“Memory and Trauma in Emily Brontë’s Wuthering Heights (1848)”

“Memoria y Trauma en WutheringHeights (1848) de Emily Brontë”

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ANEXO II

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1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of trauma has awoken a great curiosity in social and academic circles in the last few decades. This popularity has helped to develop a whole new discipline, Trauma Studies, which explores the lasting influence of traumatic events in various ways. Trauma theories have expanded their focus in keeping with fields such as psychology and Memory Studies, and especially since the Second World War onwards they have become strongly connected with literature. In this light, the aim of this essay is to analyse Emily Brontë's classical novel *Wuthering Heights* (1848) using trauma theory as a tool to interpret climactic moments in Bronte's narrative with different ends. Significantly, I claim that trauma theory will help explain the characters' behaviour in this novel, particularly Catherine and Heathcliff's, whose perturbed past lives offer a deep insight into their suffering. In connection with this, I would like to use the concept of trauma to interpret the overall meaning of the text, since I think it constitutes a great support to investigate the obscure nature of the novel.

Wuthering Heights is nowadays considered part of the canon of English literature, not only for its unquestionable merits and narrative and thematic originality, but also partly due to the myth created around the figure of its author following her death—and especially since the publication of Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* in 1855—. Though the first edition of the novel was not immediately followed by public acclaim, after the publication of the famed *Jane Eyre* by Currer Bell, and Charlotte's prologue in the posthumous edition of her sister's work, the appearance of *Wuthering Heights* made a great impact on Victorian society, especially due to its "depiction of extremes of emotion and violence, hints of necrophilia, and contempt for the marriage bond" (Ingham, 2006: 215).Charlotte Bronte's moralising reading of her sister's novel contributed decisively to this view, as she questioned in her prologue

to the novel "[w]hether it [was] right or advisable to created beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is." (Brontë, 1994: 16). As it is well known, the Victorian era was characterised by strict moral values that conformed, among other things, gender behaviour. With few exceptions, women were generally limited to the domestic sphere, and organized their lives around their families and homes. In this sense, novels also generally imitated that gender imbalance and prescribed models of feminine behaviour according to Victorian stereotypes. Emily Brontë's only novel, however, does not follow but rather questions those conventions, since the author presented round characters that oppose the moral and religious standards of the time. The disturbed minds of Brontë's protagonists, Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, have fostered endless discussion about social behaviour and the complexity of human nature.[1] I take this cue and will attempt to analyse the novel from the point of view of trauma.

First of all, I will use Emily Brontë's life as point of departure, and taking biographical accounts, I will analyse the traumatic nature of the novel in the light of the hardships she experienced in the past. I will focus especially on family dynamics and on Bronte's personality traits, which might explain her preferment for isolation and interiority and her choice of characters. Secondly, I will refer to trauma theory and its fruitful application to literary works, by selecting some of the most significant contemporary readings of Sigmund Freud's lectures on "traumatic neurosis."[2] Particularly, in this section I will focus on the way in which Memory Studies have fostered the application of trauma to literature. Especially, I will use Freud's theory about the "talking cure" and Cathy Caruth's concept of "narrative memory" as theoretical and critical tools to study the possibility of traumatic relief in *Wuthering Heights*. Thirdly, my

[1] Some literary examples on this subject are *A Biocultural Approach to Literary Theory and Interpretation* (Easterlin, 2012) or *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontës* (Glen, 2002).
[2] Freud's first use of the term "traumatic neuroses" appeared in his *Studies on Hysteria*. According to him, it constituted "the disproportion between the many years' duration of the hysterical symptom and the single occurrence which provoked it "(Freud and Breuer, 1893–1895).

purpose is to analyse the traumatic nature of the most climactic scenes found in the novel. I will try to show how the most disturbing conflicts in Brontë's novel can be interpreted as consequences of traumatic episodes and experiences. I argue that Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff can be taken as trauma victims by arguing that their pasts constitute the source of their traumatic outpourings.

Furthermore, the narrator's role is also under inspection in this essay, and the discussion about the nature of this narrative constituent, so essential to understand the structure and temporal frames of this novel, will centre mostly on the figure of Nelly Dean, whose character offers a privilege insight into the causes of these traumatic episodes. In this way, I will debate about the importance of memory in the novel, connecting Brontë's choice of narrators with the concept of "narrative memory" mentioned above. Finally, I will take into consideration the presence of ghosts and the supernatural in *Wuthering Heights*, and discuss the novel's circular structure in the light of Lockwood's first encounter with Catherine at the novel's opening and Heathcliff's visions at the end. I will relate these "unearthly" presences with theories on the uncanny and the critical concept of the ghost, as delineated by Freud and Jacques Derrida, respectively. By using the device of the ghost *Wuthering Heights* connects explicitly the protagonists' past and present states.

