



JACLR

Journal of Artistic Creation & Literary Research

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Volume 7 Issue 2 (December 2019) Article 5

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"Women Empowerment through Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*"

Recommended Citation

Perdones Cañas, Rebeca. "Women Empowerment through Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*" *JACLR: Journal of Artistic Creation and Literary Research* 7.2.5 (2019): 59-71

<<https://www.ucm.es/siim/journal-of-artistic-creation-and-literary-research>>

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Abstract: In this paper I analyse how Emily Brontë challenges in her novel *Wuthering Heights* the female stereotypes to which women of the Victorian Era were submitted. In order to accomplish this analysis, I take into account the social aspects in which women had to meet expectations. For the purpose of finding answers to this issue, I have organised this study into different parts that show the pressure to which women of the Victorian age were subjected. Firstly, I start analysing the age in which this novel takes place and how the situation of women in that time was. Secondly, I continue describing one of the most important social aspects that kept women submitted in that age: marriage. I analyse the clout that it had in Victorian society and how it was a social imposition and nobody had a different choice. Thirdly, I focus on women education and how it was something almost forbidden for them and a way to control and submit them. Fourthly, my study comes to the most important issue which is the female stereotypes challenged by the characters of *Wuthering Heights*. Then, I explore superficially how the defiance of these stereotypes lead to tragic consequences in the case of the main female characters. Finally, I conclude that Emily defies the imposed gender roles and female stereotypes of the Victorian Era through her work although it was not a simple task.

Keywords: female stereotypes, women, gender roles, Victorian Era, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*.

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Women Empowerment through Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

0. Introduction

During 1970s and progressively in the 1980s some new ways of analysing or criticising novels that had been published before appeared. These new perspectives were connected with the

ideas about gender theory and also with the feminist criticism that was emerging in that age. For that reason, some novels as it is the case of *Wuthering Heights* and many others which belonged to the Victorian era adopted a different meaning and were observed from a feminist point of view. It was concretely in the 1970s when Women Studies were born when a revisionist literary criticism began.

It took its momentum from the larger women's movement afoot at that time. Scholars of women's studies work to include female voices and experiences where once only men's were significant, and to make an awareness of gender difference part of the intellectual inheritance of their students. (Bowers 935)

Until that time, female characters role was not really important or it was always passive and traditional without any personal development throughout the novel. Nevertheless, with the appearance of gender theory or gender studies, literary critics tried to make readers reflect on gender roles that appeared in the novels which were only an imitation of what could be seen in the society of that time. And through feminist criticism they offered criticism to why those female characters had to be submitted or had to behave in a way although it was not their wish. In this way, they started to give importance and light to the female experiences which had been hidden and unvoiced during ages. Until that point, in the case of *Wuthering Heights* the reviews and analyses were focused on the figure of Heathcliff and the disdain with which he had been treated. However, due to the appearance of these new perspectives and feminist points of view that feminist criticism and gender studies provided, a new analysis was developed. These ones were focused on the female figures, mainly on the figure of Catherine and how she does not really fit into the female stereotypes of the Victorian Era.

This is the case of for example: Q.D. Leavis's influential 'Fresh approach to *Wuthering Heights*' (1969) ... For Leavis, the 'truths of the novel lie in Catherine Earnshaw's story, which is 'at once a unique personal history, a method of discussing what being a woman means, and a tragedy of being caught between socially incompatible cultures (Stoneman 147).

It is also important to highlight how critics tried to make readers aware of how difficult the transition from the childhood to the adulthood was, especially, for girls because this transition involved, in some way, to renounce to their own freedom and to follow some stereotypes which made you feel different from men. It also supposed to find a husband and to be condemned to marry him and even to live a life of extreme control and pressure without any ability of making decisions by their own. Indeed, it was considered "the theme of *Wuthering Heights* [as] the development of the female personality from childhood to maturity" (Stoneman 148). Through this new feminist perspective readers started to become aware of the fact that women were not happy with the fate that the society had imposed to them or had decided that it was the best for them. Now, it was Catherine and also the other female characters the ones that mattered. They were the real protagonists. They now had a voice. "Carolyn Heilbrun's 1973 essay, 'The Woman as Hero' is recognisably part of this new position" (Stoneman 148). Feminist

