

The Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale  
Compared and Converted.  
A Deconstruction of Gendered Archetypes, Illustrated in  
Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

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# **The Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale Compared and Converted. A Deconstruction of Gendered Archetypes, Illustrated in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.**

## **I. Introduction**

In 1847 an excessively violent novel shocked the Victorian literary scene with its realistic portrayal of extraordinary, even supernatural characters. The most severe consternation, however, followed three years later, when the public discovered that the author of the amoral novel was not Ellis Bell, but a self-sufficient woman who hid behind the penname: Emily Brontë. It is not strange that *Wuthering Heights* raised such controversy since both its characters and its creator “do not conform to any recognizable set of social values or follow any conventional code” (Almeida 49). Indeed, if public discourse is supposed to convey social rules, *Wuthering Heights* falls short in its plight. As an essential part of general discourse, literature is one of the instruments that forces society's subjects in certain positions. Western rhetoric, that has always been phallogentric, thus presents independent men and compliant women as respectable ideals, while passive fellows and destructive temptresses are the antipodes of the age's quintessential protagonists. Brontë's female heroines, however, are respected, self-sufficient women, while Heathcliff is an uncultivated brute. Moreover, if the directors of public discourse have the authority to proclaim conventional morality, those administrators should not be female in the indisputable patriarchy that is the Victorian society. Controversial as Brontë's transgressions might be, her challenge of repressive norms has always fascinated readers and critics alike. That fascination can easily be traced to her insight in the mechanisms of public discourse and her subtle manipulations to use them to her advantage. Brontë turns to the most famous literary types, staging a Byronic Hero and a Femme Fatale, and interchanges their genders so shrewdly that their onlookers are both appalled and enthralled by the strangely familiar personae.

Considering that literary archetypes bolster the coercive force of social rules, the normative Byronic Hero and Femme Fatale are contrasting figures in a moral design, the first an awe-invoking ideal, the latter a threat to avoid at all costs. The social relevance of the fictitious models has been the focus of several analyses that assess their origin and effects (Thorslev 1965; Praz 1970; Stott 1992; Hales 1996). Certainly, the Byronic Hero and Femme Fatale have been contrasted, but this comparison has only received secondary attention and has never been systematically persisted. Thus far, it has only been evaluated from a

conventional patriarchal viewpoint that lays responsibility for general decline with the destructive Femme Fatale to ascertain the Hero's innocence. In their scapegoating, these studies focus on the chronological relation between the influential types: it is widely accepted that the Femme Fatale supplants the Byronic Hero as the dominant literary type from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, when the British Empire crumbles and its Romantic discourse is gradually replaced by a discourse of protection. Seeing that previous studies exclusively focus on the conventional, opposite roles of these figures, this thesis fills an important want in the study of literary types by deconstructing the relationship between discourse and its archetypes. Comparing fictional figures I try to account for the awe-invoking image of the Byronic Hero and the forceful rejection of his seductive female counterpart, the Femme Fatale. With that aim, I match up the cardinal theories on both the Byronic Hero (Praz; Thorslev) and the Femme Fatale (Praz; Stott) to Judith Butler's deconstructivism as presented in *Bodies That Matter* (1993). In order to explain the subversive potential of excluded individuals, so called *abjects*, Butler dismantles the structure of the ruling system. She proves that every paradigm always expels several groups. Indeed, it is inevitable, even necessary for the identification of individuals. While Butler describes the tensions between the forcible gender system (the *heterosexual matrix*) and the non-heterosexual abject, I evaluate the discrepancy between accepted male self-reliance (conventional patriarchy) and unacceptable female autonomy; a contrast that is embodied by the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale, and exposed, even subverted in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>1</sup>

To unveil the repressive quality of naturalised norms, chapter II of this thesis illustrates the way in which constructions determine identification. First, I clarify Butler's gender deconstructivism which explains that every matrix utilises fictional constructs to force its subjects into acceptable identifications that secure social stability. Butler underpins her theory with theorems of acclaimed scholars. It is rather remarkable that she does not name J.S. Austin in her theory, while she unmistakably adopts his insights: the linguistic concept of *performativity* that he introduces in his *Speech Act Theory* is the basis of Butler's interpretation of gender as a performative citation practice. She does, however, incorporate Austin's ideas through the interpretations of Jacques Lacan who understands performativity in a broader sense than the speech act and emphasises the importance of repetition. Having illustrated that performativity determines identification, I illuminate the psychoanalytical dimension that supports Butler's deconstructivism. Next, I disclose the discursive

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, all citations from *Wuthering Heights* are taken from the 2009 Oxford World Classics edition: Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*. Ed. Ian Jack. New York: Oxford, 2009.

mechanisms behind the literary archetypes that direct social identification. This deconstruction unveils that the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale share many features. Still, the latter is regarded with suspicion and hostility, while the Hero is accepted, if not admired and adored. The most decisive factor in these representations is patriarchal discourse that denies its Femme Fatale a voice in order to keep subjects from sympathising, let alone identifying with her. Finally, I illustrate the artificiality of the gender distinction in an analysis of Emily Brontë's writer persona and her *Wuthering Heights*. She creates female heroines who meet the description of the Byronic Hero, while Heathcliff is constructed as the renowned Femme Fatale. As Emily Brontë is cautious not to repel her readers, she rather subtly confronts them with alternative systems and positions. As a result, the gender reversal of her protagonists often remains unnoticed. Indeed, literary criticism frequently describes Heathcliff as a Byronic Hero, while the manipulative Catherine is characterised as a Femme Fatale. These interpretations actually affirm the similarities between the eccentric archetypes. Recurring as they might be, these claims are always brief and often accompanied by a nuance that proves their very inefficiency (Almeida; Small). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar come closest to the character analysis presented in this thesis: while Catherine's actions are described as "Byronic", Heathcliff is called "female in his monstrosity" (293). However innovating these findings might be, they fail to address the consistent subversion of gendered literary figures. Despite, or maybe because of, the unfathomable character of Emily Brontë's protagonists, no study has entirely dedicated itself to the subject before; a void that this thesis aims to fill.

Once the manipulative mechanisms of discourse are uncovered, we understand that the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale are constructions that impose patriarchal norms onto their onlookers. Nevertheless, the contrasting types share their most important features: both are attractive, mysterious figures that are regarded with suspicion and fascination, be it to different degrees. The melancholic air that they convey must thus be triggered by similar sentiments, which the repressive matrix compels them to repress. Haunted with a sense of loss, eccentric individuals might decide to try and retrieve what they are forced to reject. These rebels then are assigned an abject term to obstruct their threat to social stability. It is this abject insurrection that forms the focus of chapter III. First, I explicate Butler's description of a successful subversion as theorised in the final chapter of *Bodies That Matter* "Critically Queer" (181-223). Seeing that abjects do not necessarily disrupt the matrix, they are only potentially subversive. To realise that potential they cannot simply reject the repressive norms of the matrix; rather, abjects should hyperbolically imitate the habits of the



governing paradigm to denaturalise these norms and re-direct the matrix towards accepting new values. This re-direction can only be effectuated if abjects acknowledge the bounds to their suppressors as well as their own limits. Having elucidated the conditions for abject resistance, I compare the revolution of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale. These figures are constructed for a certain purpose, but they exceed their authors' intentions and hyperbolically imitate the matrix's norms in order to problematize these stringent demands. It is their divergent acknowledgment of the conditions of subversion that accounts for the different result of their rebellion and, ultimately, strengthens their image: while the Hero adheres to both and thus manages to re-direct the matrix towards more individual self-reliance, the Femme Fatale discards the limits of self-assertion and is even sterner repelled. As discourse affects types and these types rebel against the matrix, they, in their turn, affect discourse and its stories. The plot of every story that stages dangerous lovers is therefore affected by its characters' rebellion. This is certainly true for Emily Brontë's controversial *Wuthering Heights*. In the closing section of this thesis, I unveil Brontë's own rebellion and that of her protagonists. Adopting a male pseudonym, constructing a female Byronic Hero and a male Femme Fatale and, finally, even utilising the narrative structure to denaturalise patriarchal norms, Emily Brontë disrupts literary conventions to awaken self-assertive impulses, particularly of the female members of society. A literary rebellion with extra-literary effects.

## II. The Construction of Identity: Oppressed Agency in Ideological Stability

Considering that literary figures are invariably rooted in public discourse, they embody and assess the spirit of their age. If we want to understand the social relevance of literary figures, we must gain insight in the ways in which society forms and controls its subjects. According to Judith Butler, these individuals do not have total control over their identity as they are inevitably bound to governing norms. In the first section of this chapter, I illuminate her deconstructionist theory that describes the assumption of a sex and gender as just one aspect of identification. In doing so, Butler stresses that there is no essential difference between gender and sex. The latter is not a naturally given entity onto which gender is projected as a cultural construction. Rather, sexualised, materialised bodies are, to a certain degree, formed by regularizing norms that enforce specific identifications. To make those compulsory identifications even more palpable, they are often epitomised by literary figures. The second part of this chapter will explain how the Byronic Hero embodies the self-sufficient ideal that nineteenth-century subjects should pursue, while the Femme Fatale is the personification of the utterly unacceptable. Finally, I will demonstrate that Emily Brontë assumes an accepted persona to write her influential *Wuthering Heights* and to create characters that coax her readers into assuming a certain identity.

### 1. Butler's Deconstructionist Gender Theory: Oppressed Agency

#### *1.1. Performativity as an Instrument for Materialisation and Identification*<sup>2</sup>

To comprehend the unsurpassable influence of discourse over its subjects, we have to understand who those subjects are, that is, we must know which bodies matter. Rather than a surface onto which meaning is imposed, Butler defines matter as a process. Indeed, *matter* can be construed as a “process of materialisation that stabilises over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (Butler 9). To strengthen this claim, Butler refers to Foucault's definition of sex as a regulatory ideal that is compulsorily materialised in keeping with regularizing norms which all bodies try to approximate as closely as possible in their efforts to assume an identity. Consequently, imposed identification possibilities spontaneously materialise. This automatism can be compared to the well-known ultrasonography procedure: even before a child is born, its sex, a part of its identity, is

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<sup>2</sup> Butler's deconstructionism proves that materialisation is always accompanied by a signifying procedure. We therefore treat materialisation and identification as overlapping processes.

imposed upon it as familiar authorities nominate it “boy” or “girl”. Such interpellations orchestrate, demarcate and sustain what is accepted as “human”. Every creature that does not conform to these norms, and therefore cannot be named adequately, is regarded with suspicion as far as its “humanness” is concerned. The force that determines this humanness is, however, not truly animate, let alone human, itself (Butler 8-10). Butler’s deconstructivism renounces the structuralist understanding of materialisation as misconceptions of Foucault’s construction theory. To the French post-structuralist, construction is a process of reiteration in which both the subject and the repetitive deed come into being. In fact, there is no power that acts, but only a repeated action that can be interpreted as “power” in its persistence. Hence, power is not personified as an actor.<sup>3</sup> Since that which we consider human comes into being through interpellations and attributions, Butler terms the materialisation process performative.

While the subject in a specific matrix does not act consciously and even the matrix that controls that subject is not a personified force, materialisation and identification can hardly be grasped without the notion of *agency*. Butler therefore treats these processes as a practice in which the agent is a forced subject, submitted to the system. The assumption of a sex, for example, is always forced by a regulatory apparatus which produces certain sexes. Consequently, agency originates only through and within that regulating system: one can only form and assume a sexualised body by following a series of actions that are mobilised by a certain law.<sup>4</sup> Since the subject comes into being through this performative procedure, the assumption of sex is comparable to a *speech act*.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, following Lacan, Butler defines performativity as a discursive practice that determines and produces that which it names, but, contrary to what the term speech act suggests, performativity is not a singular act (12). The essence of performative materialisation and identification is the repetition of norms. Seeing that the assumption of sex is a discursive practice, performativity can be interpreted as a citation process that iterates norms. That repetition has two important effects. First, through the process of repetition, certain sexes are produced, stabilised and ultimately naturalised. Evidently, we can only refer to extra-discursive objects if they are demarcated in advance. To

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<sup>3</sup> Butler’s genderdeconstructivism is a rectification of essentialist and constructivist ideas. The deconstructivist interpretation of the authoritative force in the materialisation process is the first revision of preceding theories. Secondly, contrary to constructivist claims, the body in Butler’s theory is an inherent part of the material domain. Still, that materiality is not given, as essentialism assumes, but is bound to a series of regularising norms in a governing matrix. As a result, a subject comes into being *within* that matrix, rather than as an act of human expression or a conscious appropriation. Butler thus provides a solution for the disagreement between essentialism and constructivism concerning materialisation: while constructivism disregards the reality of bodies and essentialism assumes an already existing subject that precedes the materialisation process, Butler’s individual originates within that process, not as a cause or a consequent of it.

<sup>4</sup> These actions are ‘mobilised’ by the law because they do not necessarily correspond with that law’s prescribed norms. I will disclose this issue further in this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> That notion of performativity is derived from Austin’s *Speech Act Theory*, a subfield of pragmatics that explains the link between language and materiality (Austin).

refer to a body is therefore always a further formation of that body. In this light, an inevitable signifying practice delimits that which it refers to. In addition, this demarcation follows the principle of selection. Because of the naturalising effect of repetition, that demarcation constitutes a normative force that hides the selection on which it depends. Finally, this covert exclusion determines the aspects that will be incorporated within the limits of *identity*. This immediately introduces the second effect of repetition: in repeating prescribed norms, *instabilities* emerge that do not conform to those criteria. These excluded identities form the constitutive outside of the system. Indeed, that exterior indicates the boundaries of construction and is therefore no ontological “there-ness” (Butler 8). It is no absolute outside, but can only exist in relation to the inside.

Since both sex and gender are constructed along the lines of certain prescriptions, and subjects identify with these constructions, identification is clearly aligned with materialisation. Identification is the assimilating force through which an *ego* originates, rather than an imitation through which a conscious being fashions itself. The ego that occurs in that identification process is first and foremost corporal (Freud 1989, 12).<sup>6</sup> Consequently, that ego is the projection of outer appearances and therefore an “imaginary morphology” (Butler 49).<sup>7</sup> Since every citation is essential to the identification process and that identification is essentially a bodily concept, the materialised body should be interpreted as a performative citation practice. Lacan states that what is repeated, which he calls the *symbolic law*, has a semi-autonomous status that already exists before a subject assumes its sexualised position in the system (Lacan, cited by Butler 14). This law, which corresponds to Butler’s *matrix*, proposes normative positions of sex that are only known in their approximation. In other words, individuals can only know which sexes are possible by witnessing approximated possibilities in real, always imperfect, bodies. Hence, the compulsory force of the norms depends on the approximation of those demands, the actual bodies, on the one hand and on the citation of the law on the other hand. This identification theory suggests that the law is produced (through citation) as that which precedes and transcends the approximations of its norms by the subject. The force that is assigned to a preceding, ideal power is thus derived from that attribution itself. This circular reasoning proves that the symbolic law is not a

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<sup>6</sup> When defining the ego, I, like Butler, must turn to Freud’s *The Ego and the Id*. Even if Freud’s psychoanalysis is increasingly being adjusted to contemporary theories, his premises invariably form the basis for all theorems or hypotheses that are concerned with the individual (sub)conscious and its relation to larger social structures.

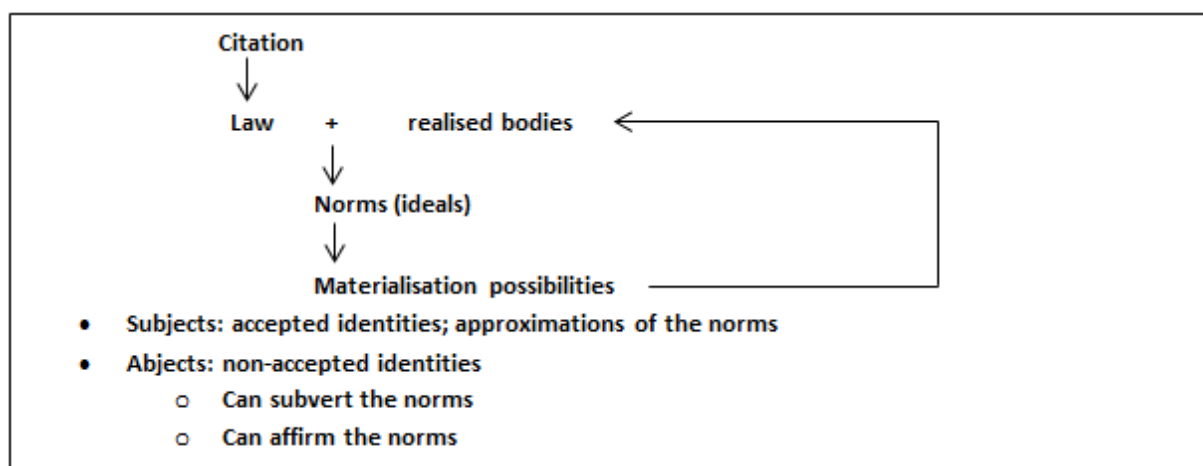
<sup>7</sup> This term can be interpreted in two ways. In the first place, it can be used to mean ‘imaginary form’. In that case, the imaginary body shapes the ego. That body is imaginative since the prescribed norms are ideal and unattainable. Secondly, *imaginary morphology* can be interpreted as ‘morphology that belongs to the imaginary domain, not to reality. That is the case because in addition to materialised possibilities, the possibilities that are not realised are also taken into account.

separate ontology that precedes its citation and concretisation. Nevertheless, the law compels subjected individuals to assume a position that approximates its norms. As the regulating system depends on its subjects, which it simultaneously forces in particular positions, Butler redefines the symbolic as a series of normative orders that instigate the limits of identity. That demarcation occurs by threatening subjects with what is not accepted: the abject position.<sup>8</sup> What I earlier indicated as an effect of repetition thus also serves as a means of identification: through delimitating the materiality of sex, the symbolic law simultaneously produces a domain of “excluded and delegitimated sex” (Butler 16). This account unmistakably illustrates Lacan’s *paradox of subjectivation* which posits that “the [individual] who would resist the norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms” (Lacan, cited by Butler 15). Deviant individuals therefore both support the regularizing system (by citing “how not to identify”) and hold the potential to dislocate it:

Hence, it [is] (...) important (...) to ask after how bodies which fail to materialise provide the necessary “outside”, if not the necessary support, for the bodies which, in materializing the norm, qualify as bodies that matter (Butler 16).

I visualised the mutual dependency of the system, the norms and their approximated materialisation in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Materialisation Scheme**



<sup>8</sup> To Butler, the abject is, like the subject, not an actual being. As such, Butler's definition parallels the abject as defined by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror* (1982): it is the antipode of the superego (the unachievable subject norm), stringently jettisoned, whereas the counterpart of the ego (the materialised position) is called the object. Nevertheless, considering that Butler's abject is an imaginary form, it is both object (materialised) and Kristeva's abject (psychic figure). In this light, I use Butler's term as a necessary nuance of the psychoanalytic concept of the Other: unacceptable aspects of the Self that must be repressed and are projected onto a psychic figure (see also chapter III 1.2.). When used in this meaning, that is, the approximate materialisation of the unacceptable, *Abject* will from hereafter be written with a capital. The same holds true for *Subject* when used as imaginary form.

### 1.2. *Psychoanalysis as motivation for identification*

Since there is a correlation between symbolic norms and bodies that make those norms palpable, we are inclined to ask what those norms and bodies look like. I already indicated that the boundaries of “sex” are established by threatening potential subjects with what is not accepted. Butler then emphasises that the performativity of identity is impossible without limits of what can be constructed, so-called *constraints* (Butler 93-120). In this light, living creatures are not only controlled by what is taboo or forbidden, they are also constructed by the symbolic law and its interdictions. Lacan posits that identification is merely accepting a symbolical position under the pressure of an impending punishment. The force of that threat relies on sexual desires that are caused by prohibition: the individual realises that something is denied to him and longs for the *full pleasure* that precedes the arrival of the law. The return to imaginary “abundance” effectuates a *psychosis* in the desiring individual (Butler 98). To Butler, that psychosis entails the risk of losing the status of a subject as well as the frightening idea of being subjected to a censor. Consequently, the psychotic individual knows that he must incessantly negotiate between the yearning for safety and the desire for freedom. As desire and psychosis are thus effects of constraints, they ultimately determine identification. Hence, the assumption of sex is both motivated by the desire for prohibited pleasure and the threat of a punishment that would accompany that satisfaction. Lacan names that threat the *Name of the Father*, that “determines appropriate kinship relations which include appropriate and mutually exclusive lines of identification and desire” (Lacan, cited by Butler 100).<sup>9</sup> If the Name of the Father exceeds the desire for the forbidden, we desire someone who keeps us from desiring the punishable, even though we deny ourselves part of full pleasure in doing so. In addition, this law can govern identification in another way: we can generate certain identifications and enlarge sympathetic connection, precisely to install dis-identification with a penal position. The Name of the Father illustrates that identifications may either be vehicles for desire or ward off certain desires to facilitate acceptable longings. Consequently, identification can be defined as the place in which prohibition and deviance, punishment and desire, are constantly negotiated. Since identification is negotiation, Butler states that identifications are inevitably plural and contestable. Indeed, they follow the logic of *iterability*:

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<sup>9</sup> In accordance with that law, to put it simply, a girl will always long for a man who resembles her father, whereas a boy will desire a woman in whom he recognises his mother.

Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshaled, consolidated, retrenched, contested, and on occasion, compelled to give way (Butler 105).

In order to illustrate how constraints force individuals in a male or female position, Lacan applies his identification theory to the well-known Oedipus scenario. In his essay “The Signification of the Phallus”, Lacan posits that humanity shapes its identity under forcible pressure of threats (575-578). In the Oedipus myth, the impending punishment is castration. In fact, the fear of castration is the primary motivation to obtain the male sex. Hence, the female position that the symbolic law presents as “castrated” is the embodiment of the punishment: it must affirm the male sex in its concretisation of the threat. Obviously, the assumption of the female position becomes problematic: if the punishment (that dictates identification) is castration and the symbolic law characterises the female as “castrated”, how can an individual then be threatened and forced to take on the female position? There has to be another punishment for the individual who does not succeed in the approximation of the symbolic constellation of femininity. If a body fails to submit to castration, it will not succeed in its necessary identification with the castrated mother and, therefore, will not be able to affirm the position of the father. While individuals are impelled to assume the male position through a threat of degradation towards feminine castration, the female position is imposed through the threat of the “monstrous ascend into phallicism”, typified by the phallic mother who is always destructive (Lacan, cited by Butler 103). According to Lacan, these retributions imply two abject positions that embody their punishment and, doing so, coerce the assumption of a subject position: the masculine lesbian or *phallicised dyke* on the one hand and the feminine homosexual or *feminised fag* on the other hand. Nevertheless, Butler declares that there are infinitely more abject figures than merely the opposite versions of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. The binarisme “feminised male homosexuality - masculinised female homosexuality” is itself an instrument to install the boundaries of the symbolic realm (Butler 104). The symbolic law produces that restrictive spectre as the threatening outside in order to legitimise and secure its own hegemony.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, public discourse creates dichotomies like that between the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale to secure its stability.