Finally, we should also mention The Brontës' notoriety all around the world. This popularity provides us with a wide range of information about the authors and their works. In particular, Emily's *Wuthering Heights* has been largely discussed by critics, who have focused on a variety of topics. These literary works are mainly based on the novel's narrative structure, its gothic atmosphere (centred mostly on the figure of the ghost), and the representations of love and revenge. In this essay, I will analyse some of these famous topics trying to connect them with relevant trauma theories.

2 THE AUTHOR AND HER WORK

Wuthering Heights was Emily Brontë's only novel, and it narrates the story of two families, whose properties and houses are separated only by a few miles: the Lintons and the Earnshaws. The story displays one of the most remarkable examples of story-within-a-story structure, and is narrated by two of its characters. The narrative begins with Lockwood's account of his first visit to the Heights to meet his landlord, Heathcliff. Due to a terrible weather, Lockwood is forced to spend one night at Heathcliff's house, where he meets Catherine's ghost. This uncanny apparition and the very Gothic atmosphere at the Heights provoke the tenant's curiosity, who soon later asks the housekeeper, Nelly Dean, to reconstruct the whole family history for him, thus relinquishing his role as narrator for that of attentive listener.

Brontë creates a very moving work, considered by some critics as displaying Romantic features while inhabiting a Victorian framework. This transitional moment in *Wuthering Heights* illustrates the author's life and literary allegiances. Brontë was the fifth child of Patrick Brontë, a man of the Church of Irish origin, and Maria Branwell, from Penzance, who died of breast cancer three years after Emily's birth. She was raised by her father and by her mother's sister, Aunt Branwell, who remained with the children at Haworth Parsonage till most of them came of age. Emily was witness not only to her mother's death, but also to her eldest sisters', Maria and Elizabeth, after a very painful stay at Cowan Bridge, a strict school for parsons' daughters where Charlotte and Emily had later been sent. Soon after their sisters' deaths, however, their father took Charlotte and Emily home. Most probably, these untoward and unhappy circumstances strengthened the ties between the remaining siblings. Few years later, Emily travelled with Charlotte to the Hegers' Pensionnat in Brussels, and though she was deemed by Monsieur Heger as very gifted, she was soon determined to go back to Haworth, where she would remain for most of her

life most of her. Critics and biographers consider that many of these experiences are essential to interpret Emily Brontë's writing, both her fiction and her poetry. Patricia Ingham's *The Brontës*, for example, contends that her brother Branwell's difficult character left a mark on Emily's life:

> Branwell's alcohol and opium addiction led to delirium tremens, described in Patrick's annotated copy of *Domestic Medicine* by Thomas John Graham as a state in which the patient 'think himself haunted; by demons, sees luminous substants [sic], in his imagination'. (Ingham, 2006: 60)

As mentioned above, and like her characters in *Wuthering Heights*, the author lived most of her life in the family house at Haworth. In this way, she could be witness to her brother's deliriums and hallucinations at a time in which madness was associated with an over-excitement of the emotions (Ingham, 2006: 61). These episodes could have been the source of inspiration used by the author to describe the mental breakdowns suffered by Catherine and Heathcliff in the novel. I will produce a detailed analysis of the protagonists' disturbed states of mind later in the essay. Emily borrows another trait of Branwell's behaviour in *Wuthering Heights*, since she depicts Hindley Earnshaw as a mad man due to his alcoholism: "[Hindley] entered, vociferating oaths dreadful to hear [...] Hareton was impressed with a wholesome terror of encountering either his wild beast's fondness or his madman's rage" (Brontë, 1994: 74). Besides, Charlotte and Emily were close friends and intimately related, though in fact they were very different. In one of her letters, Charlotte alludes to Emily's weaker nature:

> Every morning when she woke, the vision of home and the moors rushed on her, and darkened and saddened the day that lay before her...In this struggle her health was quickly broken: her white face, attenuated form, and failing strength threatened

> rapid decline. I felt in my heart she would die if she did not go home, and with this conviction obtained her recall. (Ingham, 2006: 13)

Charlotte refers to her sister's stay at Roe Head School where their father had sent them. Emily's absence from Haworth is described by Charlotte as an agony. She even mentions that her sister's homesickness had a bearing on her health, a most probable link with Catherine's anxious state after leaving the *Heights* in the novel. Moreover, Emily's single attachment to Haworth is also promoted in the restricted depiction of the two singular locations of the novel, Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights.