criticism “tended to be more oriented toward the past” (Bowers 936) and to analyse critically the submission that women had suffered since the origins being treated as an inferior human being. This gave enough knowledge to awake from the patriarchal society nightmare and to make people aware of the injustices that were being committed with women. It can be considered as some kind of liberation and rebellion against the male power. The gender theory also gave the awareness of how the patriarchal society was the one that had created the genders. That it had produced the ideas of what is masculine and feminine, being this a spotlight of binary oppositions between men and women and a way of creating hostility among them. Gender roles have been a focus of suffering during ages, not only for women but also for men who did not fit in which was socially accepted for men. Nevertheless; to know through the reading of this new literature, that there were more women feeling in the same way and having to face similar unfair situations make them feel some kind of relief and have enough strength to fight against that patriarchal society.

This is what through this paper I am going to show: a new vision of *Wuthering Heights*, a vision from the perspective of the female characters, mainly through Catherine and Isabelle and how these two challenge in some way the stereotypes of the Victorian Era which oppressed women and how the fact of not following these stereotypes make them suffer and even feel misunderstood leading them until the point of desiring to die.

1. Women in the Victorian Era

After knowing that it was a time in which feminist criticism started to appear, it is important to analyse what the situation of women in the age of Emily Brontë’s novel was and what the female roles that women developed in that society were. It is important in order to know why this feminist criticism was necessary, not only to defy the female roles and stereotypes that this literature was transmitting but also in order to know how difficult to become a writer and a woman of success was to women as it was the case of Emily Brontë in a men dominated world. The Victorian era was an age of great inequalities for women. It was also a period really influenced by the religious institutions what provoked that its main features were the puritanism and a rigid morality. It was a time in which women had to be really careful about their reputation because, in contrast with men, what was thought about a woman was as important as what she really was (Wollstonecraft 166). Chastity was a fundamental pillar of this puritanism. However, it was more important in the case of women because it was considered that men tended to be more “under the influence of their appetites than women.” (Wollstonecraft 171). As a whole, there were many taboos about sex and, more concretely, about female sexuality. Nevertheless, there was such as a double morality. This means that although society did not accept some behaviour then England was the city in which there were more prostitutes and brothels of that time. Therefore, the Victorian era was an age of a profound hypocrisy. Women were subjected to a hard discrimination and totally relegated to the domestic sphere. Education was not something they could have access to. Only women of a media or high social class could have some access to a limited academic knowledge. According to the labour market, they could not access to the public sphere. They could only work as “companions or governesses, but these positions were invariably poorly paid and the governesses could expect to be treated little better

than a household servant" (Wollstonecraft xxv). In the case of women of the poorest social class, they had to work not only at home doing household chores and taking care of their children, but also in the factories as industrial workers because it was the age of the industrial revolution. This was really hard for them because there was not a distribution of the household chores after the working day. Women in the Victorian era were submitted to a continuous male control since the beginning of their lives. Firstly, they depended on their fathers and when they passed to maturity they had to focus on finding a husband who will represent the power and authority in the family they would create in a future. Marriage was an obligation. Even it was considered as the main objective in life and it was deeply associated to the social classes. Indeed, the mentality of the age according to this was that marriage was "the only way women can rise in the world" (Wollstonecraft 15). Women who did not find husband were marginalized and they had two options: being a governess or a prostitute. It was really difficult to be a woman in that age because they still did not have freedom to choose what they really wanted and they were condemned to the fate the society decided for them. For that reason, Mary Wollstonecraft in her *Vindication of the rights of women* declares that women "when they marry they act as such children may be expected to act: - they dress; they paint, and nickname god's creatures." (15). At the same time, the Victorian era was a time in which some women -as it was the case of Mary Wollstonecraft- started to become aware of the importance of women's education in order to change their unequal position. Thus, some opinions about women and female education started to be questioned. This was the case of Rousseau's thought about women in the eighteenth century which really influenced and was spread to the following ages. He firmly asserted "that woman ought to be weak and passive, because she has less bodily strength than man; and hence infers, that she was formed to please and to be subject to him; and that it is her duty to render herself *agreeable* to her master- this being the grand end of her existence." (Wollstonecraft 99). As a consequence of their influence, women in the Victorian era were still considered as weak human beings, but not only from a physical point of view. "Believing women to have more irritable and responsive nervous systems, society and medicine thought they were more vulnerable to physical and nervous (emotional) illness" (Gorsky 75). Indeed, it was one of the main arguments used to discredit the opinion of women when this was against the submission they were suffering. If any woman reacted against the patriarchal society she was considered as if she was mentally unstable. Making them to think that their only objective in their lives was to please men was the best way to keep them submissive during the rest of their lives. So, it was crucial to insist in their education and to motivate them in order to develop some other activities really far from the domestic ones which could make them feel as independent individuals and fulfilled women. Until that point, they could not think about writing literature and using it in order to express and share their own experiences. What it could be read about women in literature was based on the stereotyped perspective men had about women or about what they wanted they were. And women who read only had as references those female characters who lacked of personality and that only mattered in relation to the male characters. Women were educated on modesty and manners but not to be, for example, a successful writer in a future. As Virginia Woolf collects in her book *A Room of One's Own* "it is fairly evident that even in the nineteenth century a woman was not encouraged to be an artist. On the contrary, she was snubbed, slapped, lectured, and exhorted." (56). It was really difficult to become a