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<sup>10</sup> In fact, abject figures are complex crossings of identification and desire that transcend and contest the symbolic law’s binary frame. The complexity of the abject position is evident from its function as a threat: if we define the primary threat, castration, as ‘the lack of phallus’, we can infer that the essence of the punishment is the phallus itself. That phallus can commit several transgressions. It can be absent in male positions and present in female positions, but it can just as easily be an indifferent or diminished structuring principle of sexual exchange.

## 2. The Construction of Literary Types: Manipulating Discourse

Dealing with well-known literary figures, it is important to delimit the scope of the analysis presented here. Both the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale stem from a long line of ancestors that influenced them before they came to prominence in a literary and historical context that was fit for them. Even when their dominion over (literary) discourse diminished, they retained a considerable grip on literature as authors revived these figures and moulded them to fit infinitely new world views. Certainly, I do not wish to present the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale merely as characters in certain oeuvres, but as literary types. Especially in the case of the Byronic Hero, one runs the risk of reducing the type to the characters presented by the literary godfather that named it. With that understanding Thorslev makes a distinction between the precursors of the Byronic Hero, the Hero's development in Byron's work, and, finally, the Byronic Hero in the Romantic tradition (10-12). Thorslev thus acknowledges the inevitable influence of preceding literary figures and avoids the lapsus of conflating the controversial character with its namesake. Similarly, I aspire to present an accurate description of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale, taking the historical and literary context in which they flourished into account. I will illustrate the features of the Byronic Hero before moving on to a detailed description of the Femme Fatale. This sequence not only reflects the chronological succession of the respective figures' pinnacle moments, the insights gained from the description of the Byronic Hero are also invaluable for a better comprehension of the Femme Fatale.

### *2.1. The Byronic Hero: Titanic Individualism*

If not solely famous as the imaginative counterpart of his alleged "inventor" Lord Byron, the Byronic Hero is predominantly known as the epitome of the Romantic Movement. Indeed, Mario Praz the champion of Romanticism provides a detailed (though rather incoherent) description of the Byronic Hero: he is a self-sufficient individual, an attractive aristocrat who stands alone in society, a fallen angel, lamenting his loss through endless wandering and smothering those who cross his way (53-84). Considering the extra-literary context in which the Byronic archetype revelled, it is not startling that an egocentric character is the protagonist of most literary works. Evidently, as enlightened values proved deficient, common sense and rationality being unable to install the age of egalitarianism and progress they heralded, the British Empire needed new ideals to support and legitimise its worldwide hegemony. Public discourse propagated the opposite values of the fading age: conformism made way for individualism, modest reason and common sense for experience and learning, and



acquiescence was substituted for heroism and hubris. An age that is losing long-fixed values loses its belief in an ultimate moral order. Consequently, it needs an unlimited trust in humanity, more specifically in its most righteous members. It is the Byronic Hero who is made fit for the task: he is presented as a fusion of preceding protagonists' respectable features along with eccentric characteristics of previous villains, emphasising the newly valued sceptical self-assurance. As the Byronic Hero safeguards the "sense of largeness and importance of man's role in the universe" he embodies the ideal Man whose norms nineteenth-century Subjects should pursue, even if they will only be able to approximate them (Thorslev 123). In this light, it comes as no surprise that the literary embodiment of attractive self-sufficiency and scepticism predominates the Romantic era.

Individualism undeniably lies "at the heart" of the Romantic Movement as a "key characteristic that is the reason for its preoccupation with the heroic" (Thorslev 17). It is this heroism that distinguishes the Byronic Hero from his precursors: rather than being a mere conglomerate of his literary antecedents, the Byronic Hero is an identifiable rebel who stands tall in a hostile society. First, the pre-Romantic types that influence him are no individualistic rebels, even if they are set apart from civilisation. This is undeniably true for the Child of Nature and Hero of Sensibility; even the Gothic Villain never appeals to the sympathy of his readers who are convinced that he was justly expelled from a moral society. The Romantic Heroes then, that made their mark on the Byronic seducer, were sympathizable rebels, but it is the Byronic Hero who humanises that revolution. Indeed, Faust, Cain, Ahasuerus, Satan and Prometheus are self-reliant characters who defy a higher force and thus symbolise the human condition, but they are not essentially human. The Byronic Hero is to the nineteenth-century readers an admirable character who symbolises their fantasies of eccentric, yet sympathizable self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, while the Byronic Hero makes the anarchistic outlaw human, he remains an eccentric human being, rather than an ordinary man. He owes some of these remarkable extra-human qualities to the types that preceded him. From the Childe of Nature and the Hero of Sensibility, the Byronic Hero takes his solitary musings and the ability to be comforted by nature. Nature, however, does not ease all pain since the Hero falls victim to his grim self-analysis. His solitary retreat in nature certainly fuels his narcissism that seems to originate from extraordinary sensitivity. According to Thorslev, the Byronic Hero's egocentrism is even increased by his "psychic malady of Weltschmerz":

[Weltschmerz is] the tension in his personality that results from the conflict of two contradictory drives, one toward total commitment, toward loss of self in a vision of absolutes, the other toward a sceptical and even aggressive assertion of self in a world which remains external and even alien (Thorslev 141).

Thorslev's definition of Weltschmerz not only reminds us of the ceaseless negotiation between interiority and appearance in Butler's materialisation process, a parallel I will revisit in chapter III, it also emphasises the increasing importance of individualism and scepticism as the primary values of the Romantic age.

As features that were previously perceived as a vice are now highly valued, the Byronic Hero is both distrusted, prioritising new values over petrified conventions, and regarded with awe as he courageously rebels against barren absolutes. Surprisingly, Thorslev is convinced that the Byronic Hero's inner duality remained unnoticed by the leading theorist of Romanticism. Thorslev accuses Mario Praz of making three inexcusable errors: first, Praz would claim that the Byronic Hero descends from Milton's Satan, through Mrs. Radcliffe's Gothic Villains; secondly, he describes the Byronic Hero as a fatal and cruel lover and, finally, the originator of the nineteenth-century vampire tradition (Thorslev 7-10). As far as Praz' third "mistake" is concerned, I think it is Thorslev who falls short. Indeed, Praz does not pretend to portray the Byronic Hero as a true vampire. Instead, he emphasises the ghostly, close-to-death, haunting charm and thus the *im-material* nature of the Byronic Hero who avoids the inevitable incompleteness of materialised subject positions.<sup>11</sup> Regarding Praz' first points, Thorslev claims that the Italian scholar disregards the fact that the Byronic Hero "is courteous toward women, has a strong sense of honour and a deep sense of guilt" (8). It is true that Praz stresses the destructive quality of the Byronic Hero and the joy he derives from it, but the champion of Romanticism also makes reference to "a troubled conscience with remorse" (Praz 61).<sup>12</sup> The Hero unquestionably does display remorse and even accentuates his haunted mind and melancholia. He carries the mark of a troubled mind as he bears a heavy brow, a ghostly pallor and, above all, piercing eyes. In addition, he often paces back and forth, roams through desolate landscapes, sets forth on long journeys to exotic places. Consequently, the Byronic Hero seems haunted with guilt, knowing his penal self-reliance (the acceptance of identification possibilities that the symbolic law forbids) cannot remain unpunished. It is

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<sup>11</sup> This feature of the dangerous lover, the Byronic Hero as well as the Femme Fatale, will prove to be crucial for the plot and theme of the story they dominate. I will illustrate this in the next chapter.

<sup>12</sup> Certainly, Praz does not assign this remorseful conscious directly to the Byronic Hero, but to Mrs. Radcliffe's Schedoni. Even so, as Praz sees a straightforward line of succession from the Gothic Villain to the Byronic Hero, he indirectly acknowledges the latter's sense of guilt and moral ambiguity.

this show of guilt along with showy courtesy that persuade society to redeem the Byronic Hero for his hubris. Even Thorslev, who claims that the Byronic archetype is essentially courteous, admits that the influential character mixes remorse with defiance for, like the Gothic Villains', the Byronic Hero's penitence is but a disguise (151). It is exactly that theatricality that raises the readers' sympathy for a character that defies their obsolete values: as the Byronic Hero excessively displays remorse and hyperbolically follows social conventions, he introduces an ideological shift, while coercing an unfaltering aristocratic position. Indeed, while the Hero often occurs as a man with an unknown lineage, he is invariably "expected to be of exalted birth" (Praz 61). In fact, the Hero's disguised defiance fuels the mystery that typically accompanies his character. This mystery does not substantially threaten the stability of the matrix, the nineteenth-century society, but heralds the welcoming of new values. Consequently, the Romantic key figure is admired, even if he defies fixed doctrines. In this light, the Byronic Hero can be identified as an individual who is introduced as an *Subject* and conquers an acceptable *subject* position. I will clarify the Hero's strategy for this particular rebellion in the next chapter, but before we can understand revolutions of literary figures, we need to have an accurate conception of the matrix in which they function.

Self-assurance, the defence of "essential dignity and (...) chosen values in (...) an alien universe", is a constant in the characterisation of the Byronic Hero, even if the nature of that universe starts to change (Thorslev 118). Consequently, this crucial defiance is the expression of a ceaseless rebellion "against orthodoxy of all kind" (Thorslev 183). It is a rebellion in vain as the Byronic Hero must constantly emphasise new values in the face of a suppressive matrix that never stops changing. The endless flux of the matrix is caused by its very mechanisms, that is, the individual's forced repetitive, yet always imperfect materialisation of the matrix's norms. The heroic defiance is thus compulsory to assume an identity but can never entirely be controlled. As a result, the Byronic Hero is not a fatalist, but a self-assertive rebel in the face of a fatalistic society that can never be fully dismantled.<sup>13</sup> As the Romantic age progresses, the fatalistic quality of society becomes undeniable: while the enlightened eighteenth century substituted religious orthodoxy and divine Absolutes for Deism that presented God as the transcendental architect of the laws of nature, nineteenth-century thinking dismisses this overruling designer altogether and propagates the belief that

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<sup>13</sup> This frightening self-assurance in the face of an uncompassionate society reflects Byron's adaption of the mythical Promethean defiance: a titanic sufferer, symbolising the individual man, who rebels against indifferent rulers as personifications of the naturalistic universe or Butler's governing matrix. In that defiance, the revolutionary appeals to 'a higher order' which Byron's Manfred significantly calls "Powers deeper still beyond", the "over-ruling Infinite", or "the Unknown" (Byron, cited by Thorslev 173).

man is governed by the indifferent and apathetic laws of nature. Even as fatal Nature runs its course, the Byronic Hero stands tall in the face of such an amoral (rather than moral or immoral) order.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, as strong as the confidence in humanitarian values is, the nineteenth-century Western society crumbles under the increasing emancipation of other civilisations and internal upheaval. As the hegemony of the Empire is increasingly threatened from the latter half of the nineteenth century onwards, a discourse of protection gradually replaces the self-assertive discourse of Romanticism and its heroes.

## 2.2. *The Femme Fatale: Scapegoat for Decay*

The evolution of nineteenth-century discourse and the succession of the Byronic Hero by the Femme Fatale as the primary literary figure has not passed unnoticed. Mario Praz, for example, remarks that in the first stages of Romanticism, the “Fatal Women” who were sporadically staged did not coin “an established type of Fatal Woman in the way that there is an established type of Byronic Hero” (201). Only in the second half of the nineteenth century does the Femme Fatale make an impression on popular culture large enough to be regarded as a literary type that matches and even replaces the Byronic Hero as the most important dangerous lover. While Praz acknowledges that this shift reflects “aspects of contemporary life”, rather than mere literary fads, he does not explicitly disclose the reasons for this substitution (216). It is Rebecca Stott who explains why the Fatal Woman becomes a dominant archetype in a society that feels increasingly threatened (1-51). In the latter part of the nineteenth century discourse is driven by fearful self-protection as the British Empire loses its hegemony over the world: European and the new American superpowers economically rise to the stake, colonial insurrection multiplies and minority groups in the Empire vigorously strive to emancipate which even causes internal turmoil. Consequently, the fear for a cultural backlash evokes a “scientific terminology for [expressing] widespread concerns about imperial, racial and moral decline” (Stott 18). This terminology gradually results in a “discourse of degeneration” that tries to ward off threats to the British’s supremacy by defining the degenerate entities. Since this rhetoric is established as the ultimate instrument to protect the system’s stability and respectability, it becomes a true “discourse of protection” (Stott 41). Moreover, the scientific delineation of abnormality is a means to demarcate and enforce prescriptive normality and morality. A terminology

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<sup>14</sup> The personification of Nature as an Absolute is an erroneous presentation of nineteenth-century discourse to give the hero and even the average man a sense of what they were fighting against. We should keep in mind that there is no personified power which governs materialisation and signification. There is only a matrix that relies on the ceaseless (and only approximated) repetition of its norms for the materialisation of its subjects.

constructed to name elements that threaten cultural conventions undeniably reflects Butler's description of the symbolic law that relies on the Objects it simultaneously rejects and creates. Indeed, the Object becomes a frightening figure through which the Self is defined. Among others, *Woman* is one of the Objects onto which unacceptable identification possibilities are projected. It is in this protective rhetoric that the *Femme Fatale* makes her most profound impression on literature and general Western culture. She personifies the identification possibilities that ought to be rejected in a patriarchal society.

The construction of *Woman* as "abnormal" has always been inherent in Western metaphysics. Indeed, both philosophical and mythological discourse are structured along patriarchal lines. Since Western discourse is undeniably patriarchal it is often described as primarily "phallogocentric" (Derrida, cited by Stott 31).<sup>15</sup> Western thought, as any governing system, is sustained by binary oppositions that are not just arbitrarily set side by side; rather, they are hierarchical dichotomies in which the two terms are unequal, even though they are interdependent. As one is presented as reputable norm, the other is an indispensable example of what ought "not to be". When dealing with a patriarchal system, *Woman* is the necessary Object that enforces the superior position of *Man*. Since identification (even within the object group) is essentially based on binary structures, accepted femininity is imposed upon women by threatening them with its absolute opposite. In this threat, we unmistakably recognise Lacan's Name of the Father. From the Victorian age onwards, and still operative at the close of the nineteenth century, the binarism that governs the assumption of the female sex juxtaposes an ideal woman, typically referred to as "The Virgin" or "Angel" against a second type known as "The Whore". This opposition captures the ambiguous status of the necessary Object as a constitutive outside: the first type is accepted as inherent to the system (affirming the dominant male position) whereas the latter is rejected, exiled to the very edge of society as the embodiment of darkness and chaos.<sup>16</sup> This negative side of the binarism is the foundation of the *Femme Fatale* as a cultural type. Indeed, in literature, she often appears as a whore, but even if that is not the case, even when she is a wealthy courtesan or Oriental queen, she is described as a temptress who lures in innocent men with her irresistible (because transgressive) sexuality. I will explain the innocence that is typically assigned to her male victims as well as the foreign nature of the *Femme Fatale* later in this section. The aspect of

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<sup>15</sup> I have already illustrated that the phallus is the central structural notion on Lacan's psychoanalysis. This is of course only one example of the monumental significance of phallogocentrism for the most primary theories of Western culture.

<sup>16</sup> As the representation of evil, this second type can be traced back to religious myths and antiquity in which seductive evil is personified in Lilith, the Whore of Babylon or Medusa. Significantly, Mario Praz introduces the *Femme Fatale* only after he has dedicated a chapter in his lengthy essay to the antique temptress, Medusa (Praz 84-201).

seduction however, is immediately relevant as it affects the identification within the Woman-subject group. While the binary structure of the governing discourse might imply unambiguous boundaries, the juxtaposed identities are not clearly demarcated. The threat of punishment therefore increases: every Woman, even the most “Angelic” one, can fall to unacceptable baseness, epitomised by “The Whore”. Barbara Hales relies on this permeability to trace the origin of “Woman as a sexual criminal” (102-104). Again, she highlights that the scapegoating of women occurred first and foremost as those inferior citizens formed a peril for social stability. According to Hales, women evoked the sense of impending instability as they started to rally for their own rights in the years that form the transition from the nineteenth to twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Innovative biological and neurological discoveries were vigorously employed to set women apart from man. Indeed, at the turn of the century, the female brain is portrayed as animalistic, driven by instinct rather than rationality. Scientific, journalistic, juridical and even popular discourse repetitively remind women to perform their social roles, in order not to fall into the looming abyss of unacceptable womanhood. Nineteenth-century Western society is in other words convinced that every woman is a potential criminal who ought to repress her inborn cruelty to sustain stability of the system. The “prostitute”, as the criminologist Erich Wulffen states, “lies dormant in every woman – physiologically and psychologically” (Wulffen, cited by Hales 112). The permeability of the boundaries between respectable and criminal womanhood thus forcefully motivates women to obey social rules. This rhetoric is an evident example of Butler’s governing matrix, which repetitively reminds its Subjects of the punishments that accompanies unacceptable identifications.<sup>18</sup>

If the *Femme Fatale* personifies the threatening side of an already subject binarism, she embodies forbidden possibilities. First of all, the *Femme Fatale* is consistently linked to the exotic. Indeed, both women and racial outsiders are Subjects that function as the blank page onto which the matrix projects unacceptable identification possibilities. Even women, who are to some extent tolerated inside the system, are perceived as unknown. Since women are believed to “lack an ego”, they are “nothing, and therefore and only therefore [they] can

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<sup>17</sup> Actually, Hales presents a reductive view on the origins of women’s criminal status by only focussing on women’s emancipation and feminist rallies. The general fear of degeneration, caused by economic and cultural competition with other sovereignties and colonial upheaval, pervades the commonwealth earlier than the closing years of the nineteenth century. It is this fear that motivated to scapegoat women, along with other Subjects. Moreover, the secondary status of Woman has always been present in Western thought, which has, since the beginning, always been phallogocentric.

<sup>18</sup> As subjects are invariably told that they should keep unacceptable traits from ‘rushing to the surface’, the scientific and popular discourse implicitly acknowledges the repressive mechanisms of the symbolic law and the compulsory play between appearances and the unconscious in which threatening identification possibilities stir. I will extensively explain this process of repression in chapter III.

become everything” (Hales 102). Hence, in addition to barbarous tribes, disfigured individuals or social anomalies, women are Objects that general discourse reduces to the unacceptable aspect their name represents. Remarkably, as the Object group comprises the limits of the symbolic order, the members start to “share the disconcerting qualities of all frontiers” (Moi 127). Consequently, all Objects, even when they ultimately personify one specific taboo, start to carry certain connotations that are linked to other archetypes of unacceptability. When, for example, the Negro is described as a deviant identification possibility, an aspect of sexual deviance is always included. The black Woman is even more “strange” and dangerous than white women, even than the male Negro; the Femme Fatale, then, encompasses a “series of projected taboos”: when she is black, she simply represents the Western prejudices against black women, but even when she is white, she bears the qualities of “blackness” (Stott 42). In literature, the Femme Fatale comes from an unknown lineage, but unlike the Byronic Hero, she is not suspected to be of high birth. Even when she is a courtesan or a foreign princess, the emphasis is on her foreign mystery, rather than on her nobility. Accordingly, authors stage their Femme Fatale as “Bohémienne”, gypsy or “diabolical creole”. Of course, the conflation of Objects reflects the multiple anxieties of the accepted Subjects who try to demarcate the Self by projecting unacceptable qualities onto several Objects, who gradually become interchangeable. Hence, when the Femme Fatale is portrayed as an instinctive animal, she frequently has feline characteristics to represent the most sensual of animals and thus link bestiality to wanton sexuality. Equally important is the representation of dangerous women as serpents: a reference to the first temptation of Eve who caused the fall of Man. Indeed, the Femme Fatale is the epitome of the “bestial nature of human females” and “always the same type of unrestrained, cruel beauty” rather than the representation of moderate and civilised courtesy (Praz 268, 270). Finally, since the Femme Fatale encompasses characteristics of different Objects, she incorporates more possibilities than the symbolic law allows. This fullness accounts for the next characteristic typically assigned to her. She is often appointed mythical proportions in the sense that she seems to “incarnate in all ages and all lands” (Praz 219). The mythical status of the Femme Fatale endows her with a sense of immortality whereby she avoids normative materialisation. Accordingly, she frequently appears in literature as a vampire: a seductive lover who suspends materiality and is therefore open to all possibilities. As the vampire embodies immortality, she is both dead and alive and hence combines all possibilities in her *immateriality*. Indeed, in addition to the lust for life symbolised by the stereotypical drinking of blood, Praz highlights the deathlike qualities (like a pale skin) of the vampire (231). This im-

materiality encompasses the “whole sensual experience of the world” and thus inevitably carries an erotic connotation (Praz 261). Consequently, the *Femme Fatale* incorporates both male and female sexuality and is often described as hermaphrodite or androgynous.<sup>19</sup> Praz interprets the female androgyny as the “perfect fusion” of masculine activity and feminine passivity (334). This combination unmistakably parallels the Byronic Hero’s fusion of the contemplative Hero of Sensibility and defiant rebels like Satan or Prometheus. Certainly, the description of the characteristics of both dangerous lover uncovers the similarities between figures that are perpetually perceived as different.