Ingham claims that Emily Brontë was not initially willing to publish her writing, although "she finally agreed, provided that they all concealed their identities under pseudonyms" (2006: 25). According to the biographer, she was more prone to enjoy her quiet and anonymous life than to be known. Ingham also mentions that both Charlotte and Emily were given to suffer from depressions, or "hypochondria" as it was then called, and that "it is possible that Emily was anorexic" (2006: 60). In the Brontës' period, mental disease was considered primarily a feminine malaise and hypochondria were supposed to affect both their bodies and minds. In the novel, Catherine's health is also weak and presents several physical and mental breakdowns (very similar to those of Mrs Heathcliff later in the story). As a bad presage, Emily died soon after the public appearance of her novel, in the ill-fated year of 1848, which had also seen Branwell's death. Not only her early novel, when she was barely thirty years old, but all the myths surrounding her life and family have contributed to reinforce the mysterious and uncanny nature of *Wuthering Heights* hence. In the next section, trauma theories will be used to shed some light on these issues.

3. TRAUMA, MEMORY AND THE ROLE OF LITERATURE

The relationship between trauma and literature has been explored by recent studies on memory which have proved that the literary reconstruction of traumatic memories fulfils a healing function. For a long time, the definition of "trauma" has being either too general or confusing.[3] Only in 1994 a more contemporary definition of the term appeared in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. This manual was published by the American Psychiatric Association in order to provide a standard classification of mental disorders. According to them, trauma is described as:

> A direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate. (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders,* 1994: 424).

Furthermore, traumatic events may lead individuals to develop another syndrome, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which "is characterized by the reexperiencing of an extremely traumatic event accompanied by symptoms of increased arousal and by avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma" (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 1994: 93).In this sense, trauma corresponds to the disturbing event itself while Posttraumatic Stress Disorder presents the disease caused by trauma.

[3]The term trauma was first used in the late nineteenth century to describe any event "outside the range of usual human experience". This definition originated a debate about which human experiences were usual and which ones were unusual (Vees-Gulani, 2003: 26).

The three basic categories required to PSTD's diagnosis comprise a great variety of symptoms that include hallucinations, flashbacks, nightmares, delirium and numbing, among many others. Apart from them, we should also include one last symptom that has been greatly discussed: amnesia. Some authors consider it a myth, alleging that the victim remembers the entire traumatic episode but that he or she decides not to show. While others like Freud assert that patients showed "aversion on the part of the memory to remembering anything which is connected with unpleasant experience and which would revive this unpleasantness by a production" (Freud and Breuer, 1893-1895: 74).

In addition to this, we might consider that trauma affects individuals on different scales and that "not everyone experiencing a traumatic event actually ends up developing post-traumatic stress disorder" (Vees-Gulani, 2003: 26). In fact, the same traumatic episode may have different responses by individuals depending on their previous experience, personality or environment. As James E. Young argued in his study on the Holocaust, "there was not a single Holocaust but that every nation remembers the event according to its own traditions, ideals and experiences" (in Rossington and Whitehead, 2007: 8). From this it follows that trauma victims can present symptoms that may help or hinder their recovery from trauma.

As mentioned above, the basis for our contemporary assessment of trauma was initiated by Freud in his studies on hysteria, a term "used to describe somatic symptoms without a physical cause" (Resick, 2001: 60). Freud observed that patients were fixated to the traumatic experience as the result of their psychological ignorance of it. According to his theory, a possible treatment was the recovery of the missing knowledge, bringing the unconscious experience to conscious understanding. Thus, as he claimed, "our therapy does its work by means of changing the unconscious into conscious" (Freud and Breuer, 1893-1895: 180).