writer and publish a book in those times. Thus, as it is the case of Emily Brontë, they used pen names to have the opportunity to be published and read. But it is also important to take into account what she said about the dependence of intellectual freedom on material things (Woolf 106). Since the beginning of our history women have been really poor, they have never had the opportunity to work to support themselves economically. And even in the cases of middle or high social class women they did not have the possibility to use freely the money of their husbands. If they wanted to write they had to do it, for example, in the sitting room of the house where they were interrupted by everybody who walked along it, what makes really difficult to be concentrated on the ideas they wanted to write. They did not have any personal space in which they could dedicate to literature. In addition, they did not have the means to write either, "they could not afford to buy more than a few quires of paper at a time upon which to write" (Woolf 71). For that reason Virginia Woolf "laid so much stress on money and a room of one's own." (106) as the main objectives to achieve in order to make possible women wrote and took a place in literature.

1.1 The obligation of marriage in *Wuthering Heights*

Taking into account that marriage was one of the fundamental pillars of the Victorian age, it is crucial to analyse the influence that this religious sacrament had upon the female characters of *Wuthering Heights*. Through the novel it concretely appears five times. However, every marriage of the novel ends becoming into a disaster and having horrible consequences. There is one aspect that it is important to highlight: as well as it was happening in the Victorian era, marriages in *Wuthering Heights* do not happen between people of different social classes. Thus, the novel represents how love was not beyond the rules of the Victorian society. Another feature of the Victorian age that is clearly reflected on the novel is how marriage was an obligation, but mainly for women. Indeed, in the novel it can be seen how Catherine is educated to be the perfect wife for Edgar when she has to stay in Thrushcross Grange because of the accident she suffers. It is Edgar's mother who handles Catherine's education. This education is based on the patriarchal ideology which reigned over that age, which had as its main principle the conception of women as 'the angel in the house' from Coventry Patmore's poem. This idea of women was focused on the belief that women had to create the best home environment to be so comfortable to welcome men when they come back from job. Women also had to be delicate and quiet. And for that reason, Catherine is forced to change because she was totally the opposite. "Her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going –singing, laughing and planguing everybody who would not do the same" (Brontë 42). Catherine clearly represents the suffering of many women within marriage. Firstly, because she is unhappy with the man she had chosen and, secondly, because marriage in that age was like a cage. Women lost the little freedom they had when they got married. Catherine experiments a great change because she was free in her childhood and she could do the same things as boys did. For example, she used to play with Heathcliff and now it was not possible. Marriage was also related to sex and giving birth children. It was an obligation to have sex in marriage in order to get pregnant and to have offspring. However, marriage was also associated with death because in the nineteenth century there were so many cases of women deaths after giving birth children. It was like a risk to become a mother. This aspect is represented in the novel, firstly, by the