It is clear that the *Femme Fatale* who unites all possibilities does not comply to prescriptive norms. That is to say, she is an ambiguous figure who at the same time appears male and female, perverse and attractive, even dead and alive. Seeing that the *Femme Fatale* cannot accurately be classified by the symbolic law, she threatens the matrix’s stability. She is therefore denied a subject position and her fullness is renounced as sterility. Consequently, the *Femme Fatale* portrays a melancholic air, a desire to feel “at home”. The Byronic Hero is ambiguous too, but in his well-wrought defiance he does not threaten society. He mourns lost authenticity, like the *Femme Fatale*, but not a lost subject position.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the Fatal Woman’s typical obsession with material possessions must be interpreted as an insatiable desire to find palpable authenticity, rather than as a social concern. Her collection of curiosities and precious objects symbolise a “lust for possession” only to “have the illusion that [she] feels the warmth of life”, as in a cosy home (Praz 403). Accordingly, the *Femme Fatale*, like the Byronic Hero, is frequently seen wandering. The physical restlessness symbolises the search for the authentic Self but simultaneously raises suspicion of a sinful past. The sin committed by the dangerous Woman is precisely what caused her exile in the first place: it is the possession of “all pleasures and all pain” which the symbolic law enviously sconces (Praz 231). The *Femme Fatale* who comprises those possibilities has lost her transcendent status (that should come with full authenticity) after the symbolic law proclaimed them illegal. As a result, she is, much like the Byronic Hero in his defiance against a suppressive matrix, often portrayed as a fallen angel. Where she once had the stature of a goddess, a “Venus who was the world’s delight”, she is now fallen “to the level of a sinister vampire” (Praz 238). To warn susceptible subjects, the symbolic law marks

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<sup>19</sup> The psychoanalytical, even metaphysical, mystic dimension of this attractive fullness will be extensively explained in the next chapter. However, as it is an important characteristics of both the *Femme Fatale* and the Byronic Hero, I must already mention it here.

<sup>20</sup> This opposition will prove to be crucial for the insurgence of the literary figures presented in the next chapter. Nonetheless, like the androgynous nature of the *Femme Fatale* and the Byronic Hero, I must make reference to it here, as it explains their melancholic air which is one of the most salient characteristics of both archetypes.



transgressive individuals: she is deathly pale, a reference to her *im-materiality*, and looks tired from experience, even though she is attractively young. The most remarkable physiological feature, however, is her enigmatic smile. That “unfathomable smile, always with a touch of something sinister” attracts individuals who feel that there is something wanting in identifications they are forced to assume (Praz 253). As such, it is both impervious and an undeniable affirmation that she has something to hide.

While Woman, no matter what type, has always been the *Subject* in Western discourse, she is not a fixed concept. The unstable nature of the sign *Woman* is caused by its adaption to the shifting spirit of an age. From Elizabethan times onwards, individualism gradually replaces *the Great Chain of Being* which motivates the substitution of supernatural deities by human heroes worth identifying with. Accordingly, their antipodes steadily become more human as well. In the naturalistic universe that is the Romantic age, supernatural temptresses who lure in brave and innocent *Subjects* are substituted by course apostate women of all kinds, who threaten the stable society built up by righteous men. As a result, the *Femme Fatale* is no longer represented by Lilith, Medusa or other renegade goddesses. Rather, she is the oriental courtesan, the gypsy or the prostitute on the street. Finally, when the Romantic age is succeeded by the Victorian Period and turns into Decadentism in the last decennium of the nineteenth century, Woman, as the example of an unacceptable identification, ends in the lunatic asylum.<sup>21</sup> She is the final stage in the evolution of the *Femme Fatale* from “the mythical plane of women” to the “hysterical woman of exasperated desire, in whose hands man becomes a submissive instrument” (Praz 277). This presentation is not without reason: it is rooted in a discourse of protection that searches for scapegoats in a universe which no hero can control. Seeing that nature inevitably runs its course, the cause of danger is not a vengeful God, but the very laws of nature. Considering that the nineteenth-century rhetoric was substantially essentialist, it seeks to “blame” a transcendent force which it personifies, rather than acknowledge the matrix as an impersonal force that suppresses both *Subjects* and *Objects*. Hence, Nature (not godlike deities) becomes the source of evil that must be personified in order to challenge it. Since concepts which *Subjects* must battle (and by no means identify with) are invariably projected onto the unknown, the members of society that deviate from Western norms embody the destructive forces of nature. In this light, we understand why nineteenth-century discourse invariably describes women as animalistic, irrational creatures.

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<sup>21</sup> Since the Byronic Hero is the epitome of the Romantic age and the *Femme Fatale* flourishes in Decadentism, the substitution of the first by the latter is most striking in Victorianism. However, as explained above, we must acknowledge the impact of the literary archetypes beyond their historical context. Obviously, *Wuthering Heights* which is written in the heydays of the Victorian Period influences readers far beyond that era.

As the personification of destructive Nature, “actual” women are on the one hand reduced to mere embodiment of the lethal laws of nature and on the other hand assigned mythological powers as they incorporate the forces that bring society to its knees. Ultimately, the personification of Nature as a force beyond-control is an artificial construct to deny responsibility. In fact, the forces of nature that are personified in the dangerous Woman slumber in every human being as unacceptable identification possibilities. It is exactly this dangerous nature that public discourse repetitively urges women to suppress if they want to approximate the Angelic ideal. Since the *Femme Fatale* is constructed as the dangerous woman who does not fulfil her female duties, she ultimately disobeys the Name of the Father and epitomises the punishment with which acceptable womanhood is enforced: the phallic woman who is automatically destructive. Accordingly, she seduces innocent onlookers and susceptible Subjects. The *Femme Fatale* is thus blamed for the misdemeanours of Subjects as it is “Woman [who] drives Man to commit illegal deeds” (Hales 111). In that way, phallogentric Western discourse presents Man as being seduced and subjected by dangerous women, so that he is not accountable for any failures of the age.

### 3. The Construction of *Wuthering Heights*: Manipulative Matrix

Emily Brontë, or rather Ellis Bell, employs the same discourse as fellow authors to construct literary figures that duplicate the age’s most acclaimed archetypes. Catherine and Heathcliff, in other words, are fully constructed as the renowned Byronic Hero and *Femme Fatale* respectively, their genders shrewdly interchanged as to confront the reader with strangely familiar characters. In fact, Brontë’s characters mirror her own subtle assumption of an opposite-gender persona. A thorough analysis of Emily Brontë’s writing persona proves that she understands the construction process of a patriarchal matrix. The last section of this chapter characterises the protagonists of *Wuthering Heights* to unveil her crafty construction of popular literary types.

#### 3.1. *Ellis Bell*

When *Wuthering Heights* was published in December 1847 the author of the two-volume story made himself known as Ellis Bell. Bell’s tale certainly shocked contemporary readers with its extraordinary rude language and its lack of moral, but the most severe consternation occurred three years after the first print. The second edition of the Victorian three-decker was accompanied by an “Editor’s Preface” which entailed a “Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell” in which the authors’ alleged brother Currer Bell revealed that the volumes were

not written by the same person, nor by men. Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontës' adoption of male pseudonyms immediately received much attention in literary reviews and continues to fascinate critics today.<sup>22</sup> Realising the weight of her revelation, Charlotte Brontë explains the choice for a male penname. Initially, she claims that certain hostility towards the public domain motivated her and her sisters to take on a writing persona. Being reluctant to disavow their female character, they took on ambiguous names, rather than straightforward male surnames. Pragmatic considerations also encouraged them to conceal their femininity for "authoresses [were] liable to be looked on with prejudice" (Brontë C. 301). Even if Emily and her sisters grew up in the Yorkshire Moors, insulated from the increasingly vivid Victorian urban life, they understood the norms and prejudices of the Victorian literary domain. Emily's attendances to city schools and her employment as a governess, though both were short-lived, gave her knowledge of society's expectations. Moreover, the geographic seclusion of the Brontë estate did not mirror the family's established position. The head of the family Patrick Brontë was an acclaimed reverend and curate, whose acquaintances and, especially, elaborated library stirred his daughters' literary and intellectual ambitions from early on. Consequently, the Brontë sisters understood that the adoption of a male pseudonym would facilitate the publication of their literary efforts.

The prejudices with which "authoresses" are faced are undeniably rooted in the patriarchal matrix. From 1850 onwards, reviews place Emily's novel "in a familiar class that was not in the central line of literature" significantly defined as one of "female genius and authorship" (Ohmann 908). The displacement of female authors to a class outside the literary centre is an unmistakable example of a patriarchal effort to present Woman as an Abject that resides in its constitutive outside. In fact, after Charlotte's revelation Emily Brontë is constructed as an *abject author*.<sup>23</sup> First, the criticism of *Wuthering Heights* shifts from a focus on its literary peculiarities (whether they are merits or flaws) to a focus on the writer who is, first and foremost, female. As such, "the author" is reduced to "the person" and almost entirely denied participation in the literary matrix. When Emily Brontë is, however, allowed a (marginal) position inside the literary field, her fiction is reduced to the intrinsic female nature that is in fact "imposed [onto it] rather than dramatized within" (Ohmann 910). Whereas the novel first evoked vehement reactions through its never-before seen rudeness and immorality,

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<sup>22</sup> In "Emily Brontë in the Hands of Male Critics" (1971) Carol Ohmann provides a detailed illustration of critics' responses. The most influential work published after 1971 is Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) which has also been useful in the analysis presented in this thesis.

<sup>23</sup> Emily did not live to see the second edition of her novel published. Nevertheless, her writer's image, an image of the author in the literary domain, still suffers from the sexist prejudices she tried to evade, even if it does outlive Emily Brontë herself.

reviewers now notice a “youthful language” or charming naivety; more often, Brontë is reproached for writing a novel that does not realise its ambitions (Ibid.). Seeing that female authors are thrust in an abject group of “female authorship” and every member of it is exposed to the same prejudices, all authoresses are reduced to the “female author”, a name that does not entail their whole being, but serves as the synecdoche that materialises their abjectness. Consequently, the members not only share abject aspects, they become interchangeable. In this light, it does not come as a surprise that some critics believed that the stories in the three-decker volume, and by extension all Brontë novels, were products of one and the same mind.<sup>24</sup>

Taking pains to avoid an exile to the abject group, Emily Brontë assumes a male pseudonym. This particular choice is not only negatively motivated (not to be classified in a marginal group) it might have been positively stimulated as well. Brontë understands that she has to present herself as a recognised authority figure, an author, in order to be able to direct and influence the matrix. The direction she presents is strikingly different than the system’s constructions that had become familiar to readers and critics alike. Reviews that predate the second edition demonstrate that *Wuthering Heights* fascinates the public even before the disclosure of Bell’s true identity, however unfavourable its reception. Only when she is identified as a woman, the deviant nature of Brontë’s novel is assigned to the female inability to handle the literary, or any, trade. The sexist critic Mark Schorer, for example, believes that Emily Brontë is instructed by her own metaphors and “set out to write one kind of novel and wrote another” (Schorer, cited by Ohmann 909). Nonetheless, the abject writer undeniably knows what she is doing when she employs the matrix’s mechanisms to fashion a personal, conversed moral. It is this re-direction of the matrix, that makes Emily Brontë the accomplice of her protagonists. With her drag-like conversion, adopting an exaggerated (sexualised) position, she tries to re-direct the system that suppresses her. This rebellion will be the main focus of the third chapter of this thesis; first we must understand which are the characters Emily Brontë, or rather, Ellis Bell, calls into being.

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<sup>24</sup> Even the male pennames were often interchanged by critics (Brontë C.). Remarkably, this misunderstanding is induced by the same mechanism of exclusion: as the Bells used a unseen rude language to write shamefully unorthodox tales, often even attributed with “the signatures of both a male and a female mind” (Ohmann 907), they were alarmingly threatening to the stability of literary discourse.

### 3.2. Characterisation

#### 3.2.1. Cunning Catherine

If Catherine Earnshaw could be characterised as a *Femme Fatale*, that description would have to be based on the last stages of mental illness that precede her death.<sup>25</sup> This mental instability, however, does not contradict an interpretation of Catherine as the Byronic Hero for it represents the inescapable influence of an ever-changing matrix to which even the Hero is subjected. Accordingly, Catherine's final neurosis is the culmination of an impossible negotiation between social status and full pleasure, between the aristocratic Edgar Linton and the foreign Heathcliff. It is this *Weltschmerz* that has always affected Catherine's choices and has resulted in a performativity that indeed displays Byronic characteristics. The death of this female Hero, however, does not relinquish the Byronic presence in *Wuthering Heights*; in Catherine's daughter Catherine Linton (from hereafter referred to as Cathy) we continually recognise Byronic traits and motivations.<sup>26</sup> Catherine's lasting presence thus again affirms the Byronic Hero's endless defiance in a fatalistic environment.

Having ascertained the female Byronic in *Wuthering Heights*, I turn to the characterisation of Catherine (and Cathy) to support my argument. Seeing that the Byronic Hero is coined as the personification of Romantic individualism, his most distinctive trait is a defiant self-assertion. The most compelling testimony of Catherine's self-reliance is voiced by its very victim; indeed, Heathcliff blames Catherine, instead of any overarching power, for their separation:

You loved me – then what right had you to leave me? What right – answer me – for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, *you*, of your own will, did it (142).

Heathcliff's complaint involuntarily identifies Catherine's negotiation between Edgar Linton and himself as the cause of her self-inflicted tragedy. Evidently, Linton represents social respectability whereas the exotic Heathcliff is invariably presented as a merciless savage and thus symbolises forbidden traits. Social pressure compels Catherine to repel him, but she confesses to Nelly that she recognises Heathcliff "as [her] own being" (73). Since there is a

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<sup>25</sup> Catherine's destructive nature often urges critics to identify her as a *Femme Fatale* (Almeida 55). These analysts, however, fail to notice that her defiance during her life is essentially Byronic.

<sup>26</sup> Indeed, many critics have interpreted Cathy as her mother incarnated (Riu 171; Gilbert and Gubar 293). Even Heathcliff often recognises his lost love in her defiant daughter (Brontë E. 253).

force beyond Catherine's control that urges her to repress her affinity with the very personification of unacceptable aspects of the Self, we must conclude that, contrary to Heathcliff's conviction, there is an overarching matrix that reduces Subjects' agency.<sup>27</sup> In the fictional universe of *Wuthering Heights*, as in Victorian reality, this matrix is a patriarchal, Western society. In this light, Catherine's unresolvable conflict between Edgar and Heathcliff mirrors the Byronic Weltschmerz as the existential dilemma between absolutes and the Self. It is this extraordinary awareness of the discrepancy between appearances and interiority, that instigates Catherine's egoism and self-assertion. This self-involvement is obvious from Nelly Dean's first description of Catherine as a teasing child whose "delight to provoke" is only strengthened by her father's "peevish reproofs"; her constant "defying [the household] with bold, saucy looks and ready words" is directed against the sterile conventions of family life, an undeniable synecdoche of the nineteenth-century matrix (36). Catherine's mundane mischiefs then, are weightier than they seem. Like the Byronic Hero, she is not just any ordinary outlaw.

Even if her mischiefs are regarded with suspicion, Catherine is not truly at risk of losing a central position in the house. Indeed, while her father claims that he cannot love her, she is always allowed at his side, even in his last moments. Being constructed as a literary figure that facilitates an ideological shift, the Byronic Hero must be represented as an individual worth identifying with. Like the Byronic Hero, Catherine manages to charm the authorities into accepting the self-sufficient values they rejected before.<sup>28</sup> When Heathcliff and Catherine come upon Thrushcross Grange in one of their rambles across the moors, the Lintons are certainly shocked at the children's lack of social conduct, but are full of "stupid admiration" for Catherine, while they chase the savage gypsy boy from their home (44). Throughout the novel, characters (and readers alike) are cajoled into idolising the eccentric Catherine with the same motivations that persuaded them to accept the Byronic Hero. First, the Lintons are utterly disgusted at the sight of their barbaric visitors, but when they recognise Catherine as the youngest resident of *Wuthering Heights*, a peculiar but respectable hamlet, they accept her into their home. Like the Byronic Hero, Catherine's origin is rather obscure, but she is never doubted to be of high birth. In addition, while Catherine does display curious features that could be interpreted as marks of her ambiguous subject position, her new acquaintances are convinced that she is a righteous girl. To assure others of her morality,

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<sup>27</sup> Heathcliff's disregard of this repressive matrix mirrors the Femme Fatale's disregard of the limitations of self-definition. I extensively describe this misconception in next chapter.

<sup>28</sup> Catherine's strategies again reflect the subversion that the Byronic Hero instigates and will be explained in the chapter III.

Catherine emphasises her melancholia (and thus her innocence) as she, like the Byronic Hero, carries the marks of a troubled mind: she is often restless, paces rooms or moors (75) and, significantly, flaunts her piercing eyes.<sup>29</sup> The compelling eyes of both Catherine and Cathy are a recurring motif in *Wuthering Heights* that both hide and suggest a secret hidden beneath. It is their constant display of melancholia, and the injury it suggests, that convinces onlookers to perceive them as secretive victims, rather than secret criminals. Indeed, Catherine's filthy clothing and rude manners are not her fault, but the result of the "culpable carelessness in her brother", who became the head of the house after Mr. Earnshaw's death (44). Even when she is truly separated from Heathcliff and thus from the unacceptable aspects herself, her "seasons of gloom and silence (...) [are] respected with sympathising silence" (81). This gloomy weapon is inherited by Catherine's daughter. Cathy, who has her mother's eyes, persuades Nelly to accompany her on her journeys to Wuthering Heights to visit Linton, even though Cathy's father forbade it:

We parted that night hostile – but next day beheld me on the road to Wuthering heights, by the side of my wilful young mistress's pony. I couldn't bear to witness her sorrow, to see her pale, dejected countenance and heavy eyes (207).

Cathy explicitly employs the evocation of pity in her compelling entreaty to be allowed to visit her dying father. Indeed, she begs the tyrannical Heathcliff to "look once – I'm so wretched – you can't help being sorry and pitying me" (243). Finally, Catherine and her daughter theatrically convey a sense of guilt and ostentatious cordiality to persuade the public of their morality. Even Nelly Dean, who used to be confronted with Catherine's mischiefs on a daily basis, "believe[s] she meant no harm; for when once she made you cry in good earnest, it seldom happened that she would not keep you company" (34). Responding to Heathcliff's passionate accusation, Catherine's final plea "I forgive you. Forgive me!" is the very confession of guilt that echoes the Byronic Hero's awareness of his provocative self-reliance (a personal acceptance of identification possibilities that the symbolic law forbids). It is this show of guilt and flashy courtesy that persuades society to accept Catherine's hubris.

If we want to understand society's reaction to the Byronic women in *Wuthering Heights*, we need at least a primary notion of the matrix in which Catherine Earnshaw-Linton and Cathy Linton-Heathcliff reside. Even if the Catherine's continuously assert their individuality, they cannot fully control their destiny. Since the matrix forces its Subjects into

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<sup>29</sup> I will return to the Catherine's cunning secrecy and display of their mysterious features as they play a central role their efforts to re-signify the matrix.

particular positions, there is only forced, no absolute human agency. Moreover, the matrix that surpasses all human agency is ever-changing. Indeed, the Byronic “rebellion against orthodoxy of all kinds” is symbolised in *Wuthering Heights* by the similar, yet differently directed rebellion of Catherine and Cathy. Catherine initially defies the family norms at Wuthering Heights. Remarkably, these patriarchal values become even more stringent when Hindley takes over the role as *pater familias* from the weakened father Earnshaw, a substitution that I will revisit in the last chapter of this thesis. Even when the strict hierarchy at Wuthering Heights is increasingly threatened by the maturing Heathcliff, Catherine still finds herself in a patriarchal environment, as her desire to be “the greatest woman” draws her to Thrushcross Grange (69). When Heathcliff, however, announces himself at the Grange, Catherine is confronted with the loss she cannot retrieve. Incapable of dealing with this want, but unwilling to exchange her accepted position, she perishes under the matrix’s injustice. Her defiance is perpetuated by her daughter, though directed against other norms; Cathy revolts against the inhumane, abject qualities Heathcliff represents, norms which her mother failed to control. This trial-and-error revolution shows that even if the matrix cannot be controlled, the Byronic Hero, especially the female Hero, must persevere in her defiance to assume an identity. The death of Catherine indicates the surrender to an irresistible Abject that threatens the stability in which she lives. Indeed, the exotic Heathcliff, like the *Femme Fatale*, is the personification of overarching Nature that increasingly threatens nineteenth-century patriarchal Britain. His emancipation mirrors the revolt of marginal Abjects: as Heathcliff grows stronger, Catherine crumbles. Her death, however, introduces a different revolution by Cathy. In this way, Emily Brontë makes no confession of fatalism, but urges her readers to follow her protagonists’ example and endlessly protect their (female) independence.

### 3.2.2. *Savage Heathcliff*

As Heathcliff’s wildness perfectly mirrors the roughness of the moors, he is the undeniable personification of Nature that threatens patriarchies. Characters that want to preserve an acceptable subject position ceaselessly describe him as an Abject, a monster different from them, to demarcate their identity. Heathcliff thus functions as a necessary threat that forces individuals to take on an acceptable position. The dangerous demon is anxiously exiled to a marginal realm. In his dominance over the constitutive outside of the matrix, the desolate Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff accumulates identification possibilities with which the residents of Thrushcross Grange are not supposed to identify. Nevertheless, his attraction is



unsurpassable: he not only seduces Catherine, but fascinates all who lay eyes on him, characters and readers alike. He is, in other words, a true *Femme Fatale*.

As Heathcliff confronts Subjects with repressed desires, he embodies more unacceptable aspects than his personification of Nature suggests. Nelly even alludes to the insufficiency of Heathcliff's name when she is "vexed at having the task of dictating an inscription for his monument" and has to "content [herself] with a single word" (293). I have already explained that discourse reduces Objects to their name, which represents only their most salient characteristic. In addition, these Objects start to share disconcerting qualities of each other. Accordingly, Heathcliff's otherness entails bestial, exotic, mythical and shockingly sexual deviances. First, Heathcliff is often compared to animals of prey to emphasise his irrationality. Frightened Subjects are frequently told that he is able to "seize and devour" them (94). When his prey seems to be taken away from him, Heathcliff's destruction becomes utterly animalistic. Indeed, when holding a dying Catherine, Nelly feels as if he is "not a creature of [her] own species" as he "gnashed at [her] and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered [Catherine] to him with greedy jealousy" (141). Heathcliff thus embodies the corrupt pole of the binarisme with which identities are constructed:

God had forsaken the stray sheep [at Wuthering Heights] to its own wicked wanderings, and an evil beast prowled between it and the fold, waiting his time to spring and destroy (95).