Following Freud's theories, a great number of studies concerning trauma have focused on its effects on individuals' sense of time and mainly, on the power of their pasts over their presents. Freud affirmed that: "it also happens that men are brought to complete deadlock by a traumatic experience that has so completely shaken the foundations on which they have built their lives that they give up all interest in the present and future, and become completely absorbed in their retrospections" (Freud and Breuer, 1893-1895: 285). Freud observed that patients of trauma were trapped in their past experiences. We can relate this remark to the traumatic symptom of catatonia in which victims present a great diminution of sensibility accompanied by the loss of interest in their present lives. Anne Whitehead has argued that Freud "focused on precisely those moments when the past called out for attention in the form of symptoms, dreams, and linguistic slips" (Whitehead, 2009: 89). In this sense, Freud's notion of trauma takes as a fact that the traumatic event constitutes a past period that resists to be forgotten. Nowadays, trauma theory considers that traumatic experiences are not processed in our minds as the rest of our memories. Freud explained this theory by claiming that traumatic memories reside in the individual's conscious while non-traumatic memory is placed in the unconscious. He figured consciousness as a "safe" site while traumatic memories were its intruders and put it at risk (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007: 187).

As previously argued, literature has been closely related to trauma in the last few decades. Nowadays, this closed relationship continues to intrigue authors producing numerous studies that present literature and trauma as opened experiences not fully processed. Along these lines, Cathy Caruth has proposed the use of literature to support the recovery from trauma. Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* mentions how Freud used literary sources in order to support his studies about trauma. The critic affirms:

> Literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. (Caruth, 1996: 3)

She states that the enigmatic natures of literature and trauma lead us to new experiences that are not granted by other means. Using one of Freud's literary examples, Caruth compares trauma to a voice which can be heard but not fully known and defines trauma as "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth [...] cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (1996: 4). All along her book, Caruth uses literary examples and even cinema productions (*Hiroshima mon amour*, for instance) related to the phenomenon of trauma in order to prove that it can be interpreted and studied by means of literature.

Immediately related to trauma is the notion of memory, largely studied from the double perspective of trauma and literature. Memory plays an important role in the construction of identities. In *Memory*, Anne Whitehead provides a comprehensive historical approach to the study of memory from ancient Greece to the present day. She asserts that "memory's significance is located in its assertion of the singular identity of the individual across different times and places, and in the face of continual lapses and confusions" (Whitehead, 2009: 62). Interestingly enough, she also emphasizes the importance of forgetting in Memory Studies, presenting our pasts as "overwhelming burdens" characterized by "haunting and pervasive powers" (Whitehead, 2009: 114).

Similarly, Caruth has claimed that the traumatic experience is registered as a repressed memory that is not available to individuals by choice, but that it manifests in the form of symptoms. According to the

critic, nightmares can be interpreted as the attempts to "overcome the fact that [the traumatic experience] was not direct, to attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place" (Caruth,1996: 62). In this sense, symptoms constitute the victim's unconscious attempt to process the traumatic event as the rest of its memories. She continues by asserting that the survival of trauma is effected thanks to its own repetitive nature. Therefore, memory is regarded as the source of the problem but also as a way of dealing with the problematic experience itself. Caruth's *Trauma Explorations in Memory* examines further the complex process of traumatic narrations and opens a debate about how "narrative memory" can be an exit to trauma by means of distortion and forgetting:

> The trauma thus requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure. But on the other hand, the transformation of trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicate, to be integrated into one's own, and others', knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall. (Caruth, 1995: 153)

Caruth states that the loss of intensity appreciated in the narration of traumatic experiences enables the patient a possible way to suffocate the pain caused by trauma. This traumatic narration can be spoken or written. In *Trauma and Guilt: Literature of Wartime Bombing in Germany* Susanne Vees-Gulani explains that "writing has thus shown itself to be a powerful tool in dealing with stressful events and can help to improve both physical and psychological health" (Vees-Gulani, 2003: 32). Both authors oppose Freud's therapy concerning the "talking cure" in his *Studies on Hysteria*, where he affirmed that the traumatised individual could be healed by means of narration. According to it, individuals must reveal their inner memories related to their traumas in order to cope with them. He observed that this process of telling led to the cure:

> The memory of the trauma acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work [...]. For we found, to our great surprise at first, that each individual hysterical symptom immediately and permanently disappeared when we had succeeded in bringing clearly to light the memory of the event by which it was provoked. (Freud, 1983 - 1985: 6)

In contrast, Caruth and Vees-Gulani recognise the importance of the narration of traumas but they support its relieving effects rather than its healing powers. This procedure of narrative trauma can be successfully applied to victims in armed conflicts. For example, Vees-Gulani focuses her studies on witnesses and survivors of World War 2. She reproduces some narratives voiced by victims of trauma about their horror experience, and in so doing she proves that the exposure of the public to trauma allows victims to "make some degree of peace with the past" (Vees-Gulani,2003: 117).

