that has taken over her mind and body. But she does not just allow her selfish intentions to take over; she obsessively pursues them. Her decay is transferred to Estella, leaving an irrevocable mark. Wolfreys observes that "[i]n the novels of Charles Dickens, youthful bodies frequently have projected onto and through them the apparitional traces of gothic and otherness" (Wolfreys 26). The night that Estella expresses her inability to love Miss Havisham, Pip asleep at the estate is haunted by the old woman; he hears her moving in at the foot of his bed and at the head, at the half-opened door of his dressing room, in the dressing room, in the room beneath, in the room overhead, everywhere.

[17] Drummle dies from an accident following the mistreatment of his horse.

Miss Havisham tries to recreate herself in Estella, again raising the issue of identity and its uncanny nature. She is again compared to a vampire, seeming to "keep her dying body alive by sucking the energy from [Estella]" and "invigorating herself at the thought that Estella will do to Pip and other men after him what was done to her" (Bronfen, 354). It seems that Miss Havisham's obsession with Estella's cruelty emphasizes or brings out her ghost-like and monstrous characteristics. As she hears a list of men courting Estella read aloud, she "dwelt upon this roll and with the intensity of a mind mortally hurt and diseased, she sat with her other hand on her crutch stick, and her chin on that, and wan bright eyes glaring at me, a very spectre" (302). This imagery is vivid and striking, conveying the intense concentration Miss Havisham has on revenge, and recalling Pip's earlier description of her as a dead figure with bright, moving eyes. Her eyes are the only sign that she is still alive, and that the inner workings of her brain are still intently focused on her mission. Otherwise, Miss Havisham might as well be a skeleton, or ghost of her once young and vivacious self. It seems that the only thing connecting her to the world and to life is the betrayal and hurt she will cause men that love Estella.

Estella compares light to love, two things she was deprived of in her childhood, to convey to Miss Havisham the impossibility of feeling:

> If you had taught her, from the dawn of intelligence, with your utmost energy and might, that there was such a thing as daylight, but that it was made to be her enemy and destroyer, and she must always turn against it, for it had blighted you and would else blight her; if you had done this, and then, for a purpose, had wanted her to take naturally to the daylight and she could not do it, you would have been disappointed and angry? (Dickens 306).

This comment is perhaps the most clear, detailed instance of Estella's experience, and even moves Miss Havisham to finally understand her crimes. Pip observes that after this conversation between Estella and Miss Havisham, their relationship does not change, except that Miss Havisham regards Estella with "something like fear infused among her former characteristics" (Dickens 308). This is the only instance in which Miss Havisham displays anything like uncertainty and comes to fear her creation just as Frankenstein eventually fears his monster, beginning to break free of her obsession with her past.

Conclusion

In Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations*, the spectral woman Miss Havisham is presented as an eccentric, ghostly spinster maddened by early betrayal and obsessed with revenge on the male sex. Her body and dress remind the protagonist Pip of a skeleton combined with a wax figure, as her body and clothes have rotted with age and she lives in a tomb-like house, surrounded by decaying artifacts of her past. The first sight of Miss Havisham is "supremely uncanny, because at Miss Havisham's body the inanimate comes to life again…not only is she the material embodiment of a living dead, but more importantly, a living sign of the bride as a dead woman" (Bronfen 351). Her ghostly appearance and haunting behavior present characteristics of the uncanny, raising issues of identity, repetition, and the desire for death. Miss Havisham is also a larger representation of limited women's independence and freedom of choice, as her ruined opportunity for marriage was her main pathway through life as an upper-class woman.

Miss Havisham's restrictions and heartbreak lead to the creation of another monster, her adopted daughter Estella. She creates a girl in her image who is able to spurn the affections of men as Miss Havisham cannot do herself, and Miss Havisham feeds off of this ability of Estella,

letting it become her driving life force. Ironically, it is when she is actually dying that she is more genuinely alive, capable of forgiveness or at least asking forgiveness, capable of not being in thrall to the past. Her last words ask Pip to forgive her, and shows her ability to feel remorse. In death, Miss Havisham almost becomes new person, a real person in terms of the novel.