In his incarnation of wolf among sheep, Heathcliff echoes the *Femme Fatale*'s representation of the Whore who is opposed to the Victorian Virgin. Seeing that this binarisme is permeable, his likening to a venomous serpent emphasises his infectious nature, contaminating Subjects with criminality. Secondly, his Objectness is further emphasised by the recurrent reference to Heathcliff as the "gypsy boy" (31, 45). Like the origin of the *Femme Fatale*, Heathcliff's lineage is mysterious, but never truly believed to be respectable. Remarkably, Nelly tries to make Heathcliff believe he is "fit for a prince in disguise [for] who knows, but [his] father was Emperor of China, and [his] mother an Indian queen" (50). She invents this tale, however, to coax Heathcliff into bettering himself by adopting gentle manners following Catherine's example. Indeed, Nelly subtly unveils the motivations for her invention as she urges her protégée to "*frame* high notions of [his] birth (...) to give [him] courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer" (50; my emphasis). In fact, she still deems the foreign respectability inferior to the Western kind. Moreover, Nelly focusses more on the whimsical attraction of the exotic than on Heathcliff's Western respectability. The mystery of

Heathcliff's pedigree thus serves as a blank page onto which Nelly projects her own desires. Hence, Heathcliff holds the possibility of regaining penal aspects of the Self. As a result, he is assigned mythical proportions that mirror the *Femme Fatale*'s immortality. The larger-than-life quality of Heathcliff is affirmed by his victims and his admirers alike: Isabella wonders whether "Mr Heathcliff [is] a man" (120), Linton sobs that his father haunts him in his dreams (233) and Nelly claims that eighteen years "had little altered his person" (253). The ghostlike Heathcliff (emphasised by constant reference to his pale skin and hollow features) undeniably echoes the *Femme Fatale*'s im-materiality with which she avoids normative materialisation that inevitably discards some identification possibilities. The fullness he represents, account for Heathcliff's next resemblance to the *Femme Fatale*: seeing that he heralds the recovery of authenticity, Heathcliff conveys an irresistible charm that is strangely sexual. His sensuality may not be as obvious as the *Femme Fatale*'s, nor does he display the same kind of androgyny, but his mysterious exterior triggers fantasies of entering married (and thus sexually active) life for Isabella Linton on the one hand, and (quite valid) fantasies of self-completion for Catherine on the other.

Considering that Heathcliff consolidates the Fatal Woman's deviant characteristics he is assiduously repelled by the righteous subject group (represented by *Wuthering Heights*-under-Hindley and *Thrushcross Grange*). Scorned by society, Heathcliff looks for a place to feel at home. First, he is obviously taken in with material goods. When he first lays eyes on the riches in *Thrushcross Grange*, he makes fun of the Lintons' petty problems and leisure, but their possessions evoke a gasp of unpredicted awe:

And we saw – ah! It was beautiful – a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers (42).

His want for the most luxurious goods is obvious from early on and increases as the story progresses: he wants the finest stallion (34), wants to possess all of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* (goods, land and inhabitants alike) and ultimately reduces his son and daughter-in-law to his very possessions. These material interests must not be mistaken for social ambitions; rather, they are a means to feel at home and, most importantly, to get revenge. As Heathcliff's revenge, like the vengeance of the *Femme Fatale*, plays a central role in his revolution, I will return to it in the next chapter. A second expression of Heathcliff's homesickness is his ceaseless roaming that suggests a restlessness which his everyday

surroundings cannot subdue. After Heathcliff's mysterious absence, having overheard Catherine's regret at his lack of gentlemanly manners, he returns enriched, but not quieted. Even when *Wuthering Heights* is entirely his, he cannot feel at home in its materiality. Heathcliff's physical restlessness, like that of the *Femme Fatale*, is the punishment for his transgression of restrictive norms. At the climax of his nervousness, Heathcliff's wanderings increase in number and are continued inside the house, "restlessly measuring the floor" while his countenance suggests "both pleasure and pain, in exquisite extremes" (295). This super-human fullness is not hailed but punished for its sheer unclassifiable nature threatens the matrix's stability. Heathcliff therefore receives the same abject marks as the *Femme Fatale*: a pale skin, an experienced countenance (though with the attractive impression of youth) and an enigmatic smile, an engrossing grin always suggesting an "ominous musing" (94). As it simultaneously hides and affirms his secrecy, it is Heathcliff's most efficient instrument to tempt his onlookers. Nelly explicitly admits that she would "rather [see] him gnash his teeth than smile", but "involuntarily obeys him" (294). In fact, the attractive *Abject* uses his allure to contaminate every *Subject* he encounters.

If Heathcliff infects innocent subjects and if he is the embodiment of Nature (even if that name cannot contain his complex identity) we must conclude that Emily Brontë craftily substituted the original female scapegoat for a male force to be responsible for society's degradation. Indeed, while phallocentric Western discourse acquits Man from any blame, being seduced by dangerous women, Brontë problematizes gendered responsibility by presenting a mythically strong Man as the source of society's feared instability.

### III. The Struggle for Authenticity: the Theatrical Subject

In their effort to approximate ideals, individuals are forced to select aspects of the Self that they will display in the “performance” of their identity.<sup>30</sup> Individuals who do not conform to these rules are assigned an abject term, that not only names, but even produces them. These marginalised individuals might become aware of their disadvantaged position and try to dislocate the matrix that represses them. Every Subject therefore has a subversive potential that lies in its understanding and appropriation of the governing system. Seeing that Subjects do not necessarily disrupt the matrix, Butler terms them “potentially subversive” (125). In this chapter, I first describe how Subjects should organise their mutiny if they want to dislocate the system. Following Butler, I illustrate a successful revolution with the exemplary rebellion of the dragperformance. This comparison is particularly significant for the two-fold focus of this thesis: the deconstruction of fixed-gender literary types and the analysis of a novel that tacitly reverses the gender norms that they are constructed to impose. Indeed, drag displays a hyperbolical, yet reverses identification with dogmatic gender norms in order to problematize their stringent demands. Having elucidated the conditions for successful resistance, I compare the revolution of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale. This juxtaposition will illustrate, and account for, the way in which the Hero conquers an acceptable position, while the Fatal Woman is painstakingly spurned. Finally, it is Emily Brontë’s appropriation of the Femme Fatale and the Byronic Hero that explicitly introduces the conversion of conventional gender positions to the literary rebellion analysed in this thesis. First, the authoress of the controversial novel takes on a male penname and thus stages a dragperformance of her own. Moreover, her female heroines meet the description of the Byronic Hero, a literary archetype that had been invariably male, while the male protagonist can, in his particular rebellion, unmistakably be described as a Fatal Woman.

#### 1. Butler’s Theatricality: an Expression of Gender Melancholia

##### *1.1. Theatricality as a Special Type of Performativity*

To ensure its authenticity, an individual must lay claim on the term that the governing system uses to name and therefore produce it. As explained above, performative power does not imply human agency: a speaker does not actively install or produce that which it names. On the contrary, the coded and thus repeatable citation precedes the speaker. As the formation of

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<sup>30</sup> In this section, I will try to define “performance” and its theatrical aspects in the assumption of gender roles. Here, the term is provisionally used as the appearance of the continuous and compulsory assumption of a certain gender position.

Subjects and Objects is conditioned by the discourse they employ, they must take its conventions into account, rather than abjure contemporary norms and terms. To make that claim palpable, Butler compares abject rebellion with the dragperformance (181-223). She illuminates how drag twists the term *queer* in and through its resistance. The notion originated in dominant homophobic discourse to shame and ward off certain individuals. Hence, the system produces those repelled Objects. Since the drag community does not deny the original taunt, it recognises the influence of the dominant system over its identity. Notwithstanding, this is only a necessary, not a sufficient condition for resistance. In addition to appropriating its derision, the Object must also be aware of the impossibility to control its name. Evidently, every concept is determined by its history. Nietzsche describes that history as a *sign-chain* in which ever new interpretations and adaptations of a term succeed each other arbitrarily rather than logically (Butler 223). In the light of the performativity theory, such a history is a process of repetition during which significations and meanings arise that do not conform to prior uses and, consequently, redirect the chain. As a result, the Object should always consider the fact that self-naming does not connote self-determination. Butler calls that misconception *the presentist conceit*:

The belief that there is one who arrives in the world, in discourse without a history, that this one makes oneself in and through the magic of the name, that language expresses a “will” or a “choice” rather than a complex and constitutive history of discourse and power which compose the invariably ambivalent resources through which queer and queering agency is forged and reworked (Butler 228).

If an Object takes into account the limits that the historicity of its name imposes, it is able to grasp the reach of its mobilisation possibilities. However, the history of the term is not the only hindrance with which the drag community is confronted: a term is not only always in flux, it also never entirely contains the identity it names. In fact, every individual that is called *queer* has an identity in which several identification *categories* converge. Gender is only one aspect that, in addition, is influenced by complex relations with other categories. Yet, this “false uniformity” is a necessary error that enables Objects to unify in their resistance: several individuals will identify with the term and will appropriate the name in their efforts to change the meaning of it (Butler 116). The fact that they will never fully control the re-signification proves that the resistance must expand the usage of the term to expose the naturalising function of conventional norms, rather than reject the name it challenges. Using the re-signification of *queer* as an example, Butler focusses on verbal rebellion as appropriation of

term. Obviously, the same holds true for rebellious actions of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale.

We now know the conditions for successfully re-directing excluding terms or conventions, but how must we link it to Butler's notion of gender performativity? In other words, what does a successful contestation of governing norms look like? I have already extensively illustrated that gender, and by extension identity, is performative since an individual identifies with norms through ceaseless approximation. Notwithstanding, there is an important difference between the performativity of gender on the one hand and the dragperformance on the other. In the previous chapter, I stressed that the assumption of gender, the embodying of norms, is compulsory. Drag, on the contrary, is not a compelled citation, but appropriates performativity: it "mimes and exposes the binding power of the heterosexual law" and its naturalisation (Butler 232). The norms of the symbolic law have naturalised to such an extent that most Subjects are unaware of their suppression. Drag echoes heterosexual gender positions to expose this naturalisation, but that exposure is no guarantee for the disruption of the system. The Abject that denaturalises the norms without calling them into question consolidates the system, instead of dislocating it (Butler 125). To abrogate its banishment, the Abject must cite the term by which it is excluded in a specific way: it must hyperbolically imitate, and in that way subvert, the conventions. Butler calls that kind of citation "acting out" (233). Because of its hyperbolic imitation of conventions, this parody is perceived as theatrical or over-the-top. Nevertheless, that theatricality is necessary to lay claim on a term, and thus on more authentic subjectivity. The drag community feels the need to express this "theatrical rage" because it is injured and excluded by homophobic strategies (Ibid.). In their hyperbolic repetition of their history, and thus their injury, they are able to direct their name towards a more tolerable signification. To understand the motivations for acting out, Butler turns to psychoanalysis. The fruitful alliance between deconstructionism and psychoanalysis uncovers the motives for critical contestation of the governing law.

### *1.2. Gender Melancholia*

Since drag is exemplary of theatrical performativity, an exaggerated performance of gender roles, it exposes the psychological motivations of gender performativity. Indeed, this abject group reveals the "truth-regime" of the dominant matrix by denaturalising conventional gender positions (Butler 233). Butler emphasises the performativity of gender when she defines it as the *play* between psyche on the one hand and appearances, including discursive descriptions, on the other. That play is determined by the heterosexual matrix, but does not

entirely coincide with it. What is performed is certainly not the whole truth. On the contrary, the normative (heterosexual) gender performance hides and disavows what remains unsaid or unperformed. A psychoanalytical interpretation of the relation between the appearance and the signification of gender affirms that impenetrability. First of all, psychoanalysis posits that the inner-truth cannot be entirely exteriorised because of the opacity of the unconscious. Secondly, the appearance can only be understood in reference to what is prohibited to appear as a sign. In other words, what is performed can only be understood in the light of what remains hidden or unperformed. To illustrate those nuances, Butler explains the gender melancholia of the dominant paradigm (234-236). She discerns a relation between performative acting out and Freud's definition of melancholia as the effect of a unrecognized and ungrieved loss. According to Freud, the aspect that is lost is preserved as a psychic figure or *Other*: an imaginative preservation which ultimately leads to a heightened identification with the Other, self-debasement and "the acting out of unresolved anger and love" (Freud, cited by Butler 234). In this light, the hyperbolic performance of the drag community can be linked to unacknowledged loss. The normative heterosexual positions deny possible homosexual desires which they do, however, know exist. Those possibilities were accessible before the installation of the law and would lead to full pleasure. Hence the safeguarding of lost aspects is no different from Lacan's definition of psychosis as the return to imaginary abundance. This correspondence affirms the abject position of the drag community and its critical potential.

Obviously, unacknowledged loss is incorporated in the identification possibilities of the drag community. The hyperbolic dragperformance thus exposes and reiterates its injury. Since homosexual longings are a priori prohibited, rather than disavowed after they occur, Subjects have no choice but to leave their shortage ungrieved. Moreover, the lack cannot be rued because there are no conventions that acknowledge the loss of unaccepted love. It is that deprivation that causes heterosexual melancholia. The drag performance allegorises that melancholia and unmasks the psychic and performative practices by which heterosexual gender positions discard homosexual desires. Indeed, in drag, the sexually non-performable is performed as gender position. As such, drag proves that heterosexual positions are actually already hyperbolic identifications with a norm: they are the extreme realisations of (unachievable models of) masculinity and femininity. In fact, performative discourse is linked to performing in the theatrical meaning that hyperbolically performs gender norms: that which is performed in drag is actually the sign of gender, rather than an actual body (Butler 237). Since the norms of the symbolic law are never fully achieved, they are inefficient. In order to

make them compulsory, in spite of this inefficiency, the system demands that they are repeated. The dragperformance, as should every rebellious Abject, uses this repetition to its advantage. It uses the norms' inefficiency to dislocate the system: drag's excessive citation displays the way in which the already hyperbolic demands of heterosexuality are presented as "normal" on a daily basis. This appropriation of normative performativity unveils the matrix's naturalised conventions that determine our ontology.

If our understanding of ontology is essentially misdirected, coded conventions do not truly reflect authentic meaning. Notably, language is one of the most effective conventions as it always entails misinterpretation: using language, one is exposed to the simultaneous proximity and distance of the essence of things (Lutz 24).<sup>31</sup> Indeed, conventional language is deceitfully familiar: since discourse consists of coded utterances that are regulated by a symbolic law it is appearance rather than essence. In discourse, the meaning is suspended so that words should be repeated in order to approximate what is meant or referred to.<sup>32</sup> Evidently, one's intentions cannot easily be understood, for both the speaker and the interpreter are determined by the governing (social) system. In conclusion, we must interpret ontology as a series of failure, an endless sequence of failed performances. If we take this conception of ontology into account, we recognise the importance of public discourse, not in the least the literary rhetoric, in the manipulation of identity.

## 2. The Theatricality of Literary Types: Revolution

Both the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale reflect the spirit of their age: the former in its propagation of individualistic values, the latter in her example of what ought not appear in a stable society. Even so, the nineteenth-century figures that are supposed to be clear-cut opposites display copious similar physical and behavioural features. They exert the same mechanisms, available in the matrix that creates and directs them. The deconstructionist comparison presented in this thesis proves that figures restrained by society carry a subversive potential in their hyperbolic appropriation of conventional norms. In order to describe the rebellion, different in degree, of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale, I analyse their motivations, their effect on other members of society and their position in a civilisation that is simultaneously fascinated and frightened. It is an injury, different in nature, that urges the fatal lovers to act out and go in search of what has been lost, their true identity.

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<sup>31</sup> We only need to consider the semiology of De Saussure to understand that there is no logical link between words and their references; furthermore, Derrida's *difference* proves that the sign is not only arbitrary, it also never entirely corresponds to itself (Derrida).

<sup>32</sup> Lutz specifically mentions the discourse of love, as described by Barthes. This use of language will further be explained in section 2.2. of this chapter.



## 2.1. *Melancholia, Negotiation and Subversion*

### 2.1.1. *Byronic Weltschmerz*

If Byronic Weltschmerz can be defined as the clash between the desire to commit to absolutes on the one hand and passionate longing to commit to the Self on the other, the “psychic malady” echoes Butler’s definition of psychosis: the Hero is aware of the negotiation between acceptance and authenticity that every individual is compelled to perform in its assumption of an identity. According to Thorslev the commitment to (changing) absolutes is the only way to be acknowledged as a member in a harmonic system, but this “wholehearted commitment to dogmas or absolutes outside oneself” does not grant the security or authenticity it promises (89). Indeed, as “all that is certain, absolute and eternal, is also lifeless and cold” an unlimited commitment to those ideals results in “spiritual death” (Thorslev 106). With that statement, Thorslev affirms Butler’s argument that accepted materialised positions invariably disregard essential aspects of the Self. Byron’s Fatal Man certainly feels that the identification possibilities provided by the governing matrix are unachievable ideals, so that he can only paint a “sombre portrait of his idealized self” (Praz 64). The realisation that approximating a reductive image acquires losing aspects of the real Self can only result in agony:

He is lost in a self-perpetuating agony that comes from an idealisation of a past “before – “before” his fall from grace, “*before*” *his realisation* of the vanity and valuelessness of human society. The Byronic Hero feels he once had a *home* in this world before he realised his desires were so profound they could never be fulfilled in this life. He imagined that, in the past [before the installation of the symbolic law] he lived in a world full of immanent meaning, where his desires for ideals such as Truth, Beauty and Purity were still in play, still *open as possibilities* (Lutz 56; my emphasis).

Being blessed (or rather cursed) with extraordinary sensitivity, the Byronic Hero is aware of his loss that cannot be grieved and thus suffers from melancholia. To unveil this injury, he acts out and tries to redirect the system that represses him. In order to effectuate this ideological shift, the Byronic Hero must take the conditions for an effective subversion into account. First, he must avoid the presentist conceit and understand that self-presentation is not self-determination. The Hero’s subjectivity cannot entirely be exteriorised because of the “secret infinity” of the Self, yet he wants it to be witnessed exactly “because its nonrepresentability guarantees its existence”; in this paradox lies the inevitable melancholia

of the defiantly conforming individual, which motivates the Byronic Hero to show “only enough to make it clear how hidden and inaccessible is this soul” (Lutz 65). It is Gabriele Poole who explicitly theorises the Byronic Hero’s duality.<sup>33</sup> He immediately affirms Butler’s *play* by stating that “the Byronic Hero is typically characterised by a marked split between his external appearance and his interiority” (Poole 7). As this unresolvable dualism is the foundation of self-presentation, the Byronic Hero realises that the matrix’s demands are unattainable, which sparks his revolution. The second condition for a successful matrix reform is that the Abject does not reject the mechanisms of the symbolic law, but imitates them in a hyperbolic way. Indeed, the Byronic Hero’s conduct is “if not inauthentic, surely exaggerated, a mask” that hides his unease in an aristocratic society to which he has always been “a stranger” (Poole 8). We must interpret the Hero’s outer gestures as a constructed persona that theatrically reveals his injury, even when that injury is never explicitly pinpointed. This staging of a persona, this acting out, accounts for the ambiguous social position of the Byronic Hero: the actor appropriates fixed conventions to be admired by a society he not truly appreciates. As the Hero’s acting out emphasises his injury, it can become “an instrument of power” in its constant repetition:

The hero’s introversion and hostility to the world, his isolation and his lack of intimacy with others is sometimes presented as a reaction to injustice of society, as well as a result of his superior nature (Poole 15).

Adopted personae are essential to criticise a governing matrix for an injustice inflicted upon the actor in the past. The Hero’s showy display of remorse, secrecy, but also his exaggerated courtesy (which Poole fails to notice) suggests less having sinned than having been sinned against. Certainly, while his solitary retreat is to some extent a penal search for self-sufficiency (for which the rebel is cursed to eternal wandering and with physical marks), the rebellious Hero cultivates his insulated roaming and eccentric countenance in such a way that his onlookers are convinced he has been injured. Moreover, his constant averment of guilt and remorse convince the public that he is a moral figure, only transgressing boundaries to be righteously self-sufficient.

Understanding the constraints of that self-sufficiency and acknowledging his ties to the ruling matrix, the Byronic Hero tries to re-direct the governing norms by perfecting his own mind first. In humanism, “the realisation of the limits of the human mind and a

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<sup>33</sup> By approaching the literary figure from this analytical angle, Poole resolves the quarrel between Thorslev and Praz, the first over-emphasising the moral tenderness of the Byronic Hero, the latter the transgression.

cultivation of one's own values", the Hero finds a way to neutralise his existential dilemma in earning social acceptance while still retaining some self-sufficiency (Thorslev 89). First, to delimit his own mind the Byronic Hero deliberately retreats from society. In that self-exile, he digs into his subjectivity to the point of "sublime torture" in which he tries to escape the insolvable dilemma (Lutz 59). With these secretive quests for self-improvement, the Byronic Hero seems to disregard moral codes entirely. It is true that the dangerous lover who solely engages in this intense flight "signifies as little as possible" and thus "breaks the symbolic structure" (Ibid.).<sup>34</sup> Indeed, the Byronic Hero studies at night to collect forbidden knowledge only for the sake of collecting and approximating im-materiality (avoiding the reduction that is inherent to every materialisation) in the form of insomnia, anorexia or autoeroticism. However, while the Byronic Hero seems to lucubrate in order to alienate the self even further from society, his lucubration "belies his carelessness in all other parts of (...) life" (Lutz 61). His self-exile and morbid self-analysis is not primarily aimed at pursuing authentic wholeness, it is a strategy to coax society into accepting humanist values that used to be spurned. This "world-decimation through self-decimation" does not, as Lutz seems to suggest, imply a total destruction (62); rather, it signifies a breaking of the mould to better the system in the long run.