Related to Caruth's "narrative memory", Marianne Hirsch used the term "postmemory" in order "to describe the way in which individuals can be haunted by a past that they have not experienced personally but which has somehow been 'transferred' to them" (Rossington and Whitehead, 2007: 7). According to Hirsch, this type of memory depends on imagination and it is basically transmitted by narration from one generation to another" (Hirsch, 1997: 22).Finally, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* analyses the role of the therapist dealing with trauma. They assert that "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event; through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (Laub and Felman, 1992: 57). In the next few pages it is my purpose to apply some of these theories on trauma and on the use of literature as an interpreting tool at the service of relief, and

also analyse the role of the "listener"/reader in this process. I argue that the application of this critical approach opens new ways of reading *Wuthering Heights*.

4. TRAUMATIZED SELVES IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

Emily Brontë's only novel caused a great impact on the Victorian audience soon after her death. For the most part, they considered her characters immoral and uncivilized. However, Catherine and Heathcliff's peculiar love story has attracted readers hence partly because of its intensity and its complicated nature. In this section, I will analyse climactic episodes and characters in the novel in order to show that it can be easily read in the light of trauma theories. In fact, *Wuthering Heights* presents several disturbing episodes in which the main protagonists manifest their troubled minds. I will try to illustrate how traumatic symptoms constitute key elements throughout the novel.

John N. Briere and Catherine Scott enumerate a series of symptoms that could be applied to the manifestations of trauma in Brontë's novel. Among their list of psychotic symptoms, we find hallucinations, delusions and catatonic behaviour (Briere and Scott, 2015: 49). Taking into account all these symptoms, we should consider that Catherine presents a variety of states that can be identified as traumatic manifestations: hallucinations, delirium and catatonic behaviour. Many of these symptoms are experienced by some others characters in *Wuthering Heights*.

Catherine's behaviour is described as delirious at least twice in the novel, the first time after Heathcliff ran away. Right after their separation, Nelly depicts Catherine as a mad and ill woman: "[I] shall never forget what a scene she acted when we reached her chamber: it terrified me. I thought she was going mad, and I begged Joseph to run for the doctor. It proved

the commencement of delirium" (Brontë, 1994: 86). Catherine's "excessive" behaviour follows after Emily's own Romantic aesthetics and shows the physical manifestation of psychological suffering. Though Catherine soon marries and moves to the Grange, later in the novel Nelly has the chance to see her and provides a detailed account of Catherine's delicate state: "But I soon found her delirious strength much surpassed mine (she was delirious, I became convinced by her subsequent actions and ravings" (Brontë, 1994: 116). On this occasion, Catherine loses consciousness and presents several other traumatic symptoms: "Tossing about, she increased her feverish, bewilderment to madness, and tore the pillow with her teeth" (Brontë, 1994: 113). As she pulls the pillow's feathers out, Catherine remembers Heathcliff and their walking through the moors. This recollection is not just a memory since Catherine situates herself in the past talking about it as a present state. As other victims of trauma, Catherine is fixated upon her past losing her sense of reality. She even fails to recognise herself in the mirror: "Don't you see that face? She inquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror" (Brontë, 1994: 114). Unable to distinguish between past and present, she looks at the mirror with her childhood's eyes expecting to see a young girl and not the grown-up that she is.

Thinking about the past, the female protagonist has hallucinations in which she sees the Heights of her childhood. At her deathbed, Catherine affirms to see her house through the window, but Nelly lets her know that "those [lights] at Wuthering Heights were never visible—still she asserted she caught their shining. 'Look! She cried eagerly, 'that's my room with the candle in it, and the trees swaying before it" (Brontë, 1994: 116). Another symptom of Catherine's trauma is her catatonic behaviour at her life's end. Nelly provides once again a clear image of Catherine's haunted look, affirming that her eyes "appeared always to gaze beyond, and far beyond—you would have said out of this world" (Brontë, 1994: 140). She also

portrays Catherine's lack of expression, assuming that she is thinking about her family home, her "distant look (…) which expressed no recognition of material things either by ear or eye" (1994: 140).

Heathcliff behaves as well as another victim of trauma in Brontë's novel. His life revolves around his relationship with Catherine. After an episode of eavesdropping early in the novel, he learns about Catherine's plan to marry Edgar Linton and decides to leave the Heights, returning as a wealthy man, the Victorian prototype of the self-made man, in the hope of meeting her ambition. The scenes portraying a bedridden Catherine soon after he is back are full of emotional intensity, so much so that Heathcliff confesses that her memory will obsess him for the rest of his life: "'Do you reflect that all those words will be branded in my memory, and eating deeper eternally after you left me?'" (Brontë, 1994: 142). Heathcliff's prophetic words anticipate his destiny, since Catherine's untimely death triggers his insanity. He is described by Nelly as a "savage beast goaded to death with knives and spears" (1994: 149), the very image of a Gothic perpetrator.