Yet, in her last moments — as she seems to be beyond her madness — she repeats her words over and over again, an indication that she is still enthralled with what she is trying to free herself from. Miss Havisham is a woman without wealth, status, or a husband; a leftover woman for which society has no use. In her madness, Miss Havisham represents a woman's struggle with self-dissolution and independent identity.

Childhood Trauma of The Spectral Woman in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Introduction

The last chapter will discuss a work by a woman author, Emily Brontë, in comparison to previous works by male authors Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. Emily Brontë, a reclusive woman later recognized as a talented writer, was largely rejected by her contemporary critics (Thompson). In the mid 19th century, it was unusual for a woman to write novels with characters thought to be savage, violent, and immoral, and with characters like the cruel Heathcliff and the violent, alcoholic Hindley Earnshaw, Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* caused distaste among reviewers (Thompson). This novel can be seen as a counter example to *The Woman in White* and *Great Expectations* because in *Wuthering Heights* Emily Brontë combines realism with the gothic genre, writing about mundane, daily occurrences in a household with dark, dramatic, and violent scenes and characters. The 'spectral woman' of the novel and what might be called its anti-heroine is Catherine Earnshaw. The abuse Catherine suffers from her brother Hindley and father Mr. Earnshaw during her childhood influences the woman she becomes, unhappy and angry. She dies a few days after giving birth to a daughter, Cathy. Heathcliff begs her to haunt him as repayment for supposedly causing her death.[18] Her reincarnation as a ghost allows her an outlet to be with Heathcliff in death as she should have been in life. The story is told from the point of views of the housekeeper Ellen Dean, or Nelly, who tells Lockwood that Heathcliff does see Catherine's ghost and eventually dies in ecstasy, believing they will be reunited in death. To honor the bond they shared in life, Catherine and Heathcliff are buried next to each other, alongside Catherine's husband Edgar Linton. This story of love pursued beyond the bounds of

[18] An orphan who is adopted by Mr. Earnshaw who develops an unbreakable love for Catherine. After she marries Edgar Linton, he leaves and returns a wealthy, cruel man who seeks revenge on Edgar. He eventually acquires both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, Edgar's estate.

life was not originally well received. As I discuss at the conclusion of this chapter contemporary reviews of *Wuthering Heights* show that critics disliked the female characters as well as the events of the novel, calling them immoral and brutal. This shows to what degree the Brontë's novel challenged Victorian Era expectations for women, and the kinds of stories told about women. Her passionate, contradictory, and ghostly heroine fell well outside of those expectations.

Catherine Earnshaw as the Spectral Woman

On the most basic level, Catherine Earnshaw's ghost is the novel's central gothic element, but throughout the novel is marked by mystery and suspense. Perhaps the most basic way of defining Gothic literature is as literature in which unnatural events that cannot easily be explained or over which man has no control occur.[19] The unexplained appearances of Catherine's spectre give the novel its gothic texture. Even the first time she is seemingly introduced into the novel, it is as a supernatural force or a nightmare mistaken for one. Set in the year 1802 (18 years after Catherine's death), Wuthering Heights estate has a guest lodger named Lockwood. During his first night at Wuthering Heights, he falls ill and is escorted to stay in Catherine's old room, the room that she occupied as a girl. Lockwood notices her childish carvings of her own name on the window sill and then finds left over pages of her diary: "An immediate interest kindled within me for the unknown Catherine" (Brontë 17). When he falls asleep, he then (seemingly) dreams that the child ghost of Catherine is knocking upon the glass. In the dream, he first he hears a knocking which he takes to be an "importunate branch:"

[19] "The Gothic, a literary movement that focused on ruin, decay, death, terror, and chaos, and privileged irrationality and passion over rationality and reason, grew in response to the historical, sociological, psychological, and political contexts of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries", from *encyclopedia.com*.