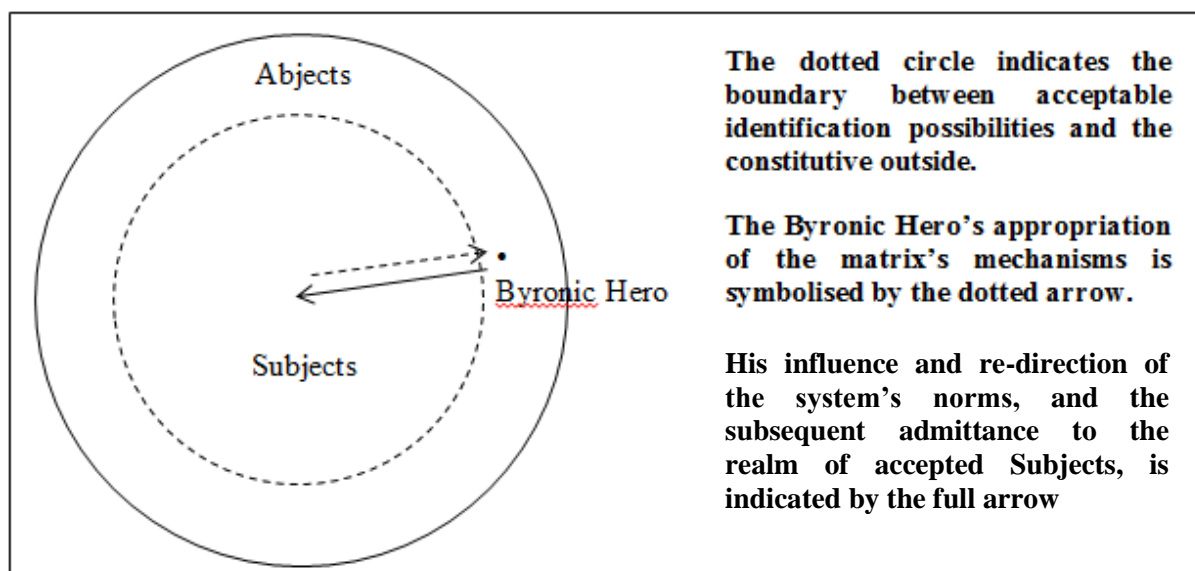
In conclusion, the self-assertive Hero does not feel entirely at home in the hyperbolically stringent matrix, but he does not criticise it to the extent that he is entirely banished from it. His solution to the impossible dilemma lies somewhere in an unresolved in-between: he "makes his mind its own place" to "create his own system of value" along the lines of the matrix itself, propagating different values but similarly structured by selection, cultivation and exclusion (Thorslev 175). Hence the Byronic Hero chooses his values instead of valuing all. In that way, he tries to approximate his authentic Self as closely as possible while retaining a subject position. As such, he channels his indecisiveness between the desire to commit to absolutes and passionate longing to commit to the Self, a clash that reflects Butler's idea of negotiation and is known among Romantics as *Weltschmerz*. This *Weltschmerz* is so essential to the Byronic subjectivity that it is sometimes even called *Ichschmerz*, but this agonising egoism "involves the whole world in his particular plight" (Thorslev 88). The Byronic Hero, concerned with his authentic individualism as no hero before, digs into his subjectivity only to structure it via the same mechanisms as the society of which he craves acceptance. It is that well-meditated acting out that persuades the matrix to

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<sup>34</sup> This phrasing unmistakably affirms Butler's conception of materialisation as a signification process governed by a symbolic law.

re-direct its norms in the direction of the values the Byronic Hero propagates.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, the Byronic Hero introduces individuality and humanism, previously seen as a threat, as the central values of nineteenth-century Romanticism. Ultimately, he theatrically unveils his melancholic soul to that extent that he reaches more than social redemption: he achieves a “melancholic sublimity” that is rooted in an abject rage, caused by a “thoughtful sense of loss”, only to be even more admired as an extraordinary Subject that approximates the sublime (Lutz 74). He is, in other words, a successfully subversive Abject that manages to conquer an eccentric subject position. In figure 2, I have visualised the ideological shift that the Byronic Hero introduces.

**Figure 2: Acting Out of the Byronic Hero**



<sup>35</sup> This persuasion must be the aim of every revolution. Indeed, it can never be the Abject's goal to make all abject positions acceptable, for every system needs Abjects to demarcate identification possibilities. Its only goal must be to retrieve the identification possibilities it values by the disclosing the truth-regime of the governing matrix.

### 2.1.2. *Fatal Hysteria*

Like her male counterpart, the Fatal Woman is always dejected and displays a mysterious air. The first cause of her melancholia is the same as the Byronic Hero's: being exceptionally sensitive, she realises that she has lost authentic wholeness and feels the need to act out. Yet, in doing so, she does not meet every condition for a successful rebellion. Consequently, her unfulfillable quest for authenticity isolates her from society in such a way that she is no longer granted a subject position. Whereas the Byronic Hero is admired for his self-analysis, the *Femme Fatale*'s voracious strife for authenticity is spurned as hysteria. She therefore not only laments lost authenticity, she also suffers from the loss of an accepted subject position.

Because she is aware of her double injury, the *Femme Fatale* yearns to express a "theatrical rage". First, she respects a crucial requirement for an effective subversion: the Fatal Woman hyperbolically mimes orthodox mechanisms to expose the naturalisation of the system's hyperbolic demands. Like all potentially subversive *Subjects*, she is marked, both by names and by physical signs, to ward off her threat to the system's stability. The most distinctive mark of the *Femme Fatale* is her enigmatic smile. Laying claim of the very notion that is used to exclude her, she excessively flaunts it to seduce infatuated lovers. In addition to nurturing her mysterious appearance, the *Femme Fatale* exploits social and judicial laws to get what she wants. She is an infamous excessive consumer who exerts "criminality [as a] way of obtaining desired items" (Hales 113). This reputation is in seeming contrast with her banishment from society, but these material interests must be interpreted as a desire for tangible authenticity, not for social acceptance. Remarkably, the criminal behaviour that the Fatal Woman employs to achieve this goal does not entirely neglect the symbolic law. Even if Hales links the *Femme Fatale* to the world of the anti-social that is set "apart from social restriction", she invariably connects the Dangerous Woman to prostitution or the "a-logical games of chance" (110). These practices undeniably belong to the underground circuit, a well-structured community that can be interpreted as the constitutive outside of the system. Consequently, the marginal environment of the *Femme Fatale* is, like every *abject* group, based on the familiar principles of selection and exclusion to identify its members who ultimately function as the materialisation of possibilities not to identify with.

While the *Femme Fatale* acknowledges her ties to the governing matrix (realising that she assumes her identity in the same way as acceptable *Subjects*) she does not fulfil the second condition of the *abject* revolution. Since performativity is no controllable self-creation, the theatricality of the *Abject* is not necessarily subversive. Even if the *Femme Fatale*

emphasises her eccentric exterior to denaturalise the system's hyperbolic demands, her appearance never fully coincides with her interiority because the unconscious, in which the unacceptable is repressed, is thoroughly vague. Disregarding these limitations of her theatricality, the Femme Fatale is not able to express her loss as well as the Byronic Hero. It is true that both figures are harmed by the matrix's repressive norms, but the Femme Fatale cannot convince society that she has been sinned against, rather than simply sinning. Her unmitigated acting out exploits social norms to that extent that her theatricality is wrongly perceived as an instinctual strife to destroy those who love her for the mere sake of destroying, rather than the indictment of injustice and the struggle to recover what was taken away. When the Femme Fatale "takes revenge" her bystanders proclaim that she takes her wrath beyond the reprisal of her pain as she "avenges the outrage committed against her" by killing "all who loves her" (Praz 219).<sup>36</sup> Praz cites Gautier's heroine in *La Morte amoureuse* to emphasise that the rage of the Femme Fatale knows no measure:

I am urged forth from the grave to seek the joy which was snatched from me, to love again the man I once lost and to such his heart's blood. When he is ruined, I must pass on to other, and young men shall succumb to my fury (Praz 219).

The initial confession of spiritual death caused by lost joy might have uncovered the matrix's injustice had the Fatal Woman not shown an inclination to endless fury. In her lack of composure, she fails to fully expose the system's manipulation: unlike the Byronic Hero, she does not cultivate the marks of rejection to arouse sympathy or mystery, nor does she convey any guilt in order to be redeemed. Instead, she is solely focussed on retrieving her authentic Self. Infallibly, the Byronic figure displays his mark to point out the injustice of the system as well as to invoke awe and admiration for the sheer unknowability of his interior. The Femme Fatale, on the other hand, nurtures her mysterious smile only to "suffocate [her lovers] in her arms" (Praz 218). As the revenge in the singular murder of a certain wrongdoer does not suffice, she feels the need to repeat her injury again and again, until it would finally be acknowledged. However, her theatrical denouncement of the system's hyperbolic demands is never heard as authority figures never grant her a voice. Her struggle for authentic wholeness against reductive norms is "the mute melancholy lust of heaven" (Praz 237). Rather than acknowledge its responsibility, the matrix uses (even constructs) the Femme

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<sup>36</sup> The abstract injury losing essential aspects of the Self is in literature often realized as the death of loved ones or her lover's adultery. This concretisation makes the injury more palpable and identifiable for all readers. Moreover, it indicates the primary importance of love and the signification of eroticism as the search for the authentic self that will be explained in the next chapter.

Fatale as a pawn that exemplifies the utterly unacceptable Abject, the materialisation of a punishment with which the governing matrix threatens its subjects to assume an acceptable identity. I have already explained that Lacan labels that threat the Name of the Father. As the Fatal Woman tries to retrieve authentic fullness, she does not acquiesce in the castrated femininity which that law prescribes, but assumes the reprehensible position of the phallic woman. It is this return to forbidden abundance that effectuates a psychosis. As a result, the Femme Fatale is not praised for her mysterious air, but is charged with hysteria.

Considering that the Femme Fatale realises the illegitimacy of the fullness she pursues (being acutely aware of the compulsory negotiation between that authenticity and acceptance), she experiences a double psychosis: in addition to the psychosis in the Lacanian sense she suffers from the psychosis described by Butler that is caused by compulsory, yet unresolvable negotiation. Like the Byronic Hero, the Femme Fatale tries to escape the existential dilemma through self-renunciation in the form of anorexia, insomnia or catatonia. However, she does not use this self-decimation to alter the matrix, but solely to escape the inscrutable negotiation (Riu 170). While the Hero engages in ardent self-study to the point of sublime torture, the readings of the Femme Fatale are confined to articles found in newspapers and magazines that “channel and direct” the female audience towards “pleasurable forms of consumption” (Hales 113).<sup>37</sup> The “world-decimation through self-decimation” is not the detrimental weapon of the Byronic Hero, but the destructive effect of female hysteria that is ultimately aimed at recovering penal authenticity in im-materiality. This psychological interpretation of female neurosis gradually becomes a commonplace as Romanticism turns into Decadentism. At that point the Fatal Woman’s illness can easily be related to desire for penal wholeness, the nostalgia for an authentic identity:

Flaubert’s *Salammbô* [an exemplary Femme Fatale in the heydays of Decadentism] is a *hysterical woman* steeped in hieratic indolence: she also, wasting away in the expectation of [*something unknown*] can be imagined *wandering* in the silence of her vast apartments, or ecstatic in a corner (...) tortured by obsessions (Praz: 318; my emphasis).

As the Fatal Woman unlimitedly defies the norms that indisputably name and define her, she fails to acknowledge her position in a sign-chain she will never be able to control. That is, she ultimately thwarts her chances of dislocating the system she criticizes. Her exaggeration of

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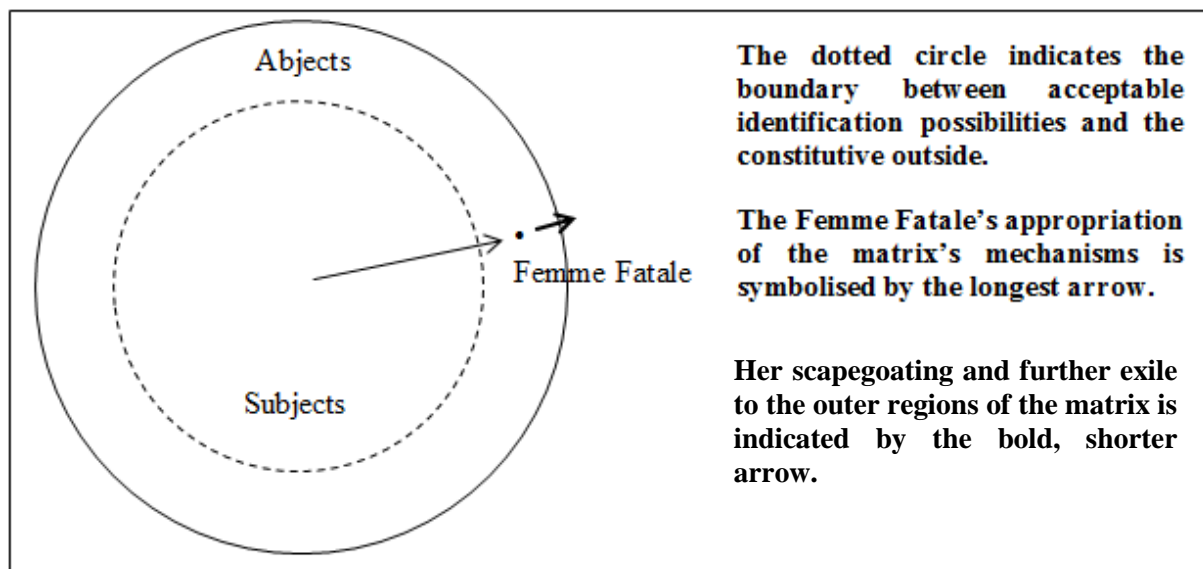
<sup>37</sup> This consumption is in fact more than merely ‘pleasurable’. It is, as explained above, a desperate desire for tangible authenticity

the compulsory play between restraining acceptance and dangerous authenticity does unveil the naturalisation of naïve norms, but fails to direct her own identity towards a more tolerable signification:

Her life had merely been an imitation, a reflection of the man's and the conclusion, while showing the complete childishness of this game of sadism and sacrilege, reaches a degree of bitterness (Praz 368).

In conclusion, while the theatrical acting out of the Byronic Hero realises its subversive potential, the Femme Fatale only causes more destruction. However, neither of them manage to achieve authentic wholeness: the Hero cunningly attains a newly accepted subject position but has lost fundamental identity aspects along the way; his female counterpart, on the other hand, perseveres in her endless quest for authenticity and is denied a subject position. As a result, the Byronic Hero is admired for his pensive psychotic malady or Weltschmerz, while the Femme Fatale's hysteria is a dangerous threat to social stability, a sick deviation from the norm. With figure 3, I provide a visualisation of the Fatal Woman's failure to realise her subversive potential.

**Figure 3: Acting Out of the Femme Fatale**





## 2.2. *Attraction, Fusion and Rebellion*

### 2.2.1. *Attraction of the Unknown*

Indisputably, the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale are no normative Subjects. Even the Byronic Hero who has conquered an acceptable position retains some of his eccentricity. Consequently, it is rather peculiar that these dangerous figures simultaneously evoke repulsion and seduce innocent Subjects. In fact, the dual response of their onlookers (and readers) is nothing less than an “uncanny experience that terrifyingly leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (Freud 1955, 219-220). It is frightening because it entails a flight from everyday familiarity that provides us with a false sense of safety, but it is attractive because Objects represent the realm of the unknown in which authentic parts of the Self reside. We do not easily recognise these authentic aspects as parts of our identity because they have become alien to us through the process of repression that the symbolic law imposes on us. If we are then confronted with the Object, we are faced with something strangely familiar. It is Praz who recognises the “metaphysical reflection of the other” in the destructive attraction of the literary figures: while Subjects fashion a “macrocosm [that] is the exact counterpart of [their] microcosm” to be acquitted of any responsibility for impurity, they inevitably become “the powerless victim of furious rage of a beautiful [Object]” that holds the assets banished from their microcosm (234).<sup>38</sup> In this light, we understand why the mysterious air of the Byronic Hero and Femme Fatale simultaneously frightens and attracts their beholders: their countenance and isolation suggest that something unfathomable lies beneath, something unknown which holds the identification possibilities that can fill the void of our forcedly reduced identity.

Every individual that is labelled “unknown” inevitably heralds the recovery of lost possibilities and can therefore not be classified in one of the matrix’s available categories. The dangerous lovers, then, disclose an unmanageable, ambiguous identity. Seeing that the attraction of the unknown can easily be symbolised by sexual tension, the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale often display features that are conventionally assigned to the opposite sex. Indeed, the Byronic Hero is not only self-assertively rebellious, he also inherited the Hero Of Sensitivity’s tenderness.<sup>39</sup> Since he has conquered a (marginal) subject position, his feminine

<sup>38</sup> Notably, Praz uses ‘Woman’ instead of ‘Object’ and where I write ‘Subject’, he uses ‘Man’. This rhetoric actually reflects the patriarchal discourse of protection of the nineteenth century in which men were absolved of any blame for the age’s decline. Since I have already unmasked the artificiality of that discourse, I can rightfully generalise Praz’ claim.

<sup>39</sup> In this light, it might seem surprising that both Thorslev and Poole remark that the ‘soft, almost feminine character’ of the protagonist in *The Bride of Abydos*, Selim makes him an exception among Byron’s Hero (Thorslev 149; Poole 13). Certainly, he is the most feminine and tender hero in what Thorslev calls “Turkish Tales”. However, I have already specified that I use

features are accepted (and rather subtle). The masculine traits of the *Femme Fatale*, on the other hand, are striking and regarded with much more suspicion. Indeed, she is obviously domineering and destructive, even to the extent that “the man is reduced to playing the woman’s part” (Praz 350).<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the *Femme Fatale* not simply adds masculine characteristics to an essentially female identity, she often displays a veritable androgynous appearance. In this perfect amalgam of male and female sexuality, the identity of the *Femme Fatale* cumulates more possibilities than the symbolic law allows. This ambiguous identity certainly does not fit any subject position provided by the matrix, yet it is undeniably attractive for the prohibited co-mixture approximates authentic wholeness. As the nineteenth century progressed, the metaphysical dimension of this transgression towards authenticity is increasingly emphasised (Praz 380). While the monstrous hermaphroditism only truly receives a moral statute in Decadentism, the attraction of the unknown has always been a moral phenomenon. Nevertheless, in the light of the late-nineteenth-century discourse of protection, the description of Decadentism as the zenith of metaphysical hermaphroditism is not entirely incomprehensible: considering that men were to be acquitted of any responsibility for a threatened age, the *Femme Fatale* seduced male lovers from the middle of the century onwards. Consequently, righteous men who were infatuated with androgynous woman were regarded as “moral hermaphrodites” who could not be blamed for their obsession (Ibid.). That desire has actually always been the wish for authenticity: it has always been the moral fascination with *Subjects* who accumulate all possibilities and foretoken authentic fullness.

Since the union with the *Subject* would effectuate true authenticity and individual wholeness, it is in fact a sublime ideal. If the fusion of the *Self* and the *Subject* would take place, it would result in a sort of ecstasy, a veritable transcendence. Accordingly, I must rectify Praz’ erroneous distinction between the mystic and the exoticist: Praz claims that the mystic projects himself into a “transcendental atmosphere” to be united with Divinity, while the exoticist “transports himself outside the actualities of time and space” only to content “his own senses” (210). In fact, this sensual satisfaction is exactly what is indispensable for true authenticity, but is denied to him. Both the exoticist and the mystic thus transfer their desires to another world to be united with the entity that heralds their transcendental completion. Only those who venture “outside their own present and actual self” can recognise the *Subject*

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the term “Byronic Hero” to refer to the individualist archetype in English Romanticism, rather than as the umbrella term for Byron’s Hero.

<sup>40</sup> We cannot interpret this reversal as a successful dislocation of the governing matrix: this subversion would only replace one *Subject* with another, while a truly lucrative subversion would make some possibilities that were previously assigned to *Subjects* acceptable.

as an essential part of the self; it is this “metaphysical intuition which discerns, behind the complex outward appearances, the permanence of a unique essence” that is the “ecstasy of the exoticist” (Praz 212). This intuition undeniably makes the individual ecstatic, as he is now capable of evading the essential confusion of ontology: the ecstatic individual understands that true authenticity cannot be found in mundane surroundings but in the unknown Abject. If we consider the true value of the unknown, we understand why the secretive Byronic Hero and enigmatic Femme Fatale are simultaneously frightening and above all attractive.

### *2.2.2. Illicit Fusion*

The fusion with the Abject is not just any union of lovers. It is surely ambiguous as it is precisely the taboo that captivates craving lovers. Praz implicitly uncovers the ambiguity of dangerous relationships as their forbidden fullness assures us that “sexual practices which man considers perverse (...) represent many virtues” (366). Consequently, the sexual relationships that occur in the dangerous lover romance are invariably illicit from a conventional point of view. First, the Byronic Hero’s and Femme Fatale’s relationship with their respective lovers is not rarely incestuous. While Thorslev primarily turns to biographical or historical facts to explain these affairs, Lutz rightly interprets the incest as a form of self-love (Thorslev 23, 154; Lutz 64). She explicitly defines the “Byronic erotic sublime” as “the rebellious doubling of the self in an incestuous self-love, (...) an eroticism of the other as same as the self, of two creating a completion when brought together” (Lutz 64). In this erotic self-doubling, a motif throughout Romanticism, the lovers acknowledge the Abject as the prohibited but indispensable complement of the Self. Like the Byronic Hero, the Femme Fatale is often involved in incestuous relationships. As far as her sexual relations are concerned, her transgression even exceeds that of the Byronic Hero: the Fatal Woman frequently appears as a cannibal who devours her lovers after she has deprived them from their sexual vitality. In this literal absorption of the Abject, we easily recognise the forbidden admission of wanting aspects. Furthermore, the illicit relationships of Fatal lovers not only uncover the Abject as a part of the Self, they also highlight that true authenticity entails the shocking fusion of different, even antagonistic possibilities. Indeed, both the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale are sadistic and algolagnic lovers who seek both pain and pleasure in their relationships.

The illegitimate bounds of dangerous lovers immediately imply rebellion. These liaisons actually meet the first condition for a successful revolution as they try to dislocate the system by excessively imitating its unachievable norms. First, the dangerous lovers’ affairs,

whether it be with an innocent Subject or a companion equally eccentric, repeat an injury in the same way as individuals repetitively display their trauma: in the lovers' bounds arises a passion so excessive that it can be interpreted as a hyperbolic imitation of the tempered, fixed passions between men and women as prescribed by the Name of the Father. In this light, the illegal bounds between lovers not only represent forbidden wholeness, they also unmask the limited relationship possibilities that evoke gender melancholia. Next, infatuated lovers use the discourse of love as an overblown parody of conventional discourse. In the first chapter, I already explained that coded language always suspends authentic meaning; we can only approximate what is meant by repeating prescribed words. Similarly, when lovers utter "I love you", that statement has already lost its essence. Their words can never fully contain their meaning and must thus endlessly be repeated in order to approximate the original avowal. Following Barthes, Lutz states that the suspended meaning of the discourse of love is the "pure affect" (Barthes, cited by Lutz 25). Hence, the surpassed essence is a hyperbolic rendering of the already hyperbolic content to which conventional discourse refers: rather than the restricted topics that nineteenth-century discourse prescribes, the discourse of love refers to (and thus always suspends) "pure affect". Considering that rational composure and achievements distinguishes the bourgeoisie from the compulsive populace, we might argue that this dichotomy is fabricated precisely to demarcate accepted (bourgeois) subjectivity: in order to protect status quo, public discourse projects instinctive and affectionate urges onto its Subjects. The overly passionate lovers then repetitively exaggerate the affection assigned to them in order to repeat their injury. Similar to conventional discourse, this hyperbolic repetition depends on performativity as the endless sequence of singular utterances that only approximate what they refer to. As the insurgent lovers thus appropriate the very mechanisms that mutilated them, they denaturalise the hyperbolic norms that impede several possibilities.