Significantly, one of the novel's most popular passages relies on the interchange ability of both figures, Catherine's often-quoted "'I am Heathcliff'" (1994: 80). In similar terms, when she dies Heathcliff cannot face life without whom he calls his soul. Therefore, he refuses to forget his past and commands Catherine's ghost to haunt him instead. He prefers to remain attached to his memories rather than living his present life: "'Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! You said I killed you – haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad!'" (Brontë,1994: 148).Heathcliff's final attitude reveals a similar behaviour to Catherine's. He loses all interest in life, wandering alone around the moors and neglecting his health. However, as soon as he hints the end is fast approaching, he shows a cheerful attitude in contrast to his previous disturbances throughout the

story. This strange happiness is related to the proximity of his death and as a consequence, the end of his painful existence: “Last night I was on the threshold of hell. To-day, I am within the sight of my heaven” (Brontë, 1994: 272).[4]Only hell follows for him after Catherine’s death. On the other hand, heaven constitutes his reencounter with Catherine. Nelly describes his last appearance as ghostly: “That smile, and ghastly paleness! It appeared to me, not Mr. Heathcliff, but a goblin” (Brontë, 1994: 273).

5. MEMORY IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*: THE NARRATOR’S ROLE

The narrative structure of *Wuthering Heights* expressly mirrors the dynamics of memory. If in the former section I argued that the protagonists of Brontë’s novel behave as trauma victims, displaying the main symptoms of this syndrome, in the present one I will try to show how, focusing on the application of memory to trauma theory and on the function of confession, *Wuthering Heights* can be interpreted as a “talking cure”. Interestingly enough, memory studies in the nineteenth century started to consider the role of forgetting as an essential component of the memory phenomenon. Herman Ebbinghaus, who was the first philosopher to examine learning and memory scientifically, studied the process of associations in individuals’ minds and established a “forgetting curve” to show the relationship between memory and forgetting. Although Ebbinghaus created a procedure consisting of testing his own capacities for memory and forgetting it contributed decisively to the study of human memory (Henderson, 1999: 56). More recently, forgetting has been largely analysed as an integral part of memory and trauma studies. Paul Ricoeur devotes a whole section in his influential *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) to the need to forget in order to complete the process of remembering. Anne Whitehead has also declared that: “a degree of

[4]Heathcliff’s inner voice here reminds us of Emily Brontë’s poetic persona in poems like “Anticipation”, where she waits patiently for death to come.

forgetting is as important as remembering for allowing the community to function in the aftermath of social and historical catastrophes" (2009: 14). At an individual and more domestic level, this late statement could be applied to Brontë's novel. In *Wuthering Heights* the main narrator provides accounts based on memories of the past in which the traumatic experiences are not fully described, and forgetting constitute the missing parts of the story.

Wuthering Heights presents an elaborated narrative structure that shifts between past and present events using different voices. The author also employs dialogues and epistolary fragments that provide authenticity to her story, a strict narrative control that somehow replaces the role of the omniscient narrator. In this light, Jibesh Bhattacharyya asserts that the use of such complex structure emphasizes the novel's dramatic effect, and that Brontë starts the novel towards the end of the story in order to procure it (Bhattacharyya, 2007: 4). Though *Wuthering Heights* offers different points of view, the story is told by two main narrators, Lockwood and Nelly Dean. The former has been identified as an outer narrator, while Nelly is seen as an inner one (Ireland, 2001: 205). This section will focus preferably on Nelly's role as the main narrator (and a female one) in the story. Nelly tells the story of the two families, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, adopting the role of witness, and she relates the events of the past in retrospection. Based on Nelly's "faulty" reminiscences, memory plays ironically a pivotal role in the novel.

As it has been seen before, trauma narrative, either spoken or written, may offer a relief to the trauma victim. In this sense, Nelly's statements about Catherine's, or Heathcliff's need for confession, can be seen as the protagonists' attempts to suffocate their sufferings: "'Nelly, will you keep a secret for me?'[…] 'Is it worth keeping?' I enquired, less sulkily. 'Yes, and it worries me, and I must let it out! I want to know what I should do. Today, Edgar Linton has asked me to marry him, and I've given him an answer […]' (Brontë, 1994: 77). This episode anticipates Catherine's

despair since it takes place just before Heathcliff's disappearance from the Heights. Catherine's confession and distress prove that she is aware of the consequences of her choice. She asked Nelly for advice, though she has already accepted the marriage proposal.