> [K]nocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch: instead of which, my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand. The intense horror of nightmare came over me: I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and a most melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in — let me in!' (Brontë 24).

The vivid imagery of Lockwood's nightmare fits with gothic elements of unnatural events involving death and terror. His nightmare begins normally enough, with a familiar tapping noise of a tree branch, but quickly turns into the unfamiliar, as he finds a child's hand knocking instead. To force her to let go, he pushes her hand against the broken glass and boards up the window with her old books. Once they topple down, Lockwood wakes up with a shout of horror. Lockwood awakens Heathcliff with this episode, and he comes rushing in the room, excited by the possibility of Catherine's presence. Lockwood overhears him standing at the open window, begging Catherine to come in, but his request is met with silence.

This first appearance of Catherine' ghost conveys the ambiguity of her spectral figure, as Brontë continually leaves the reader guessing if her ghost is a genuine apparition of Catherine's unquenchable spirit or a figment of the imagination – whether Lockwood's imagination influenced by his invasive reading of her words or Heathcliff's born out of his passion and despair. For the majority of the text, it seems as though Catherine's ghost is a hallucination of Heathcliff, who conjures up her image because he desperately wants to see her and speak to her. However, there are instances that suggest that Catherine actually roamed the moors and cemetery. Nelly runs into a village boy who is too frightened to walk down the road, crying as he claims, "'There's Heathcliff and a woman yonder, under t' nab un' I darnut pass 'em'" (Brontë

296). There are multiple instances in the novel of superstitious townspeople claiming to see ghosts, which Nelly, although superstitious herself, immediately dismisses as folly.

Brontë also contrasts the supernatural fear of ghosts with the role that love and passion play in conjuring Catherine's spectre. The ghost story in *Wuthering Heights* intermingles death, tragedy, and love. Heathcliff feels as if he cannot live without Catherine and that the only way to be close to her is to be haunted by her ghost. Heathcliff embraces death and haunting saying:

> And I pray one prayer — I repeat it till my tongue stiffens — Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you — haunt me, then! …. Be with me always — take any form — drive me mad! only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul! (Brontë 151)

Heathcliff's passion is tragic and all consuming asking Catherine to "take any form" to drive him mad (Brontë 151). He prefers madness with Catherine to sanity without or perhaps even knows that to believe in her ghost he would have to be mad.[20] But Brontë flips common conceptions of malicious or wicked ghosts by creating one who was haunting her lover in death because of her repression in life.

After Lockwood's nightmare, Nelly observes that Heathcliff's health declines and that he begins exhibiting strange behavior. The implication seems to be that for Heathcliff this was no nightmare but Catherine's apparition summoning him. A morbid joy is sparked in him, and Cathy notices a change in his usually moody, dark attitude. He begins to be almost cheerful, happy, yet eats only once a day, eating nothing for four days up until his death. He does not sleep, wandering the moors at night searching for Catherine and pacing in her old room,

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[20] *Wuthering Heights* is thus very different from Collins's *The Woman in White* and Dickens's *Great Expectations* because the haunted asks to be haunted, even pleads for it.

murmuring her name. When Heathcliff asks Nelly and Cathy to sit with him in the house, and they refuse out of fear, he says "[w]ell, there is *one* who won't shrink from my company! By God! she's relentless. Oh, damn it! It's unutterably too much for flesh and blood to bear—even mine" (Brontë 294). Here, Heathcliff mentions that Catherine's constant presence is too much to bear and is one of the last things he says before his death.