The overly passionate pursuance of union certainly unmasks the matrix's strict norms, but it does not automatically subvert the system. Insurgent lovers must take the limits of their theatrical affair into account if they want to effectuate their subversive potential. Remarkably, the impossible quest for authenticity in the dangerous lover romance is symbolised by erotic tension between lovers (Lutz 1-29). The erotic actually comes from the postponement of love that parallels discursive suspension: in the postponement of love, lovers evade the punishment for their penal union but never reach immanent love. Nevertheless, the continuous suspension is an auspicious failure: as love is never materialised, forced in the moulds of to the ruling

matrix, all possibilities are still open and authenticity seems achievable.<sup>41</sup> If lovers were to unite, that is, if their love would be materialised, they would infallibly discard some aspect of wholeness so that authentic love would, again, be missed. Lovers thus never achieve immanent love, and are faced with insatiable desire. In order to satisfy that longing, they constantly approach each other. In this light, eroticism is both the evasion of and, at the same time, the move towards the full presence of meaning. Accordingly, the destructive bounds between dangerous lovers described above do not effectively reform the matrix that injured them. The eccentric unions certainly approximate authentic love more than any available position, but their shocking actuality is rejected rather than hesitantly welcomed. The lovers will only be able to re-direct arranged norms towards more authentic meaning if they manage to repeat their injury within the limits of acceptability. In fact, in the repetitive negotiation, the overlap between Lutz' eroticism and Butler's performativity, lies the possibility to reshape the system towards broader tolerance: the lovers who repeat their disadvantaged position expose the system's inefficiencies and create chasms in the established matrix. Like their discourse, their motion of love, evasion and approximation, parallels performativity as the endless sequence of incomplete performances. It is in this series of failure that dangerous lovers re-direct the matrix and their own materiality towards "pure affect" that must, however, always be missed.

### 2.3. *Plot Structure*

Considering the importance of discourse, the way in which the dangerous lover story is told determines the perception of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale. The romance's plotline (and the typical motifs that bolster it) certainly proves that Fatal Lovers never realise their union. Stories that stage dangerous lovers invariably reveal their endless negotiation between acceptance and authenticity.<sup>42</sup> Seeing that the story of Fatal Lovers is structured on love as an instance of pure authenticity, love is the essence that is pursued but can never be narrated. In that light, dangerous lover romances are actually written in the discourse of love. Faced with

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<sup>41</sup> The postponement of love is not only voluntary: conventional lovers always interpret their own feelings along the lines of coded conventions, the repressive perspective of the matrix (Lutz 26). In addition, they essentially misread the signs of the beloved who simultaneously hides and discloses his secret identity in his negotiation between wholeness and acceptance. In this light, common lover's doubled misreading shows the inescapable influence of the matrix.

<sup>42</sup> The negotiation process is revealed even if it was not the author's aim to thematise that struggle. Indeed, from a deconstructionist viewpoint, discourse always exceeds the speaker's intentions. I have already explained that performativity or discourse are never fully controllable. In fact, stories are the most effective form of discourse to convey a certain truth, whether it be the ideas of the establishment or those of revolutionaries. Hence, the nineteenth-century dangerous lover romances are exposed to the same multi-interpretability as any discursive truth-regime, a diffusion that holds the possibility of unmasking the regime all together. In that light, we can discover the hidden rebellion of the dangerous protagonists. Nevertheless, the analysis of the dangerous lover plot presented below focusses on the too-late-ness of the plot as yet another parallel between discourse and the basic structure of the dangerous lover romance that unveils the lovers' strife to reclaim their denied wholeness.

an agonising privation, rebelling lovers long to retrieve what is lost, but simultaneously know that every materialisation of it will fall short. Therefore, they suspend the authentic meaning of their utterances in an endless sequence that repeats their injury and ultimately approximates the original avowal. The restless discourse can be described as an endless journey to authenticity, a postponed homecoming, and thus perfectly lends itself to organise any nostalgic plot.

Since the story of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale is infallibly told in the discourse of love, we do not have immediate access to the essence of the story; that is, we cannot unambiguously detect what causes the melancholic atmosphere that pervades the story we are reading. If we want to make sense of the plot of dangerous lover romances, we must understand that the most important event has already passed before the narrative commenced. As lovers ceaselessly repeat their trauma in their discourse of love, the events in the story mirror what happened earlier but cannot be told. Consequently, the reader is compelled to take on the position of the fascinated characters in the novel: like any suspicious onlooker, they try to unravel the secret that dangerous lovers hide beneath their eccentric appearance. In order to describe the reader's task, I discern three stages in the events that precede the novel and explain the dangerous protagonists' restlessness as a desperate search for what the repressive matrix has taken from them. First, the melancholic atmosphere that predominates the story implies that there is something missing. Indeed, the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale understand that the matrix positions they occupy do not grant true authenticity. Authenticity lies in the acceptance of the Self in all its possibilities, a fullness that was accessible before the symbolic law. In the first stage of the events before the actual romance, this authentic entirety is still available. The installation of the symbolic law introduces the second phase of the before-story. The full authenticity once owned is lost in the process of repression that the symbolic law dictates. As injured individuals experience a loss that cannot be grieved, they arrive at the third stage in the anticipatory developments: the experience of melancholia. Indeed, the agony that comes from the obstruction of full authenticity, an ideal "past "before" [their] fall from grace" becomes unbearable; the Byronic Hero and Femme Fatale certainly know that "in the past, [they] lived in a world full of immanent meaning, where [their] desires for ideals were still open as possibilities" (Lutz 56). This awareness obliges them to engage in a ceaseless negotiation between acceptance and authenticity. It is the theatrical exaggeration of that performativity, passionate acting out, that inaugurates the actual story. Remarkably, the actual narrative exactly mirrors the before-narrative: through excessive theatricality (phase 3) the wronged individuals repeat their injury (phase 2) and

strive to obtain the authentic wholeness initially enjoyed (phase 1). The Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale try to retrieve their original self-sufficiency through an excessive play of appearances and interiority. Indeed, the lovers painstakingly struggle to recover their authenticity, the first stage of the before-story, while they try to avoid the second phase, the confrontation with the symbolic law. This bargaining accounts for the looping of the plot as it cannot be solved, but is fundamental to assume an identity. As a result, the dangerous lovers are stuck in the endless anticipation of their impossible return.

Since the plight of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale is to regain what is lost, their story is always told “too late” (Lutz 56). In fact, the beyond-death quality of the fatal protagonists emphasises the importance of belatedness in the dangerous lover romance. In their incarnation of vampires or ghosts, or even with their deathly pallor, the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale suggest that they have already lived their life, or at least the part worth living for. Since the primary aim of these lovers is to retrieve lost authenticity and, additionally, this authentic fullness is represented in erratic relationships, the too-lateness of the narrative must be reflected in the unorthodox bounds between lovers as well. Indeed, not only do deathlike seducers prey on vivid victims, as if to render all material positions immaterial and dislocate the system’s norms, passionate lovers may even literary embrace death in necrophilia, an ever-lasting love for a beloved who is already dead (Praz 345). As necrophilia can only exist as an after-effect, after and beyond materiality, it accurately represents the belatedness of the lovers’ story and their discourse. All dangerous liaisons must be interpreted as bounds beyond death that strive for an authentic union already lost. As such, the impossible union is both the desired future as the ideal past, so that the dangerous lover’s romance is stuck in a looping of time that “occurs because the end—union in love—is prefigured in the beginning” (Lutz 35). The repetitive plot structure of the dangerous lover romance then reflects Butler’s conception of performativity: a ceaseless negotiation between authenticity and acceptance, an endless sequence of failure, only able (and only willing) to approximate what it represents. These inefficiencies actually hold possibilities to re-direct the matrix, the sequence itself. In fact, since the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale feel that meaning has already past, they feel as if “time fails”. As they try to impair the course of time to retrieve what has been lost, they take the “story into mythic realm, transcendental outside where the cessation of time, of the self, is desired” (Lutz 56-57). Butler’s definition of the matrix’s constitutive outside as a domain in which the rejected, yet necessary *Subjects* reside, echoes Lutz’ description of a mystical sphere. The lover’s desire to reside in a realm outside time or materiality is, however, a utopian dream. Their only hope of regaining some “mythic”

aspects of the self lies in the introduction of certain identification possibilities from the constitutive outside into the accepted subject group, rather than in the unmitigated withdraw to the mythical.

### 3. Theatricality in *Wuthering Heights*: Denaturalisation

Considering that Emily Brontë perfectly understands repressive patriarchal mechanisms, she manages to use them in her advantage. After describing Brontë's own theatricality, I illuminate how her conversion of well-known literary types stages a self-sufficient woman and a destructive man. These characters theatrically challenge a suppressive symbolic law, but where Heathcliff is solely detrimental, Brontë's Catherines are respected in the course of their rebellion. Even if the first female revolutionary fails to re-direct the suppressive matrix, her daughter manages to stand tall in a (changed) hostile environment. Finally, I describe how Brontë's narrative structure unveils the naturalised injustice of the matrix. This deconstruction of *Wuthering Heights* proves that Emily Brontë does not intend to destroy the Victorian family life, but encourages her (female) readers to re-direct the patriarchy towards an increased acceptance of autonomy, especially for wounded women like herself.

#### 3.1. *Emily Brontë*

When Ellis Bell is unmasked as a woman, the subversive potential of his controversial novel attains another dimension. Three years after the first print, the public realises that an authoress adopted an unconventional persona to construct a fictional universe that exaggerates norms of diction, setting and character. To effectuate subversion, not only fictitious characters must take norms to extremes, the writer too must theatrically imitate conventions while taking into account the limitations of her performance. Indeed, Emily Brontë's dragperformance meets the conditions for a successful re-signification of a suppressing matrix.

First, Brontë's rebellion is motivated by the awareness of a loss that cannot be grieved. Like any Abject, Emily Brontë suffers from melancholia as she is reduced to a single aspect of her individuality. Her position of a "female author" places her in the margins of the literary system and presents her as the personification of a threat to social and cultural stability. Realising that her "mode of writing and thinking was not what is called 'feminine'", Emily Brontë tries to avoid the reductive label and conquer a more central, authoritative position in the literary domain (Brontë C. 306). An unchallenged imitation of conventional norms, however, would reinforce the system's prejudices instead of dislocating them. In that light, the "conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine" must be



interpreted as the Brontës' (unconscious) yearning to draw attention to their gender parody. Through this theatrical performance Emily Brontë tries to re-direct the lot of the entire Abject community, rather than attain an accepted, but inauthentic position for herself. As Emily never revealed her true identity herself, we must assume that she realised the limitations of her self-naming: she must have been aware that her self-denomination together with her controversial literary constructions did not alter the matrix to that extent that female authorship would be wholeheartedly be accepted.

Emily Brontë meets another requirement to re-direct the matrix when she uses its mechanisms to her advantage. While gender labels portray Woman as a secondary Subject, Emily Brontë theatrically repeats these exclusion mechanisms, adopting the position opposite her own to enable herself to show the injustice inflicted upon her. Not only does she choose a male penname, she invades the male territory in her revision of male genres. As she introduces a female perspective in these fictions, her stories are essentially "palimpsestic works whose surface designs conceal deeper, less accessible (and less socially acceptable) levels of meaning" (Gilbert and Gubar 73). Her education can be interpreted as another appropriation of excluding (gender) conventions. Being the daughters of an acclaimed reverent, Charlotte, Anne and Emily enjoy the privilege of attending schools for middle class gentleladies.<sup>43</sup> When Charlotte claims that her sisters are "not learned", she tacitly criticises the inferior quality of that female education, aimed at developing female accomplishments, especially in comparison to the education of their brother Branwell, who is able to study classical languages and painting (306). As a result, even the educated ladies are more ignorant than their gentleman friends. Being aware of the injury, the Brontë sisters exploit the intellectual influences that, coincidentally, are accessible to them: even "[r]esident in a remote district where education had made little progress" Emily and her sisters are intellectually stimulated by their father's acquaintances (often key figures of Victorian politics and intelligentsia) and "seek social intercourse beyond [their] domestic circle" in the "books and study" that their father's library provided (Brontë C. 301). Finally, Emily's nature is infallibly characterised as eccentrically rude, wild and stoic. "Stronger than a man, simpler than a child", she hyperbolically imitates the norms of self-sufficiency that were conventionally believed to be exclusively male (Ibid.). As a self-assertive woman in whose personality "extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet", Emily Brontë stages a dragperformance that denaturalises the patriarchal norms of the Victorian society. Her personal nature as well

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<sup>43</sup> Respectively Cowan Bridge School, Roe Head School, Mme Heger's School. In 1838, Emily was (briefly) a governess at Law Hill girls' School (Small xxiix-xxi).

as her literary persona theatrically draw attention to her injury in order to re-direct the suppressive system that wounded her. It is this revolution that is mirrored by her protagonists: both Heathcliff and Catherine adopt an identity that is already a hyperbolic rendition of barren conventions to problematize the repression that is compulsory to assume an acceptable identity. Withal, they add one complaint to the theatrical revolution of well-known literary archetypes: in terms of gender, they take on the opposite of what might be expected in order to denaturalise fixed gender norms.

As Emily Brontë appropriates (literary) standards and understands the limits of her self-assertion, her rebellion resembles the Byronic Hero's. However, in her appropriation of the pen, a synecdoche for the male profession and phallus metaphor, she might be seen as a phallic mother who threatens male Subjects rather than enforcing their supremacy. In this duality she creates fascinating, subversive characters.

### *3.2. Acting out*

#### *3.2.1. Catherine's acting out*

If Catherine's acting out is "Byronic", her theatrical rage must be caused by the same injury that defines the Byronic Hero rebellion. From early on, it is clear that Catherine is blessed with, or suffers from, an extraordinary understanding of the tragic human condition as the compulsory negotiation between acceptance and authentic individuality, an understanding that must be interpreted as the Byronic Weltschmerz. Indeed, that Catherine "had ways with her such as [Nelly] never saw a child take up before" must have motivated her to ask her father to bring home a whip from his journey. Unlike a frivolous toy, a present one might expect for an ordinary little girl, a whip would be the perfect instrument to effectuate her atypical longing for autonomy. Tragically, Catherine not only desires self-sufficiency, she also longs to be accepted by the household and her father, that is, by the absolutes of the Victorian patriarchy. Her wish for complete autonomy can therefore never be achieved in a matrix that forces her to discard unsuitable parts of her identity. Significantly, Catherine's eccentric relationship with Heathcliff highlights her extraordinary sensibility of the discrepancy between wholeness and acceptance; instead of the requested whip, old Earnshaw brings home Heathcliff, who functions just the same: he would "do her bidding in anything and only [Mr. Earnshaw's] when it suited his own inclination" (36). Since Heathcliff thus becomes the instrument with which Catherine secures her authenticity, he inevitably forms a threat to patriarchal hierarchy. Indeed, Catherine's patriarchal surroundings increasingly order her to part from Heathcliff if

she wants to be “the greatest woman of the neighbourhood” (69). The patriarchal pressure to “keep [Catherine] in due restraint” instigates a process of alienation from the once so familiar Heathcliff (46). Having spent five weeks at Thrushcross Grange to learn appropriate behaviour and accomplishments, Catherine hardly recognises her companion:

Why, how very black and cross you look! And how – how funny and grim! But that’s because I’m used to Edgar and Isabella Linton. Well, Heathcliff, have you forgotten me? (47)

While Catherine is baffled by Heathcliff’s appearance, it is she who has changed. Her teasing question whether Heathcliff has forgotten her must therefore be reversed: having been habituated to life at the Grange, what seems nearest to Catherine at this point is not truly authentic. Consequently, it is she who fails to recognise Heathcliff as he is: a part of her Self. The (first) re-confrontation with Heathcliff is an uncanny experience that brings her back to something familiar but lost after the installation of the symbolic law. From Catherine’s point of view, that law is the repressive patriarchy that is endlessly secured by Subjects who try to approximate its norms: the Lintons institute Catherine’s ladylike countenance and Hindley tries to be the *pater familias*, even introducing a necessary “mother” to Wuthering Heights in the form of Frances (Gilbert and Gubar 267). Nevertheless, as Catherine is reminded of the perfect union enjoyed in childhood she understands that its disruption connotes a loss that cannot be grieved. When Heathcliff haphazardly witnesses Catherine’s negotiation between himself and the respectable Edgar Linton, Heathcliff departs from Wuthering Heights and leaves Catherine with an “incontrollable grief [that is] inarticulate” (77). The world without Heathcliff, substantiated by her marriage to Edgar, is to Catherine a “shattered prison” in which she is not free to be herself, a Self that is scattered over the moors rather than united in one identity, the original perfect union (141). It is this injury that triggers the gender melancholia of the *Byronic Victorian Woman* who is aware of her ungrievable loss. Catherine’s first physical injury in *Wuthering Heights* unveils the aggressive nature of patriarchy: having been bitten by the Grange’s watchdog, Catherine “is in mourning – and may be lamed for life” which enables the respectable Lintons to draw her into the restrictive world of acceptability (43). Seeing that Skulker is an instrument to scare off and punish trespassers, he symbolises the matrix’s mechanisms that the cripple and restrain the eccentric girl. Had she retained her eccentricity, Catherine would have been devoured or chased from the aristocratic abode. To escape the existential dilemma between acceptance-with-loss and authenticity-in-exile, Catherine acts out and tries to redirect the system that represses her.

Like any Abject who theatrically imitates unachievable norms, Catherine's revolt is only potentially subversive. To dislocate the overruling patriarchy, she must take account of her undeniable bounds to the system and take heed not to transgress social boundaries as to be exiled from it altogether. First, during her initial lodging at Thrushcross Grange, Catherine becomes a "very dignified person" through education and adopting their respectable manners: she often acts indifferent and aloof, keeping her passions under control (47). While a controlled countenance was expected from aristocratic ladies, Catherine's composure is highly unbelievable. The passions that Catherine so ardently tries to control are invariably related to Heathcliff: whether he has been sent off by Hindley (52), driven away by Edgar's visit (69) or whether he has returned after a long absence (84), Catherine painstakingly covers up her feelings towards Heathcliff. Flaunting false indifference, she confronts her acquaintances with the naturalisation of exaggerated norms. Next, after having flung Nelly, she tries to convince Edgar of her righteous remorse as she claims she will "cry [herself] sick" (63). This cultivation of illness does not only suggest remorse, its sheer visibility convinces Catherine's onlookers that she has been injured. Since patriarchal discourse presents a model of frail femininity, Catherine parodies another unachievable, yet naturalised norm (Gilbert and Gubar 54). Her frenzy is nothing less than a "parody of so many other sickroom scenes in Victorian fiction" that denaturalises the very platitude (Small xv). In this light, Nelly falsely revises her assumption that Catherine "acts a part of her disorder" (107). Similarly, she consciously exposes her first injury, the cause of her melancholia: being bitten by the Lintons' dog, she "[does] not yell out" until the invaded family finds her bleeding and feels compelled to nurse her back to health. Finally, Catherine dislocates society by appropriating another of its instruments. While the matrix marks threatening individuals to ward off identification, Catherine employs the most Byronic mark to suggest a remorseful mind and cultivate secrecy to affect her onlookers: perennially, she flashes her "winsome eyes (...) with that sort of look which turns off bad temper, even when one has all the right in the world to indulge it" (68).

Appropriating the matrix's instruments is necessary, but not sufficient for a successful subversion. Catherine's acting out can only realise its potential if she understands both her relation to society and her inability to control her name and identity. First, Catherine proves that she understands the inadequacy of her performances by suggesting the discrepancy between act and interiority. Considering that Catherine ardently tries to control her passions related to Heathcliff and seeing that Heathcliff represents a repressed aspect that resides in her unconscious, her exaggerated composure suggest that the Self cannot be exteriorised due to its complexity and opacity. Like the Byronic Hero, she discloses her secret just enough to make

clear how painful is her grief. While Nelly claims that “she never had power to conceal her passion, it always set her whole complexion in a blaze”, this must be interpreted as a deliberate disparity that highlights her injury (63).<sup>44</sup> The most salient feature of her heated complexion are her “double eyes”, the very mark with which the Byronic Hero draws attention to the secret infinity of the Self that must be witnessed to denaturalise the barren matrix (Ibid.). Next, Catherine uses her isolated position to (re-)direct her identity, rather than determine it altogether: her repetitive writing of her own name with different variations in the window pane of her closet-bed signifies her awareness of her complex identity, instead of a vain attempt to delimit or define it. Acknowledging *Catherine Earnshaw*, *Catherine Linton* and even *Catherine Heathcliff* as part of her Self, Catherine tacitly advocates the acceptance of possibilities that were spurned before.

Understanding the matrix’s mechanisms and her own limits, Catherine manages to re-direct the norms in the direction of the values she propagates. Like the Byronic Hero, she digs into her subjectivity to structure it along the lines of the society of which she craves acceptance. She does not engage in a morbid self-analysis to achieve authentic wholeness (if she did, she would choose Heathcliff over Edgar); rather, she drives her self-analysis to the extreme until it becomes a visible condition that influences her environment. First, Catherine Byronically fashions an illness with which she tries to escape the unsolvable dilemma between acceptance and authenticity. After locking herself up with Heathcliff and Edgar, a clear metaphor of her inescapable negotiation, Heathcliff flees Thrushcross Grange and Catherine seems to flee reality in self-starvation. In this anorexia nervosa, we recognise the sublime torture of the Byronic Hero who tries to signify as little as possible to avoid discarding options in self-fashioned im-materiality. In addition, this psychoneurotic condition also functions as a weapon to re-direct the matrix that led to it: while Catherine is capable of being “as stoical as anyone”, her resolution to “break their hearts by breaking [her] own” suggests a conscious revolt, a Byronic world-decimation through self-decimation that breaches the matrix to reform it (104). Secondly, her usurpation of white pages in dusty handbooks symbolise her silent rebellion. Indeed, Catherine devotes herself to an isolated self-study: the diary fragments scribbled in the margins and blank pages of prayer books prove that Catherine structures her own story in contrast to, but undeniably along the lines of, the ruling matrix whose norms are fixated in books and lessons. In these instances of severe

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<sup>44</sup> When Catherine first returns from her initial education at the Grange, she represses her unease over Heathcliff’s punishment too well to be understood: while she is inevitably grieved by the dismissing of her companion, Nelly is “pained to behold Catherine with dry eyes and an indifferent air” and “could not have imagined her to be so selfish” (52).

self-analysis, Catherine takes her self-exile beyond self-concern in an effort to re-direct the system. Her eccentric self-improvement thus reflects the humanitarian ideals which the Byronic Hero introduced to nineteenth-century society.<sup>45</sup> This well-meditated acting out coerces acceptance and respect from the matrix. Even in her delirious frenzies, she is increasingly admired by the respectable society. While Nelly thinks Catherine “was going mad” when Heathcliff vanishes from the Heights, the town doctor “pronounced her seriously ill” and advises everyone to let her have her way; even Hindley “allowed her whatever she pleased to demand” and Edgar Linton “believed himself the happiest man alive” to be able to marry his eccentric sweetheart (78-79).<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Catherine is not only respected, she becomes a model with which young girls aspire to identify. When Isabella discloses her feelings for Heathcliff, she certainly dismisses Catherine’s warnings as lies, but her hostility towards her “poisonous friend” might, as the oxymoron suggests, conceal idolisation (91). Obviously, Isabella knows that she must be like Catherine if she wants to appear attractive to Heathcliff. It is because she differs from Catherine that she appears to Heathcliff as alien as “a strange animal, a centipede” (93). An aristocratic girl without the values of female self-sufficiency thus seems “Abject” in the shrewdly reformed matrix. Considering Catherine’s Byronic exemplary position, her warnings must be interpreted as a breaking of the matrix’s moulds to reform it, rather than jealous lies.