Heathcliff makes an even more important confession when he explains Nelly that he has meddled with Catherine's coffin in order to fuse her remains with his once he dies:

> 'I'll tell you what I did yesterday! I got the sexton, who was digging Linton's grave, to remove the earth off her coffin-lid, and I opened it [...] so I struck one side of the coffin loose, and covered it up [...] And I bribed the sexton to pull it away when I'm laid there, and slide mine too; I'll have it made so: and then, by the time Linton gets to us, he'll not know which is which!' (Brontë, 1994: 214)

In this extract, Heathcliff reveals his dark nature and inner turmoil. He confesses that he has been tormented by Catherine's death. Since that day he restlessly waits to meet her again feeling her presence around him and becoming closer to his beloved by turning into a spectre rather than being a mortal human being. Moreover, the protagonist is aware of the power of confession when traumatic events are concerned. Heathcliff shows a reserved nature all along the story but at the end of his life he shares his most intense sufferings with Nelly. As it has been previously hinted, narrative trauma can allow the victim to ease the pain, but Heathcliff explains that his confession gives him no relief (Brontë, 1994: 269).

In addition, Nelly plays for both Catherine and Heathcliff the role of therapist, though she is also affected by trauma through transmission—the meaning of Hirsch's postmemory—. Though she does not undergo the same plights as the lovers do, she is deeply involved in the violent episodes described in her narrative, and becomes somehow an active participant rather than a passive observer. Furthermore, Nelly's memories are neither objective nor naïve. Rather, memories can be transformed or influenced

according to personality, previous experiences or environment. They also reveal the way in which each individual faces traumatic events. The housekeeper's testimony reveals her own trauma, while the very narrative act constitutes the treatment to overcome it.

In conclusion, we have seen that narrative memory allows Brontë's characters to exteriorize their traumas. I have explained how the novel presents Heathcliff, Catherine and Nelly's unconscious attempts to suffocate their traumatic experiences by means of narrations and confessions. *Wuthering Heights'* structure, mostly based on the account of past events, can be compared to traumatic recall. In this sense, the past is a relevant topic in its own right, and its importance is highlighted by the presence of the supernatural.

6. GHOSTLY PRESENCES IN *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

In this section, I will attempt to establish a connection between the presence of ghosts, understood as the representation of the uncanny, and trauma, the symptomatic manifestation of the past. Out of this critical connection I will analyse the use of ghosts in *Wuthering Heights* to prove that the novel's engagement with the supernatural suggests another encounter with the past similar to the way in which traumatic episodes work.

Victorians were concerned with their past and manifested a great fascination about the supernatural world. These facts were transmitted to literature, where the figure of the ghost became quite popular. The supernatural element in Victorian literature—more prominent with the advent of sensation fiction in the 1860s—can be read as a mechanism for breaking social rules, and as a symbol of freedom in the face of moral and social repression (Arias and Pulham, 2009: 59). Nina Auerbach has provided an interesting analysis about Victorian ghost stories, affirming that Victorian writers attributed a great importance to the supernatural

because they were conscious of the power of the dead. She also described the Victorian ghost as “a monument to memory, displaying itself as the unburied past, baring its wounds, intoning its admonitions to a world that tries to forget” (Auerbach, 1990: 48).

Taking this definition as point of departure, it could be affirmed that ghosts are linked to individuals’ pasts and memories, and thus, that these reminders of the supernatural can forward the connection with, or can be manifestations of, unresolved traumatic experiences. They return among us after a period called “latency” in Freud’s own words. Whereas phantoms manifest after death, traumatic symptoms usually follow disturbing experiences. Freud coined the term “latency” to refer to the space of time compressed between the trauma event and the appearance of the first symptom. This period entails the processes of forgetting and remembering after traumas take place. Caruth emphasises the role played by the unconscious during the traumatic event, asserting that victims of trauma realise that they are hurt only after a lapse of time:

> The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is experienced at all. And it is this inherent latency of the event that paradoxically explains the peculiar, temporal structure, the belatedness, of historical experience: since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place and in another time. (Caruth, 1995: 8)

Furthermore, individuals face ghosts and traumatic symptoms unprepared, since they are not predisposed to them. As symptoms do, the figure of the spectre also acts in unpredictable ways, even as the span of the latency period is concerned. In reference to trauma, Caruth claims that this randomness is due to the very ignorance of their existence. Thus, spectres and symptoms haunt the individual at present proving that some

episodes of their past are not over. They are also attempts to communicate with the present. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine's ghost at the novel's opening asks for admittance into the house, revealing her desires to turn back to her family home: "'[L]et me in—let me in! (…) I come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!'" (Brontë, 1994: 36).