The clearest instance that Heathcliff is being haunted by Catherine's ghost occurs when Nelly is speaking to him, trying to get him to drink coffee and eat some bread. She notices he is staring at "something within two yards' distance" that "communicated, apparently, both pleasure and pain in exquisite extremes" (Brontë 291). Heathcliff is staring at a figure that Nelly cannot see, and is so transfixed by its movements that when he makes an effort to eat a piece of bread, his "fingers clenched before they reached it, and remained on the table, forgetful of their aim" (Brontë 292). Even as he speaks to Nelly, Heathcliff's eyes pursue the figure with "unwearied diligence" and "never weaned away" (Brontë 291). It is apparent that Heathcliff sees Catherine's ghost and is spellbound by her figure, joyful at her presence yet sorrowful that he has not yet joined her in death. The next morning, Nelly discovers him laying face up on Catherine's bed with the window flung open, and rain pouring in. On the surface, the scene is full of horror—Heathcliff eyes are wide open and a grin is stretched over his face. Rain water runs down his clothes and hair, and his hand rests on the window sill, with the shutters hitting it every time they flap in the wind. When Nelly tries to shut his eyes, they will not close, his face frozen in a grotesque grin. It seems as though Heathcliff knew his death was coming, and embraced it without fear, but rather with eager anticipation and a sense of triumph.

Catherine's ghost serves a greater purpose that just an embodiment of gothic themes. Outside of the window, Catherine appears to be physically shut out of Wuthering Heights, telling

Lockwood that she had been wandering the moors for 18 years, perhaps mirroring how she roamed the moors with Heathcliff in her youth. On a symbolic level, however, she is shut out of a life at Wuthering Heights with Heathcliff as an adult. She is stuck outside the life that she should have lived with him, and will never be able to "come in", or live as Heathcliff's wife at Wuthering Heights. It ultimately matters less whether Catherine is an actual ghost versus Heathcliff's vision and more what her presence in the novel represents — a woman who was repressed in life and whose only opportunity for freedom of expression is in death. She was abused emotionally by her father and verbally and physically by her brother. As a member of the upper class, she was limited to marriage, as she would not inherit her father's wealth. It would also not be socially acceptable to marry beneath her station, to someone like Heathcliff. The next section will further discuss the circumstances that lead to her ghostly return.

Early Life of Catherine Earnshaw

Catherine is shunned by her father and later verbally and physically abused by her brother. As a child, she is "wayward and mischievous," playing jokes on the adults, running and playing outside with Heathcliff, constantly laughing and singing. Her behavior tests caretaker Nelly's patience, but Nelly admits that Catherine meant no harm, comforting anyone who she made upset, and after misbehaving Catherine would sometimes try to make it up to her father. Mr. Earnshaw, however, described as "strict and grave" with his children, does not understand Catherine's jokes (Brontë 39). He expects Catherine to behave in a gentler, more feminine way, instead of playing roughly with Heathcliff or running outside on the moors during the day. He believes a young girl should be better behaved and say her prayers, as evidenced in a chastisement to Catherine. After a specific instance in which Catherine tries to apologize to her father, Mr. Earnshaw's responds — "'Nay, Cathy, I cannot love thee, thou'rt worse than thy

brother. Go, say thy prayers, child, and ask God's pardon. I doubt thy mother and I must rue that we ever reared thee!'" (Brontë 40). Mr. Earnshaw's unforgiving words are cruel, denying Catherine his love, and telling her he and her mother wish she had never been born. This response makes Catherine cry at first but "being repulsed continually hardened her" and "she laughed if [Nelly] told her to say she was sorry for her faults, and beg to be forgiven" (Brontë 40). Her father's constant disapproval and rejection changes Catherine from being apologetic to spurning anyone who tries to tell her to change. Her father's treatment teaches Catherine that she is not acceptable the way she is, which only strengthens her bond with Heathcliff as an outcast. This bond continues even after her death—whether one interprets the ghost as Heathcliff's tormented projection or, indeed, as Catherine herself reaching out to him from beyond the grave. The gothic ghostly figure here also becomes another avatar of Catherine's protest against the world—her unwillingness to be contained in any fashion, even by the borders of life and death.