If Catherine enacts the Byronic rebellion, her ambition is never fulfilled. Like the Byronic Hero, her strife for authentic subjectivity invariably fails in the face of an ever-changing matrix that forces its Subjects to discard certain possibilities in whichever materialisation. Indeed, when Heathcliff returns to the Grange, Catherine wants to welcome him as an essential part of herself but his threatening capriciousness motivates Edgar to banish the vagabond from his house and marriage. Feeling Heathcliff’s increasing presence and Edgar’s resolute prohibition, Catherine can no longer sustain her well-wrought negotiation between authenticity and acceptance. Consequently, she falls in a terminal frenzy, that symbolises her struggle to cope with ever-changing absolutes. Originally, she learned to repress her wildest urges while re-directing the patriarchy (a Culture-matrix) into accepting some authentic female autonomy, but when Heathcliff’s influence increases, her aristocratic

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<sup>45</sup> We must be cautious not to interpret Catherine’s ‘education’ at the Grange as Byronic humanism or nurturing individual values. On the contrary, it is a patriarchal instrument to restrain Catherine in her regulative role as a lady of accomplishment.

<sup>46</sup> Nelly’s disapproval of Catherine’s theatrical disobedience to patriarchal rules does not contradict the overall acceptance and awe for her behaviour. Nelly’s position as a housekeeper certainly sets her apart from the aristocratic houses in the moors, but she particularly plays a special role in her personification of society’s dual nature: it is to Nelly that Catherine and Heathcliff entrust their deepest desires and harshest feelings, emotions that Nelly is obliged to contemplate and must decide whether to tell them to her masters, the personification of patriarchy, or not.

matrix is invaded (and conquered) by a Nature-matrix. In that uncanny confrontation, the urges she repressed surface, but Catherine fails to acknowledge these alienated aspects of the Self. Indeed, when Catherine, driven to madness, sees her own face in the mirror, she is unable to recognise her reflection:

“Don’t you see that face?” she enquired, gazing earnestly at the mirror. And say what I could, I was incapable of making her comprehend it to be her own; so I rose and covered it with a shawl.

“It’s behind there still” she pursued, anxiously. “And it stirred. Who is it? I hope it will not come out when you are gone! Oh! Nelly, the room is haunted! (109)

While Gilbert and Gubar claim that Catherine does not recognise the “image of [the aristocratic woman] she has really become”, it is the haunting “alien version of the self”, as it was in the union with Heathcliff, with which she fails to identify (237).<sup>47</sup> Considering that Heathcliff is the personification of Catherine’s uneducated Self, and thus of Nature, Catherine’s fall mirrors the mid-nineteenth-century collapse of the British Empire and its Romantic Hero. Accordingly, her frenzy is a degradation for which she cannot be blamed. Nevertheless, Catherine’s impending death is no confession to fatalism. First, like the revolution of the Byronic Hero, the female self-assertion is continued (in the next generation) even if it defies other absolutes. Moreover, Catherine’s death signifies the wanted reunion in its im-materiality that allows all options. In an uncontrollable urge to escape her patriarchal suppression (and be reunited with Heathcliff) she opens the window “in the middle of winter” (111). In this echo of Heathcliff’s famous window-scene, Emily Brontë substantiates the (temporal) victory of Fatal Nature, personified by the *Femme Fatale*, over Romanticism.

### 3.2.2. *Heathcliff’s acting out*

Like his old playmate, Heathcliff displays a gloomy air and a physical restlessness that indicate his unease with his surroundings. Being acutely aware of what is lost, Heathcliff shares Catherine’s inclination to act out and recover their authentic union. Their melancholia is caused by the same prohibition, yet his goal differs from Catherine’s in one important aspect: while Catherine tries to re-direct the matrix (of which she craves respect), Heathcliff does not care for social acceptance if it does not lead to true authenticity. Consequently, Heathcliff not only mourns the loss of full authenticity, he also suffers from his banishment

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<sup>47</sup> This interpretation is enforced by Catherine’s assertion that she “thought [she] was at home (...) lying in my chamber at Wuthering Heights” as when she was a child and part of the perfect union with Heathcliff, her other Self (109).

from accepted society. The vagrant realises that if he is to unveil his injury, he must appropriate his suppressors' mechanisms rather than deny their influence. First, Heathcliff exploits the physical marks that were assigned to him to institute his exclusion. Indeed, Isabella is dangerously infatuated with Heathcliff as she imagines that "he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior" (90). Like the *Femme Fatale*, Heathcliff's most salient feature is his smile with which he misleads his opponents in his daily gambling at Wuthering Heights (91), lures in naïve Subjects like Isabella and Cathy and even gets Nelly to "involuntarily obey him" (294). Unlike Catherine, Heathcliff does not adopt these marks to denaturalise the accustomed discrepancy between appearance and interiority. Instead, he exploits the mystery they suggest solely to attract subjects on whom he wants to take revenge.<sup>48</sup> Next, Heathcliff excessively imitates the matrix's norms by exploiting social and judicial laws. When Edgar Linton is about to alter his will, Heathcliff arranges a meeting with the Lintons' lawyer to stall him and prevent that Linton's fortune is left to trustees instead of Cathy. Even in his marriage with Isabella, Heathcliff takes care to "keep strictly within the limits of the law [to avoid] giving her the slightest right to claim a separation" (133). It is with this "diabolical prudence" that Heathcliff "married [Isabella] to obtain power over [Edgar]" (134).<sup>49</sup> The careful criminal not only closes social deals by employing instituted laws, he also sets the underground rules of the illegal circuit to his hand. Heathcliff's scheme to marry off Linton to Cathy even associates the despotic father with prostitution. Finally, like the *Femme Fatale*, Heathcliff masters the rules of "dice, brandy [and closed] shutters" to actualise his revenge (92):

The guest was now the master of Wuthering Heights: he held firm possessions, and proved to the attorney, who, in his turn, proved it to Mr. Linton, that Earnshaw had mortgaged every yard of land he owned for cash to supply his mania for gaming: and he, Heathcliff, was the mortgagee (166).

After Heathcliff poaches Wuthering Heights from its rightful heir, the abode is a part of the matrix's constitutive outside. In contrast to Gilbert and Gubar's conviction this does not imply that there is no hierarchy at the Heights (262). Considering that Heathcliff is "female in his monstrosity", the antagonist of the ruling patriarchy, his realm must be interpreted as a matriarchy. Like every abject group, this matriarchy is structured in accordance with the

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<sup>48</sup> Certainly only Nelly notices that his smile is often "ill-meaning" but as a narrator and both Catherine's and Heathcliff's confidential she plays a distinct role in Brontë's novel which I will analyse in section 3.3. of this chapter

<sup>49</sup> The reference to the devil is clear in this utterance, but it can also be discovered in Heathcliff's manipulation of the Lintons' lawyer as the latter 'sold himself to Mr. Heathcliff' just as one sells his soul to the devil (251). The myriad allusions to Heathcliff's demonic nature affirm his status of a fallen angel, a true *Femme Fatale*.



common principles of selection and exclusion, even if it selects other, often contrasting possibilities. The matriarchal hierarchy of Heathcliff's *Wuthering Heights* is undeniable. First, the Heights "regained its ancient aspect of comfort under female management" of Heathcliff's newly hired maid who "never dare[s] disobey the master" (174, 260). Moreover, Heathcliff wants to make Hareton an uncultivated brute, who is never taught to read or write, doing heavy chores on the land instead. Linton, Heathcliff's legitimate son, the very personification of patriarchy, is presented as a fragile, sick boy. In this conversion of the patriarchal gender positions, Heathcliff unmistakably embodies the Name of the Father or, in this case, the Mother. Like suppressed Subjects, Linton is threatened into obeying his father's commands, unable to mourn his grief (of not being attended to). Indeed, Linton shrieks: "my father threatens me (...) and I dread him! I dare not tell" (136). Heathcliff's law is inescapable as he even haunts Linton in his dreams. Finally, even if Joseph is partial to the old Earnshaw name, he never truly stands up to his new master under the threat of impending punishment.

Exploiting the matrix's instruments, Heathcliff meets the first condition for a successful revolution, but that is not enough to realise his subversive potential. In his unabated revolution, he fails to recognise the constraints of his self-definition. Immediately after Catherine's death, he vows to "repeat [his sufferings] till [his] tongue stiffens" and invokes Catherine to "drive him mad":

You said I killed you – haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers (...).  
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 (148).

While the repetition of his injury might have uncovered the reason for their separation, the compulsory repression of possibilities, Heathcliff professes that he does not want to live without the essential part of his Self that is Catherine. He would rather go mad in unity than pursue an accepted balance between mourning and a respectability. Next, Heathcliff is convinced that he is able to control his identity: he claims that he "shall be [Cathy's] father – all the father [she]'ll have" (239). That Heathcliff imagines himself as "*all* the father" must not only be interpreted in the light of Edgar's death, it unquestionably proves Heathcliff's conviction of his imminent revenge that will re-install his wholeness. Nevertheless, as his injury is never healed, his revenge never suffices. He therefore declares that he will continue to avenge Catherine on her offspring:

You [Cathy] shall have plenty of [tears] – you can bear plenty – you’re no weakling – you shall have a daily taste, if I catch such a devil of a temper in your eyes again (239)

In this threat Heathcliff does not take heed of the altering matrix that is foreshadowed in the subversive potential of Cathy’s temperamental eyes. Even when Cathy and Hareton engage in a subversive affair (at least from Heathcliff’s point of view) through study, Heathcliff merely curses at the new couple, rather than impeding their union. Finally, he attempts to escape the compulsory negotiation inherent to every materialisation. Like the *Femme Fatale*, he tries to establish authentic fullness in im-materiality through the self-decimation of anorexia and insomnia. Indeed, Catherine’s memory becomes unbearable when it is materialised in her descendants who “are the only objects which retain a distinct material appearance to [Heathcliff] that causes [him] pain amounting to agony” (287). His fast is, in contrast to Catherine’s, not aimed at re-directing the matrix: while Catherine makes sure everyone knows that she is seriously ill, Heathcliff seems pleased with his approaching vanishing and avoids company of all kinds, even doctor’s visits. Making up his will, he wishes he could annihilate his properties and himself along with them (296). Engrossed in his efforts to “attain *my* [his] heaven” Heathcliff does not try to reform a matrix whose heaven is “altogether unvalued and uncoveted by [him]” (297).

In conclusion, Heathcliff’s ungrievable melancholia over the loss of authentic fullness motivates him to embark upon an unmitigated, transgressive quest for wholeness that causes his ban from acceptance. Like the *Femme Fatale*, he recognises his ties to the system but fails to acknowledge the limits of his self-definition.<sup>50</sup> Like Catherine, he finds wholeness in im-materiality. Contrary to his lover, however, Heathcliff does not use his ultimate ineffectiveness to change the matrix.

### 3.2.3. *Cathy’s acting out*

While Catherine cannot re-direct society towards acceptance of individual, particularly female autonomy, Cathy perpetuates her mother’s revolt, only against other absolutes. Cathy’s rebellion is already Byronic in its motivations: even before she has parted from a loved one, the sense of loss is installed in her from the previous generation. Consequently, *Wuthering Heights* “on the other side of the hills” holds an uncanny attraction over the sensible girl

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<sup>50</sup> That Heathcliff is often analysed as a Byronic Hero is doubtlessly due to the fact that he evokes some sympathy in most readers. In fact, we do not sympathise with him through his behaviour or specific rebellion but through Nelly as mediator.

(167). She likes “good reasons for every restraint” and when her father cannot give satisfactory arguments for his order to avoid the Heights and her long-lost cousin, Cathy is Byronically obliged to trust her own judgement (195). Despite her insubordinate letters and visits to Linton, however, she still wants to be the daughter she is expected to be. When her father and Nelly catch a fever, the eccentric girl divides her attention between their sickbeds and Linton’s. Even when she embarks upon her secretive journeys to Wuthering Heights, Cathy “partly wished [her] father knew, and approved” (219). In this negotiation we recognise Cathy’s extraordinary understanding of her position, a true Byronic *Weltschmerz*. Significantly, this negotiation process does not change substantially when Cathy moves from the Culture-matrix of Thrushcross Grange, to the Nature-matrix of Wuthering Heights: first, Cathy longs for her father’s approval in the patriarchy of Thrushcross Grange and simultaneously disobeys when she deems it befitting; in Heathcliff’s matriarchy then, she obeys the new Name of the Father, being firmly threatened, while tacitly trying to reform the system. Haunted with the sense of loss that is ingrained in any negotiation process and therefore in materialisation, Cathy feels a melancholia that triggers a theatrical rage.

If Cathy is to act out, she can only realise her subversive potential if she adheres to the conditions of abject revolution. Like the Byronic Hero, she already meets one of these conditions by acknowledging her limits of self-definition. In the patriarchy of the Grange, Cathy may plead to get her will, she ultimately does accept the supremacy of the Name of the Father as “her affection for [her father] was still the chief sentiment in her heart” (226). Later, Cathy comprehends the constraints of her self-sufficiency as she cannot simply alter Heathcliff’s system that determines the sign-chain she belongs to. When Heathcliff vouches that Cathy will not see her dying father until she marries Linton, the captivated girl realises that “she must either accept [Linton] or remain a prisoner” (243). Seeing that she can neither ignore Heathcliff’s order, nor escape his threat, Cathy is obliged to hasten the marriage, instead of persisting her urge to refuse it. Evidently, Cathy’s hazardous negotiation with her soon-to-be father-in-law mirrors the Byronic compromise between concessive safety and increased authenticity.

In addition to acknowledging the confines of agency, Cathy must meet another requirement to disjoint the (changing) system. She meets this condition by appropriating the mechanisms of the matrix that limited her self-determination in the first place. Indeed, Cathy tactfully coaxes the household into doing her bidding by repeating the rules of the patriarchy. First, Nelly claims that whenever “a servant chanced to vex her, it was always ‘I shall tell papa!’” and thus affirms Cathy’s exploitation of the Name of the Father (167). She then

abuses the patriarchal model of frail femininity when she exclaims “I am sick” to get Nelly’s attention (199) or when she cries to arouse her father’s pity in order to be permitted to visit Linton. Consequently, her company is convinced that Cathy is only disobedient “from hot temper and thoughtlessness” rather than from bad intentions (196). Significantly, she does not only evoke feelings of sympathy by exaggerating her female frailty. Like the Byronic Hero, Cathy excessively displays remorse to convince her surroundings of her morality. To accentuate her troubled mind, she cultivates physical marks that suggest an uneasy conscience; with this ingenious cultivation, she is able to get what she wants while retaining much-craved acceptance:

[Nelly] couldn’t bear to witness her *sorrow*, to see her pale, dejected countenance, and *heavy eyes*; and [she] yielded [to accompany her to Wuthering Heights] (207; my emphasis).

We cannot help but notice that these marks are undeniably Byronic. Accordingly, Cathy’s most salient peculiarity are her “heavy eyes” that infallibly mark her insurgence. Seeing that Cathy’s eyes are “those of Catherine Earnshaw”, they serve the same subversive agenda, beguiling their onlookers and coaxing concession (286). When a new Nature-matrix replaces the patriarchy of Edgar Linton, a substitution that is substantiated by the death of Cathy’s father and the inauguration of Heathcliff as her father-in-law, the Earnshaw-eyes still affect their suppressor, provided that the suppressed takes the new norms into account. Begging Heathcliff to allow her one last visit to her dying father, Cathy calls upon her familiar repertoire of subversive mechanisms: first, she emphasises female inferiority (“I’m going to kneel here”) and her troubled mind (“If papa thought I had left him on purpose could I bear to live?”) but cannot change Heathcliff’s resolution; Cathy then exploits the enigmatic allure of her eyes and assures her new father that she “will not take [her] eyes from [his] face, till [he looks] back at [her]” hoping he would not be able to “help being sorry and pitying [her]” (243). Initially, her efforts prove in vain, but things change as Cathy grows more intrepid the longer she resides in the feral Nature-matrix. Indeed, when Lockwood encounters the residents of the Heights, the fierce Cathy seems a fitting member of the Heathcliff-clan. Her Earnshaw-eyes, however, have regained their insurgent quality: “the resemblance [to her mother’s eyes] disarm Mr. Heathcliff” as they uncannily remind him of what he painstakingly pursues but cannot reach: the reunion with his lost love, the recovery of authentic wholeness (287). Cathy’s defiant conformity, her partial adaptation to Heathcliff’s rules and simultaneous self-assertiveness, is unmistakably a Byronic rebellion.

Since Cathy understands the illusion of the presentist conceit, she does not impulsively pursue outright authenticity. Instead, she perfects her own mind to re-direct the matrix towards wider acceptance of autonomy. If Cathy wants to affect her surroundings through introspection, her self-bettering must evoke some sort of fascination. Indeed, as her strife for world-improvement through self-improvement mirrors Byronic humanism, her self-study is rather eccentric. That peculiarity, however, does not primarily lie in secrecy or self-decimation, it is erratic in its sheer existence. First, female education is commonly limited to female accomplishments in the Victorian society, but Cathy's learned father takes her education on himself and, in doing so, offers her a privileged learning. Hence, the apt scholar does not merely read diverting stories. The groomsman, for instance, who "is fond of reading and thinks of leaving off to get married" can easily be persuaded to attend to her wishes if she only lends him books from her personal library (238). Even her cultivated cousin "wants to have [her books] extremely, when [Cathy] told him how interesting they were" since "his books are not as nice as [hers]" (197). When Cathy is forced to substitute the Grange for Wuthering Heights, her ardent reading becomes even more remarkable. Considering that Heathcliff's abode is a Nature-matrix that keeps its subjects uncultivated, it is not in secrecy that lies the eccentricity of education, but in the overt practice of any study. At first, reading seems only a diversion, but the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights soon learn that it promises self-sufficiency. To counter this inevitable threat to the stabilised hierarchy, Heathcliff's Subjects try to disarm the intrusion by naming it. Joseph, for example, claims that Cathy does not study any lofty topic, but practices the black arts instead. Cathy, however, highlights the incredibility of his insult by theatrically imitating it:

She continued, taking a dark book from a shelf, "I'll show you how far I've progressed in the Black Art – I shall soon be competent to make a clear house of it. The red cow didn't die by chance; and your rheumatism can hardly be reckoned among providential visitations" (12).

Due to this acting out, a suppressed (and attentive) Nature-matrix Subject realises the artificiality of the norms he used to follow and gradually casts off these "chains forged by habit" (286): Hareton realises that his inability to read limits his possibilities. Significantly, he cannot even read his own name so that he misses every sense of a Self. It is only when he learns to spell his name, that he is able to re-direct his identity towards larger independency.

Hence there is an unmistakable “incitement to his secret studies” (268).<sup>51</sup> As he progresses in this learning, Hareton adopts the self-reliance with which the Byronic Cathy re-directs the matrix.

The rebellion of Cathy and her companion reaches its zenith in their union. Like the union between Catherine and Heathcliff, this fresh affair must be interpreted as the meeting of opposite parts into one Self. It is not, however, usually interpreted as subversive, because it is the most normative patriarchal liaison. Notwithstanding, it is illicit in the Heathcliff-matrix. Since the union appears so natural to the reader, he/she easily (even unconsciously) accepts the radical subversion of one of the most severe Victorian norms: a brute man is dependent of an educated woman to be freed from suppression in a tyrannical matrix that is essentially matriarchal.

### 3.3. Narration

Emily Brontë takes pains to thematise the patriarchal matrix that thwarts her ambitions. Not only do her characters defy its manipulative mechanisms, Brontë denaturalises the intrinsic repression of the matrix by the way in which she presents her revolutionary story.

First, Brontë employs the frame narrative to fictionalise the act of storytelling and ultimately unveil the construction process that (Victorian) discourse implements.<sup>52</sup> Notably, the parallel between construction and storytelling is immediately clear from the first narrator’s introduction of the charismatic residents of Wuthering Heights. Rather than conveying absolute truths, Mr. Lockwood relies on mere conjectures to construct an image of his landlord and his household. When the nosy tenant is temporarily bedbound by illness, he turns to his housekeeper, Ellen Dean, to satisfy his curiosity. Ellen – Nelly – Dean might have been a direct witness to the events she recounts, she is too partial to tell an objective story. By embedding one unreliable narrator into the account of another, Emily Brontë unveils a mediation process, that obstructs objectivity, and denaturalises Victorian discourse that constructs biased stories as incontestable truths.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, Brontë introduces no omniscient narrator who relates the events as they truly happened and unambiguously

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<sup>51</sup> Seeing that Heathcliff’s realm is an uncultivated matriarchy, the brutish Hareton must, in contrast to Cathy, engage in a secretive study.

<sup>52</sup> The literary technique of the frame narrative was already well-known among learned readers. Moreover, it must be interpreted as a satiric device, an interpretation that is enforced by the long history. Indeed, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (a 14<sup>th</sup> century collection of stories and thus the predecessor of the actual novel), Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* (often referred to as the first novel, published in 1605) and Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (one of the most famous English satires, published in 1726) are all frame narratives that parody contemporary customs.