character of Frances, the wife of Hindley, who is going to die after giving birth to her baby, Hareton. This is what probably Catherine feels when she does not accept that she is an adult. She fears of adulthood because she associates it with marriage and the consequent death. It is also important to point out that; as well as Catherine marries Edgar in an ambitious way because she marries him in order to belong to a higher social class, Edgar marries her or, most importantly, falls in love with her because of what she represents. She had turned into a quiet and self-sacrificed woman. And this is what he loves. He does not love the other Catherine, the one who used to be savage in her childhood and totally free. Men in that age wanted a conservative and domesticated love. This is what Edgar wants. A domesticated wife who followed the female stereotypes of being passive and delicate. In some way, this is the prize that Catherine had to pay because of having been born as a woman in a patriarchal society. She is loved by what she represents and not by what she really is or wants to be. With all, it is easy to come to the conclusion that marriages and even home were totally a hell for women. They could not go out from there. Homes represent that patriarchal society which submitted and oppressed women. Homes were like hell whereas nature was the only place in which they could rest. For that reason, Catherine is really connected to nature and she wants to go there every time. It is the only refuge to that life of sacrifice and pain. Thus, she wants to come back to childhood where she was all the time in nature and free but now this is impossible she is married and she has a child. Another example of how marriage was an imposition in that age is the case of Catherine's own daughter, Cathy, who is going to be forced by Heathcliff to marry Linton although she does not want to. Marriage was also a prison and a synonym of violence. You were obligated to endure the violence of your husband. It was permitted that women were mistreated by men. In *Wuthering Heights*, this is going to be depicted by the marriage of Isabella and Heathcliff. He beats her. However, in some former ages, literary criticism tried to victimise him and to avoid blaming him alluding to the mistreatment and marginalization that he had to suffer when he was a child. But the fact is that Isabella was not to blame for that and however she suffers his violence only because she is a woman and it does not matter if she is beaten. He is so cruel with her. Nevertheless, there is a fact that gives the reader the notion that Emily wants to show through her novel a different view of women: a view of empowerment, of trying to escape from the suffering and to become independent. This is the moment in which Isabella leaves Heathcliff and decides not to stay there besides him, she flees to London and gives birth to her son lonely. And not only this but also that she burns her wedding ring as a sign of rebellion. She firmly says to Nelly:

O, give the poker! This is the last thing of his I have about me:' she slipped the gold ring from her third finger, and threw it on the floor. 'I'll smash it' she continued, striking with childish spite. 'And then I'll burn it!' and she took and dropped the misused article among the coals (Brontë 172).

Isabella is breaking the stereotypes and gender roles. She chooses to be free. She chooses to escape from that toxic love masked as romantic love. Throughout the novel there are

more examples of this toxic love, which is a torture for women and a prison because it exerts a continuous control over them. It is near the obsession. Firstly, it is Edgar who is obsessed with Catherine. This is not true love because, even knowing she is not happy with him, he wants she stays with him. It is a possessive love. This is insane and mentally destructive. Nevertheless, Heathcliff does not love her better. He is also obsessed with her and his love also looks for possession. It is also sickly because he dedicates all his life to this love. It is masked as pure love but it is not. He is also full of revenge because she does not choose him and he does not accept her decision. However, Catherine is also obsessed with him because women, in that age, also fell in the lie of the romantic love because of her education, although that love means to suffer. Even, she herself describes it in the novel as a union between the two souls because the two become one. For that reason she says: "He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same" (Brontë 81). This is a conception really insane because it is like she is not complete without him and that she really needs Heathcliff to live. "Catherine and Heathcliff's mutual obsession is destructive. She needs him as she needs a part of herself she finds attractive, frightening, and essential". (Gorsky 182) Another aspect which is important to highlight talking about marriage in *Wuthering Heights* is that the ideal of what a perfect marriage was in the Victorian age is represented by the one between Edgar and Catherine because they had sex and a descendent. However, Heathcliff and Catherine, although they love each other, they do not have sex showing in this way that to have sex within marriage was an obligation for women although they do not really want to do it.

1.2 Women's education in the patriarchal world of *Wuthering Heights*

This point is going to be one of the main factors in the depression or unhappiness of Catherine. First of all; since the moment in which she is biologically considered as a woman, she is going to be submitted to a hard female education in order to become a respectful and honourable lady who was able to find a husband of her social-class as it was the case of Edgar. This is what Edgar's mother tries to do with her since the moment in which Catherine appears in Thrushcross Grange. This moment has been analysed as Catherine's pass to maturity. This is because Catherine goes to Thrushcross grange because she had suffered an accident. She is bitten by a dog while she is wandering with Heathcliff around Thrushcross grange and she bleeds. This blood is considered as a symbol of the first menstruation of Catherine. And with this her childhood comes to an end.