The scene in which Mr. Earnshaw dies is particularly powerful. Catherine had been sick, and, therefore, calm and obedient, leaning against her father's knee at the fireside. Nelly observers the scene:

> I remember the master, before he fell into a doze, stroking her bonny hair—it pleased him rarely to see her gentle—and saying, 'Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?' And she turned her face up to his, and laughed, and answered, 'Why cannot you always be a good man, father?' (Brontë 40).

Catherine's direct response is a radical answer to her father's question, showing that Catherine has arrived at a certain insight into their relation. With these words, she stands up for herself and laughs off her father's disapproval.

While Mr. Earnshaw is unsympathetic and sometimes cruel, Catherine's brother Hindley is violent, jealous, and vindictive. Hindley returns from college to his father's funeral, and becomes the inheritor and master of Wuthering Heights. Even though Mr. Earnshaw favored Heathcliff, he leaves nothing to him in his will. Hindley's treatment of Catherine is even harsher than her father's treatment. He is jealous of Heathcliff and Catherine sides with Heathcliff as an outsider. Lockwood discovers Catherine's journal and in one entry she recounts Hindley saying, '"You forget you have a master here," says the tyrant. "I'll demolish the first who puts me out of temper! I insist on perfect sobriety and silence"' (Brontë 19). Catherine views her brother as intemperate and brash, and tries to defy him every chance she gets. She writes about Hindley's punishments for her and Heathcliff; "Hindley hurried up from his paradise on the hearth, and seizing one of us by the collar, and the other by the arm, hurled both into the back-kitchen…we cannot be damper, or colder, in the rain than we are here" (Brontë 21). Catherine and Heathcliff decide to escape outside and play in the rain rather than stay locked in the kitchen. When Heathcliff later lies dead with the rainwater washing over him, it looks back to this early episode of shared suffering and shared play, as if once again Heathcliff and Catherine had escaped into the rain.[21]

Mr. Earnshaw and especially Hindley's treatment of Catherine strengthen her bond with Heathcliff and they forge a connection that will last the rest of their lives. The strength of their relationship is apparent when the worst punishment for Catherine is being separated from Heathcliff, and she writes in her diary, '"How little did I dream that Hindley would ever make me cry so!' she wrote. 'My head aches, till I cannot keep it on the pillow; and still I can't give over…He has been blaming our father (how dared he?) for treating H. too liberally; and swears

[21] Professor Deborah Elise White suggested to me the connection between the two passages.

he will reduce him to his right place'" (Brontë 21). The more Hindley tries to demean Heathcliff, the stronger the relationship of the two outcasts grows.

The unloving and cold treatment of Mr. Earnshaw molds Catherine into becoming stubborn and defensive, hardening her to others (with the exception of Heathcliff). She eventually learns to mask her free, fun-loving spirit when she marries Edgar Linton to continue living with financial security and as a member of the upper-class. However, because of her childhood experiences, Catherine develops a quasi-feminist rage as she grows into a young woman. She treats Nelly unfairly, becoming patronizing and harsh, and slaps Edgar Linton right before they get engaged, the first indicator of the imbalance of emotional (though not economic) power in their relationship. Catherine marries Linton, but she is angry. Angry that she was abused as a girl, angry that she cannot be with Heathcliff, angry with her allotted life path. She is only truly free when she is with Heathcliff because he loves her for who she is, wild and playful, sometimes commanding and sharp. This is seemingly why she continues to be with Heathcliff even in death as a ghost, because with him, her spirit is free. She draws Heathcliff into death as well, so that they might be together at last.