In *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Jacques Derrida proposes that ghosts must be listened to. Derrida provides a deep analysis of Marxism supported by his interpretation of *Hamlet*. He refers to scholars (taking Horatio in Shakespeare's work as an example) as learned individuals that are not believers in ghosts and encourage them to remain open to supernatural encounters: "He [the scholar] should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with it, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech" (1994: 176). In this sense, it could be argued that Lockwood might play the scholar's role in *Wuthering Heights*, as he narrates his encounter with Catherine's ghost as a dream, and justifies his vision as a result of the stories he had read before falling asleep. Although he seems reluctant to believe what he sees, he admits that it was a strange dream in which the ghost appears as Catherine Linton, in spite that he had read the name of Earnshaw more often. Initially, Lockwood is not interested in Catherine's phantom, since it is not related to his past. However, Heathcliff reacts to Lockwood's description of the ghostly presence he has encountered. He does not doubt the veracity of Lockwood's dream and begs Catherine's spirit to appear again (Brontë, 1994: 39).

Apart from this ghostly encounter, *Wuthering Heights* is full of references to haunting. Just before her death, Catherine affirms in the midst of anguish, that her room is haunted. She also talks about her coming death and claims that she will never rest in peace, anticipating Heathcliff's curse. Heathcliff is utterly desperate after Catherine's death and addresses her ghost, demanding to be haunted:

> 'Oh! You said you care nothing for my sufferings! 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! The murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe.' (Brontë, 1994: 148)

Not till the end of his life will Heathcliff achieve his goal, however. At this time, after spending one night out of his house, Heathcliff returns as someone different. Accordingly, he acts as a man with a vision, most probably of Catherine's ghost:

> He took his knife and fork, and was going to commence eating, when the inclination appeared to become suddenly extinct. He laid them on the table, looked eagerly towards the window, then rose and went out. We saw him walking to and fro in the garden while we concluded our meal. (Brontë, 1994: 271)

His last days seem to be spent among phantom presences rather than human beings. Even Nelly portrays Heathcliff's physical transformation giving him the appearance of a ghost (1994: 273-274).

The motif of the ghost pervades *Wuthering Heights* and contributes to its circular structure. If the story began with Lockwood's description of his ghostly encounter, Nelly Dean reinforces the Gothic atmosphere of the novel by explaining how two phantom figures, most probably those of Catherine and Heathcliff, have been seen after their deaths:

> 'But the country folk, if you ask them, would swear on the Bible, that he walks: there are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor, and even in this house. Idle tales, you'll say, and so say I. Yet that old man by the kitchen fire affirms he has seen two on'em, looking out of his chamber window.' (Brontë, 1994: 278)

Turned into ghosts, Catherine and Heathcliff have managed to reconcile with their unresolved past, and seem to have returned to the time of their childhood.

7. CONCLUSION

As we have seen along this essay, Trauma Studies benefit from different disciplines, among which literature stands out. Thus, I have tackled on the uses of memory, the characters' personality and the supernatural to offer a reading of Emily Brontë's novel from the perspective of trauma. The interpretation of literature, like trauma, is not fixed, but endlessly open and alive. In addition to this, we have also seen that Freud supported his studies on trauma using literary sources. Nowadays, we should also consider trauma theories when it comes to analysing literary works, and more specific when dealing with novels like Emily's *Wuthering Heights* in which the characters present troubled states which may be not fully understood by readers.

Trauma Studies propose a great basis for the novel's analysis since the fact of considering Wuthering Heights' protagonists as victims of trauma allows readers to find some sort of justification for their unsettling acts. In this sense, Heathcliff's torment or Catherine's despair can be interpreted as corresponding reactions to experiences of trauma. Thereby, Heathcliff, who has been seen as an evil creature, or Catherine who appeared to be selfish and shallow, can now be seen as victims of their past experiences using the lens of trauma. Far from being a hindrance to a clinical or psychoanalytic approach to trauma, literature becomes a valid tool for interpretation.

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