<sup>53</sup> In narratologic terms, Lockwood can be defined as an extradiegetic (because not embedded) and homodiegetic (since he is, to some extent, involved in his story) narrator. Nelly, then, is intradiegetic (i.e. the narrator of a story-within-the-story) and homodiegetic.

discloses characters' thoughts and emotions. As a result, the reader does not attain a privileged position, being entrusted with the character's true past, intentions and looming hindrances, but is obliged to gather information from biased, if not unknowing characters. Since these characters represent different social (and moral) positions, they convey different viewpoints to emphasise that there is no absolute Truth, only slyly constructed and tacitly naturalised truth-regimes.

Judging from the first pages, no reader would expect the shock that the novel is about to evoke. Indeed, Mr. Lockwood introduces the bizarre inhabitants of Wuthering Heights from a familiar viewpoint: as an aristocratic gentleman who wants to escape the hustle of the increasingly vivid urban life, Mr. Lockwood is nothing less than the mouthpiece of the dominant Victorian patriarchal matrix. He might be astounded by Heathcliff's rough demeanour and isolated abode, he is still convinced his landlord's "reserve springs from an aversion to showy displays of feeling" rather than from pride or ill-will (3). Notwithstanding, Heathcliff and his household prove to be as hostile on Lockwood's second visit as on the first. Moreover, the visitor cannot wrap his head around the hierarchy in the house. Lockwood's inability to assess the relations in Heathcliff's eccentric family is in fact caused by the naturalised truth-regime he reinforces. As Wuthering Heights is the manifestation of the matrix's constitutive outside, its inhabitants are the personification of repressed aspects of the Self. Consequently, Heathcliff's Nature-matrix seems alien rather than familiar to the aristocratic subject. At first, Lockwood vigorously persist the repression in his attempts to fit the deviant house in conventional moulds: he first assumes that Cathy is Heathcliff's wife and then that she is Hareton's who is neither a servant, nor Heathcliff's son.<sup>54</sup> However, when a heavy snowstorm makes Lockwood a temporary prisoner at the Heights, he cannot avoid the presence of *Subjects* who prove that he (the patriarchal matrix) is "unhappy in [his] conjectures" (3).<sup>55</sup> As Lockwood is unable to escape his landlord's influence, an uncanny dream assures him that he is capable of the same animalistic brutality as his hosts, an aspect that is more familiar than it seemed:

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<sup>54</sup> The assumption that Cathy, who "did not look not seventeen", would be Hareton's wife rather than Heathcliff's would solve the *unconventional* age difference of the first conjecture (3). Lockwood's conviction implies that every matrix tries to solve deviant, and thus threatening, elements by forcing them into pre-existent and unquestionable norms.

<sup>55</sup> The overwhelming snowstorm is an unmistakable metaphor and can be interpreted in two contrasting, though not excluding, ways. On the one hand, the snowstorm symbolises the suppressive nature of every matrix, reducing its *Subjects* and *Subjects* to *forced* agents. From the point of view of the dominant matrix, on the other hand, the inescapable snowstorm represents the unavoidable resurfacing of (Nature) aspects of the Self that ought to be repressed.

As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window – Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bed-clothes (21).

Even if Lockwood is uncannily reminded of repressed possibilities, he tries to escape their immediate effects. At the first opportunity, when the storm has cleared, he hastens home where he recovers in his study. Despite his keen flight his awareness of, and fascination by, repressed possibilities has been raised. Consequently, his uncanny experience has an irrevocable, if indirect effect: even though he resolves never to return, that is, never to let the repressed surface, he cannot resist the urge to hear his housekeeper tell its past.

The story that Ellen Dean recounts does not contradict Lockwood's patriarchal view, yet it does unveil the negotiation process that lies beneath its conventions. As a housekeeper, Nelly is not directly affected, but is a biased witness to the events that forged the curious relations at Wuthering Heights. In this extraordinary position, she cannot be interpreted as one of Butler's theatrical *Subjects*, but she is no ordinary *Subject* either. Hence she does not (unconsciously) naturalise the unresolvable bargain between acceptance and authenticity, nor does she disclose it through vehement acting out. It is exactly in this unique position, however, that she denaturalises the compulsory negotiation: the trusted housekeeper is expected to guard the tranquillity of the household on the one hand, but she is the only one to whom her superiors confide their unconventional passions on the other. Indeed, Catherine coercively asks Nelly to "keep a secret for [her]" and entrusts her true feelings towards Edgar and Heathcliff to the reluctant maid (69). Heathcliff, in his turn, imparts his motivations for revenge and his design to forge a marriage between his son and Catherine's daughter (189). Finally, he does not hesitate to tell Nelly of his necrophilic reunion with Catherine, a beyond-death unison which I will return to below. As the secrets that Nelly is entrusted with are utterly illicit, she must not disclose them to her master if she wants to protect the house's stability, but it is her duty as a housekeeper to inform her employer of possible threats. Consequently, Nelly is troubled, rather than excited by her protégé's confessions; in fact, she "does not like to hear [them] talk" (257). When Heathcliff demands Nelly to announce his visit to Thrushcross Grange after years of absence, the disturbance that would accompany that message causes Nelly to "shrink reluctantly from performing her errand", yet "a sense of her folly compelled her" to speak (83). Nelly's negotiation unquestionably reveals that her patriarchal superiors expect her to repress un-stabilising knowledge. Significantly, she



“shrinks” as if threatened to be punished if she were to reveal what ought to be hidden, a revelation that is discarded as “folly”, rather than righteousness. Finally, Nelly’s negotiation not only reveals repression, it also uncovers the selection with which the matrix excludes fickle elements from its structure. As Cathy’s chaperon, seeing to it that she obeys her father’s norms, Nelly “hardly know[s] what to hide, and what to reveal” of Cathy’s insurgence (233). When Nelly reports forbidden escapades, secret letters or even Heathcliff’s threats to her master, she infallibly censors her story not to stir up commotion:

I related our compulsory visit, and detention at the Heights: I said Heathcliff forced me to go in, which was *not quite true*; I uttered *as little as* possible against Linton; nor did I describe his father’s brutal conduct – *my intentions being to add no bitterness*, if I could help it, to [Mr. Linton’s] already overflowing cup (249; my emphasis).

Even if Nelly does not theatrically imitate conventions, she manages to display the repression and selection that is inherent to the matrix’s construction of Subjects and Objects. Since she is the guardian of stability as well as the sentinel of truth, Nelly both personifies and denaturalises negotiation.

Emily Brontë’s appropriation of the frame narrative might disclose the manipulative mechanisms of discourse, it also complicates the plot structure of her demanding novel. Notwithstanding, the complex plot might be a conscious parody of the dangerous lover romance: relying on the parallel between discourse and the stereotypical plotline, Brontë unveils that the essence of what is told has already past, for no utterance can fully contain its meaning. Similar to discourse that endlessly suspends its meaning, lovers ceaselessly suspend and anticipate their union. These suspensions herald the recovery of what is lost, while avoiding materialisation that inevitably falls short. To expose the inadequacy as well as the subversive potential of such failure-sequences, Brontë draws upon different narrative devices. First, the mediation process represented by the frame narrative affirms that (story)telling cannot provide direct access to the events as they really happened. If the readers of *Wuthering Heights* want to understand the melancholic inhabitants of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, they must try to know what caused that dejection. To discover the secret that Heathcliff and his household (only partially) hide, they must rely on Mr. Lockwood, who relies on the story of Nelly Dean. The latter might have been present when the crisis developed, she only witnesses the events, rather than being directly involved. Indeed, to tell her story, she depends on the confessions of the dangerous lovers themselves and, even more so, on the many letters, stories and hearsay of copious characters who all select those parts of

the truth they want to convey.<sup>56</sup> As readers must unravel a series of mediations, their anticipation of the ending echoes the lovers' journey to union in its suspension and approximation: every story inserts obstructions that delay the ending to create suspense and no story has a univocal meaning, even if incontestability was the writer's aim.

The two-volume structure is the second literary device that emphasises that every tale or utterance misses its essence, a secret before-story. Considering that the conventional romance structure mirrors the un-told events that preceded, the consecutive rebellion against and re-installation of the (reformed) patriarchal matrix, represented in Catherine's and Cathy's rebellion respectively, suggest that Brontë's controversial first volume discloses a story that has never been told, while her second volume is concerned with the customary after-effects.<sup>57</sup> At first sight, the first volume promises to become just another romance as Mr. Lockwood introduces it from the familiar viewpoint. It is probable, however, that this conventional presentation is a conscious strategy: initiating her story in accordance with literary (and discursive) conventions, Emily Brontë is able to lure in sceptical readers while tacitly introducing new elements, as illustrated above. Indeed, after only a few pages, "Volume I" halts its concern with the after-effects to convey the threefold before-story that has always been silenced. First, Nelly discloses a phase in which authentic wholeness is accessible in the form of lovers' union: Catherine is free to take Heathcliff as her uncultivated companion in their wild excursions among the moors. This freedom is rather peculiar, as it is only possible while old master Earnshaw is still alive. The presence of a father would imply that the Name of the Father has already been installed, initiating the repression of unacceptable possibilities. However, according to Gilbert and Gubar the old master's journey to Liverpool must be interpreted as a "half-conscious preparation for death" that allows the children to achieve a "fullness of being" (263-265). Their arguments suggest that father Earnshaw prepares for death by ceasing to implement the repression of hidden desires, a hypothesis enforced by the fact that it is the master himself who introduces the gypsy boy to his household. When he asks his children what he should bring them from Liverpool, he symbolically asks them to reveal themselves. Hindley wishes a fiddle, a symbol of wanted softness, Catherine asks for a whip as a representation of her lust for power. As Catherine

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<sup>56</sup> Significantly, the reader is only acquainted with Heathcliff's management of the Heights-before-Cathy by a lengthy letter of Isabella. Most information about *Wuthering Heights* is passed on as town gossip through the accounts of Zillah or even the "Idle tales" of heedless inhabitants of the moors (299).

<sup>57</sup> While the familiarity of "Volume II" has often motivated scholars to scold it as uninteresting, the idea of an essence lost in a before-story provides an explanation for the infamous distinction. Moreover, despite the notorious postulation that Emily Brontë hastily added the second volume to complete the Victorian three-decker (the remaining volume of which was Anne's *Agnes Grey*) after publishers turned down Charlotte's volume, the second volume that is concerned with Catherine's offspring has recently received increasing attention (Riu; Gilbert & Gubar: 287-302).

receives her whip in the form of a gypsy boy, that power must be interpreted as the acknowledgment of her uncultivated parts of the Self. It is only when father Earnshaw is succeeded by his son as the master of the house that the second stage in the before-story commences: the Name of the Father is installed, making an end to fullness of possibilities. That repression is substantiated in the increasing influence of Thrushcross Grange and Catherine's aristocratic education. The subsequent melancholia experienced by the separated lovers introduces the final phase of the before-story. Like the Byronic Hero Catherine excessively flaunts her dejection while Heathcliff, in accordance with the *Femme Fatale*, is not easily understood, but suffers from the same injury.<sup>58</sup> Due to their separation, Heathcliff and Catherine never feel at home in their beloved moors. Haunted with homesickness, they feel the need to repeat their injury in constant restlessness, "wandering to and fro", and secretive journeys (75). Ineluctable as this theatrical rage is, "Volume I" already includes it in the form of Catherine's acting out as explained above. The closest approximation of its aim, simultaneously its biggest failure, is preserved for the second section: the presence of death dominates the volume that conveys a well-known story, only with never-before disclosed insights.

"Volume II" begins with Catherine's frenzy that initiates her death and the irreversible separation of the lovers. Consequently, Heathcliff's melancholia becomes unbearable and urges him to act out. His acting out then mirrors what has happened before: he theatrically imitates the norms (phase 3) diabolically prudent to avoid any hindrance of the Law (phase 2) to fashion a revenge plan that unambiguously tries to recover (or avenge) something that is lost (phase 1). As a result, Heathcliff is stuck in endless acting out. Indeed, he incessantly "repeats his sufferings" in an attempt to own all the possessions of his suppressors, to marry off his offspring to Catherine's and to become the lord of the house which briefly held his own authentic union. However severely Heathcliff pursues his goal, his revenge must be a "killing, not by inches, but by fractions of hair-breadths, to beguile [him] with the spectre of a hope, through eighteen years" (257). Heathcliff thus suspends his revenge and approximates his goal. This never-ending anticipation and suspensions installs the eroticism typical of dangerous lovers' bounds. As explained above, this approximation is both the effect of discourse's inefficiencies as it is a mechanism to avoid reductive materialisation. In fact, Catherine's death does not indicate her escape of this endless approximation, it signifies the

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<sup>58</sup> Both Catherine and Heathcliff reveal the reason for their melancholia, even their revenge strategies to Nelly. Nonetheless, as Nelly takes on a special position in the matrix, their confessions do not contradict the mystery and misunderstanding of dangerous lovers.

continuing quest for authentic unity that can only be achieved in im-materiality. Indeed, when Heathcliff feels the need to dig up Catherine's body, he halts his efforts when he "was on the point of attaining [his] object, when [he] heard a sigh from above"; Heathcliff realises that his beloved cannot be with him in the flesh but in a presence which he "could almost see, yet [he] could not" (256). Moreover, Catherine haunts Heathcliff to the extent that materiality pains him in its inadequacy:

What is not connected with her to me? And what does not recall her? (...) I am surrounded with her image! The most ordinary faces of men and women – my own features – mock me with a resemblance. The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that I have lost her! (288)

It is only when both protagonists have died that they can again "walk the moors" together in im-material union (299).<sup>59</sup>

Like the dangerous lover romance, "Volume II" is told too late. The necrophilic tension that is initiated by Catherine's death reflects the too-lateness of that story.<sup>60</sup> The beyond-death relationships in which both the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale are involved suggest that the essence of their union has already past. Ordinary romances leave the reader guessing what that essence might have been, but Emily Brontë actually provides the before-story ("Volume I") to disclose that what is lost is exactly the authentic wholeness which the lovers now pursue. Seeing that union is both the desired future as the forgone past, Brontë's story is stuck in a time loop. First, this loop is suggested by the repetition of the famous window-scene. In the beginning of the novel, Mr. Lockwood witnesses how Heathcliff wrenches open the window lattice to passionately implore Catherine to return to him (24). Later Nelly recounts how Catherine aggressively opens the window in a fit of frenzy to feel close to Wuthering Heights and Heathcliff (111). While Catherine's window-scene closes "Volume I" the last repetition of this poignant episode occurs at the end of "Volume II", where Heathcliff has opened the window to be united with Catherine, a union that is finally achieved in the death of both lovers (298).<sup>61</sup> The recurrence of scenes across volume boundaries emphasises the parallel between the different generations that dominate

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<sup>59</sup> Significantly, Heathcliff has *anticipated* that union by loosening one side of Catherine's coffin to be able to lay next to her when he dies.

<sup>60</sup> This belatedness is further emphasised by the narratologic device of the frame narrative. Indeed, Lockwood introduces "Volume II" in the same, yet slightly changed words with which Nelly terminated "Volume I". With this minimal variation Brontë again emphasises the construction process with which the matrix manipulates our world view.

<sup>61</sup> Significantly, the passion in these scenes is fuelled by the stormy weather that enters the room through the window. As the begging lovers invariably suffer from these nature conditions, the window-scenes must be interpreted as self-decimation to achieve fullness in im-materiality

the separate volumes. As the second volume mirrors the first and, in fact, the second generation mirrors its ancestors, these dichotomies are another indication of looping time. Indeed, both Catherine and Cathy pursue forbidden lovers to rebel against matrixes that are each other's counter image. With this reversal, Brontë implies that the struggle for self-sufficiency is never fulfilled as it faces overruling systems that are truth-regimes rather than the presentation of Truth. Considering that the lovers endlessly repeat their futile attempts for union and seeing that their necrophilia is realised as a ghostly presence rather than in the material unison of survivor and corpse, the acting out of Heathcliff and Catherine is a sequence of failure. As the bound they pursue has already past, not only materiality falls short, time fails as well. Consequently, the dangerous lovers take their story into the mythic realm where time and materiality dissolve. This mythic cessation of time would account for the mythical elements that elevate the mundane Victorian life to mythical dimensions. Indeed, the ghost of Catherine is almost palpable and Heathcliff is demonically strong and seems to grow stronger as he ages. Realistically presented, the mythic events are in fact exaggerated "realistic portraits" of Victorian society to denaturalise its norms (Yukari n. pag.). Finally, the failure of time is highlighted by the protagonists' indifference to it. When Catherine announces that she will marry Edgar, she claims that she has "only to do with the present" in which he is handsome, young and rich (71). Her allegation, however, is a residue of the Name of the Father with which she fruitlessly tries to counteract her undeniable feelings for Heathcliff. When Heathcliff's influence becomes insuperable, Catherine's hold on time fails as she conflates present, past and future: she has a vision of Nelly as the "aged woman" she will "come to fifty years hence" and recognises her own reflection in the mirror as the young girl she was at the Heights (108-109). Heathcliff's time, too, seems to stand still as eighteen years "had little altered his person" (253). In contrast to the dangerous lovers, the narrators frequently refer to time. Indeed, Nelly often comments on the passing of the seasons, the years and hours, to reprimand restless lovers as if to force them back into time, that is, back into the restrictive matrix's norms (75). The only occasion that a narrator failed to tell the time is after Lockwood's uncanny encounter with Catherine's ghost in his dream. When he wakes, it is "not three o'clock yet" while he "could have taken oath it had been six" as if time stood still in the mythic realm of lost lovers (23).

Nelly may plead, surroundings may change and time may pass in the mundane world, dangerous lovers pursue their eccentric union to attain the authenticity that is so ardently forbidden, so endlessly missed.

#### IV. Conclusion

With Judith Butler's gender deconstructivism, we are able to dismantle an opposition between literary types that had been fixated in Western thinking for at least two centuries. Her theorems uncover that every system imposes stringent rules on its Subjects. To assume an identity, individuals try to approximate these norms, negotiating between authentic wholeness and an accepted subject position. Whatever their choice might be, every materialisation invariably discards some aspect of the Self. Rejected aspects are projected onto Objects that, in their personification of punishment, are inevitable instruments to demarcate identification possibilities. To make the rules even more palpable, the directors of public discourse utilise literary figures that substantiate the age's norms and punishments. Accordingly, the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale are called into being to demonstrate the spirit of the age: the first is a self-assertive hero who introduces humanistic values, the latter a destructive woman who is blamed for society's corrosion as the nineteenth century progresses. Even if these figures have contrasting roles, both aimed at securing social stability, they share some remarkable characteristics. Admired as the Byronic Hero might be, he is eccentric, just like the Femme Fatale, in his melancholic air. That mysterious appearance dangerously fascinates their onlookers. Considering that ordinary individuals are never able to fully embody the matrix's norms, it is not surprising that even the administrators of discourse cannot control their constructions. Indeed, literary figures exceed their creators' intentions and challenge the sign-chain to which they belong. The mysterious countenance of the Byronic Hero and the Femme Fatale suggests the secret abundance that lies beneath their appearance, that is, the awareness of possibilities that the symbolic law forbids. Realising the reductive nature of symbolic norms, the maverick figures feel the need to theatrically display the naturalised repression. Their insurgence, however, does not have the same result: the Byronic Hero does acknowledge his ties to the system and his own limits, and thus realises his full subversive potential; the Femme Fatale, on the other hand, disregards the deficiency of her self-assertion in her unabashed quest for authenticity. It is this divergent rebellion that strengthens the archetypes' image: the Byronic Hero is admired as the bearer of new values, a moral rebel, whereas the Femme Fatale is further exiled to the utmost margins of the system. As both archetypes do understand their bounds to the matrix, they appropriate the discourse that constructed them. In an exaggerated discourse of love, they repeat their avowal to approximate its essence, an authentic meaning that has already past. That parody of discourse affects the literary component that calls the lovers into being: like their language of love,

every story is told too late. A sense of loss pervades conventional dangerous lovers stories and urges readers to read on and unravel the lovers' secret. In fact, the anticipated ending is already pre-figured in the beginning: both lovers and readers soon learn that wholeness has already past; the only way to recover it, is to trace their steps back to the im-material beginning.

*Wuthering Heights* is without a doubt one of the most compelling love stories of all times. As it stages renowned characters with an unprecedented twist, it has fascinated readers since its first publication, even more so since its second. Indeed, the deconstructionist comparison presented in this thesis echoes in both the genesis and the fictional universe of this novel. Understanding the stringent norms of Victorian society, Emily Brontë assumes a male pseudonym to be accepted as the creator of exemplary literary figures who direct their readers' identification. With that dragperformance Brontë enables herself to create female Byronic Heroines and a male Femme Fatale. Indeed, Catherine and Cathy are admired for their self-assertive defiance of ever-changing systems, while Heathcliff's boundless desire for revenge is regarded as monstrous. Dangerous as they might be, their secretive composure heralds the recovery of lost possibilities and seduces all who lay eyes on them, characters and readers alike. It is Brontë's ingenious narrative structure that unveils what caused the lovers' melancholia. Not only does the frame narrative expose the naturalised construction process with which the matrix creates truth-regimes, the most important storyteller, Nelly Dean, explicitly uncovers the selective mechanisms on which it is based. Her tale is actually the untold before-story that discloses the truth about Catherine and Heathcliff: before their confrontation with Victorian patriarchy, Catherine and Heathcliff enjoyed true authentic fullness in their union. The agonising suspension and passionate anticipation of their death is their last resort to recover lost possibilities in im-material wholeness.

Granting a voice to types that had never been heard before and cunningly reversing their gender, Emily Brontë motivates secondary subjects like herself to act out against restrictive patriarchal norms. This revolution, however, never reaches authenticity as self-definition is never complete in a system that endlessly changes. Similarly, the deconstructionist analysis presented in this thesis does not pretend to provide an absolute Truth. The fruitful alliance of linguistics, literary theory and psychoanalysis certainly does shed a new light on a dogmatic gender dichotomy, but that innovation is again subjected to criticism. The inefficiency of my research, however, is lucrative for its evasion of incontestable materiality acknowledges ever new possibilities: literary theory and general discourse will always evolve so that new insights will rise that nuance, problematize and even

contradict the deconstruction of gendered figures I presented. Self-assertive theorists will deconstruct and re-organise my truth-regime to grant a voice to whomever I disregarded. In this light, *Wuthering Heights* fictionalises the dragperformance of its author and all readers who disrupt ever-new conventions to re-direct their name towards a signification that approximates authenticity. Emily Brontë thus becomes the accomplice of her Byronic Women and Fatal Man who ceaselessly encourage onlookers of every era to claim their essential right in a repressive matrix: the freedom to strive for wholeness that is, and must always be, missed.



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