In 1920, Sigmund Freud published *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis* which became the most popular and widely translated of his works.[22] In the chapter on wish fulfillment, Freud defines wish fulfillment as the satisfaction of a desire through an involuntary thought processes like dreams, daydreams, hallucinations, and symptoms of neurosis, and psychosis (1). Freud coined the term *wunscherfüllung*, and posited that it could occur when unconscious desires are repressed by the ego and superego as a result of guilt (1). With this in consideration,

[22] Editor's Introduction, Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, p.31

Catherine's ghost could actually be the product of Heathcliff's repressed guilt and sadness over losing Catherine while she was alive and for indirectly causing her death. Shortly before dying, Catherine says that he has broken her heart, and for that reason, killed her (Brontë 178). It can be inferred that Catherine died, weak and hysterical, because of her overwhelming grief. Seeing Catherine again as a ghost perhaps eased Heathcliff's grief over her death, and helped him feel as if she is still with him. Freud's idea of wish fulfillment also echoes Pip's vision of Miss Havisham hanging from a rope in *Great Expectations* as it references visions or hallucinations as a mark of repressed feelings or thoughts. However, instead of seeing the spectral woman in feelings of repressed anger, Heathcliff sees Catherine as a result of his deep devotion and repressed guilt.

Catherine speaks to Nelly earlier in the novel about how she and Heathcliff are the same person, and she could not separate herself from him any more than she could separate from herself. It follows that he cannot truly live while she is dead, and that he follows her into death. Catherine's oneness with Heathcliff also ties into the idea of identity being spectral, because it emphasizes the ambiguity surrounding identity. Catherine's statement raises questions about whether it is possible to be the "same" as another person, feeling what they feel and thinking what they think. Her feeling of oneness with Heathcliff suggests that identity is less defined by a physical body and more a soul, or spirit, making it possible for her spirit to draws his back so they might be one once again.

Spectral Identity

At the beginning of the novel before Lockwood's nightmare, he finds iterations of Catherine's possible last names scratched in the window ledge "[t]his writing…was nothing but

a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small — *Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*" (Brontë 18). Catherine's carving of her names are her possible identities — her given name Earnshaw, or her name if she were Edgar Linton's wife or Heathcliff's wife. The repetition of the carvings indicates that young Catherine was obsessed with the idea of marriage and who she would potentially become. She could be the wife of a gentle, wealthy man from a well-established family or the wife of a rough, bold but equally if not more devoted man with little to his name. As the reader knows, she chooses Edgar for financial stability, but the more important note is that Catherine's choices are limited to marriage.

But the carving of these multiple names may be read in other ways that suggest something about the malleability of identity. It is not that, for instance, Catherine Earnshaw will ever have a single identity: she *is* Catherine Earnshaw — Catherine Linton — Catherine Heathcliff all at once. Even though she marries a Linton, she never gives up her identity as an Earnshaw (she becomes Catherine Earnshaw Linton) or her love for Heathcliff. The point is that the capacity to be multiple is the capacity to have an identity, even if it seems like identity ought to be something more stable; it is familiar and unfamiliar, and because of this, always ghostly.[23] Catherine's identity also haunts others. Her repeated name haunts Lockwood as he sleeps in her old room after he falls asleep reading the carvings:

> In vapid listlessness I leant my head against the window, and continued spelling over Catherine Earnshaw — Heathcliff — Linton, till my eyes closed; but they had not rested five minutes when a glare of white letters started from the dark, as vivid as spectres — the air swarmed with Catherines (Brontë 18).

[23] Professor Hannah Markley suggested this point to me.

Here, Catherine's multiple identities are directly compared to ghosts. Perhaps the swarming of the letters represents not just how the spectrality of Catherine's identity haunts Lockwood but rather the uncanniness of identity as a whole.[24]

Initial Reception (1847–1848)

In the year and the year that followed *Wuthering Heights'* publication, there were a large number of reviews written in magazines and newspapers responding to the novel. Emily Brontë published the book under the pseudonym Ellis Bell, and many reviewers thought it was written by a man. A common thread that ran through the reviews, both good and bad, was shock at how savagely the main characters behaved, and the tragic plot points. Henry Chorley of literary magazine *Athenæum* said that it was a "disagreeable story" and that the "Bells" (Brontës) "seem to affect painful and exceptional subjects" (Thompson). In the Unites States, an anonymous reviewer for *Graham's Lady's Magazine* wrote, "How a human being could have attempted such a book as the present without committing suicide before he had finished a dozen chapters, is a mystery. It is a compound of vulgar depravity and unnatural horrors" (Thompson). These reviews illuminate that *Wuthering Heights* was not just out of the ordinary for Victorian literature, but was exceptional enough to cause astonishment.

Reviewers were critical of Brontë's creation of such rough, cruel male characters and expressed distaste for the female characters as well. The two following reviews, both by anonymous writers, were found in Brontë's desk after her death (Thompson). First, an article in *Atlas* newspaper was published on January 22, 1848 and summarized the novel by writing: "We know nothing in the whole range of our fictitious literature which presents such shocking pictures

[24] The feeling of the unfamiliar in a familiar place or memory is part of a phenomenon often discussed in psychoanalysis as *the uncanny* and that is characteristic of the gothic as a literary genre. Julian Wolfreys writes, the gothic is "one name for acts of spectral troping which we otherwise name the ghostly, the uncanny, the phantom" (Wolfreys 14).

of the worst forms of humanity. Even the female characters excite something of loathing and much of contempt. Beautiful and loveable in their childhood, they all, to use a vulgar expression, "'turn out badly'" (Thompson). On January 15, 1848, The *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper* published an article that read, "The women in the book are of a strange fiendish-angelic nature, tantalising, and terrible" (Thompson). Perhaps these reviewers did not like the female characters because they stood out from Victorian ideals of womanhood. According to Kayla Lindsey, expectations of femininity in the Victorian age include "submissiveness, pleasantness, modesty, humility" (4). Additionally, Karen Stein observes, "the women who have been most acceptable to patriarchal culture are those who have been powerless; passive rather than active, self-sacrificing rather than self-assertive, meek rather than bold" (2). The contemporary reviews that were written show that society rejected the female characters in *Wuthering Heights* because they did not conform to the ideal Victorian woman. In particular, Catherine Earnshaw is a character who deviates from the norm, and thus brings shape to societal fears of a dominating, angry, adventurous and indeed sexual woman.

Shortly after Brontë's death in 1848, G.H. Lewes, in weekly pictorial magazine *Leader*, wrote:

> Curious enough is to read *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, and remember that the writers were two retiring, solitary, consumptive girls! Books, coarse even for men, coarse in language and coarse in conception, the coarseness apparently of violence and uncultivated men – turn out to be the productions of two girls living almost alone, filling their loneliness with quiet studies, and writing their books from a sense of duty, hating the pictures they drew, yet drawing them with austere conscientiousness! There is matter here for the moralist or critic to speculate on (Brick 355).

Since critics could hardly believe that a man wrote such a story, the fact that it came from a young woman was even harder to accept. It seemed unlikely that Brontë, a clergyman's daughter with limited travel experience, could imagine such a brutal story. The review above however, emphasizes the larger issue. The fact that Brontë *did* write this story shows that she felt a sense of importance in her stories, that they carried a message in their immorality of cruelty and savage love. Ultimately, Brontë explores the constraints and desires of women with sympathy, showing two sides of womanhood – the socially acceptable and conventional choices versus the passionate desires. In this perspective, *Wuthering Heights* describes women's limited opportunities in a patriarchal society and their desires for freedom of expression.

Conclusion

In *Wuthering Heights*, lives without the possibility of satisfaction in real relationships are actualized or realized through ghosts. Catherine is abused and stifled as a child by the older men in her family and grows into an unhappy, angry woman, choosing to marry a man who she masks her true self around. In death, her spirit haunts Heathcliff with whom she shares an unbreakable bond. Heathcliff and Catherine's inseparableness reveal the ambiguity of identity, as Catherine articulates that she and Heathcliff are one and the same. Neither of them are happy as adults, but they are finally happy to be together in death, illuminating that women in Catherine's position during the mid 19th century only had true freedom after they died.

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