Cathy stayed at Thrushcross Grange five weeks, till Christmas. By that time her ankle was thoroughly cured, and her manners much improved. The mistress visited her often, in the interval, and commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise her self-respect with fine cloths and flattery (Brontë 53).

Thus, Catherine is forced to renounce to her savage and free way of being. It does not matter she was different as her response to her father when he goes to London for a day and asks her for what she wants he bring for her demonstrates: "he asked Miss Cathy; she was hardly six years old, but she could ride any horse in the stable, and she chose a whip" (Brontë 36). Now, she has to become a delicate and passive woman and she is going to be treated differently from men. The difference is so remarkable that her brother is proposed to access to

an academic education whereas she is not. In this last aspect the church had a great power. In fact it was a curate who "advised that the young man should be sent to college, and Mr Earnshaw agreed" (Brontë 41). It is going to be a hard process for Catherine because she becomes aware that everything is different and that every action she does has a consequence. Even for getting married she is not free because she has to act according to the social norms that reigned over the Victorian era. Although she decides to marry Edgar, she decides it because through the educational process to which she had been submitted during those days she had to stay in Thruscross Grange, she is convinced that that was what she had to do although her feelings said to her something different. Society was saying her to marry a man of her social class. This gives the reader a vision of the Victorian era as an age in which there was a lack of freedom and that everything you did had to comply with the established norms. And the worst consequences were for women because they were property of men and it did not matter what they felt or what they wanted. This is the fatal consequence that Catherine is going to suffer: she is enclosed in her marriage with Edgar. She does not accept her new reality and she wants to come back to her childhood when she was happy with Heathcliff. Those times in which it did not matter if she was a girl or not and if she was from a determined social class or not. This type of education had an enormous effect on women because it supposed a huge step from childhood to maturity. In fact, for Catherine it is really traumatic to the point that she is going to die without having accepted the role she has to develop as a woman into that patriarchal society. And in this suffering of Catherine, it can be seen the suffering of so many women of the Victorian era whose wings were totally cut in the same way as it was their freedom. Even their dreams and lives were totally destroyed. In *Wuthering Heights*; through the suffering of Catherine, Emily is trying to give the message to the readers that what they were feeling was normal. She tries to create a reference through the character of Catherine with which women could feel empathy and did not to feel so lonely in that suffering. It can also be considered as a way of rebellion against those female stereotypes which provoked frustration and anxiety to women. Catherine does not feel comfortable in that environment and she expresses it. She rebels against that patriarchal society although she can be considered as a mad woman because of her behaviour. Probably she can have gone mad. She had reasons for that because it was not only that she was living a toxic love with Heathcliff but also that she has to endure the pressure of the female stereotypes. And probably she is not really mad and it is only that the fact of rebelling against those female stereotypes was not well looked upon. "Women who violated the norms through seeking to parallel men's education, jobs, or freedom were considered unhealthy as well as unfeminine" (Gorsky 75). Indeed, in the Victorian era it was common to consider a woman as she was mad or hysteric in order to discredit her opinion when this was not really accepted by the society. Isabella is also another female character that suffers the consequences of the domesticated female education. She had been also educated in the idea of being quiet, delicate and to follow the indications of her husband. "She was at that time a charming young lady of eighteen; infantile in manners, though possessed of keen wit, keen feelings, and a keen temper, too, if irritated." (Brontë 101). Thus, she is going to defy this female education and also the female stereotypes of the age since the first moment. In her relationship with Heathcliff, she is going to be the one who initiates everything. She is the one who has the initiative in contrast with what the female education taught them which was to be passive and wait for the proposal

of men. She had been also raised with the idea of being the perfect wife who is always there for her husband even if her husband did not behave in a good way and mistreated you. Everything was permitted for them because the husband was the owner of the wife and everything he did was right and for the goodness of his wife. However, Isabella defies that domesticated female education she had received and she decides to escape from Heathcliff's mistreatment although she was really scared of him as she herself expresses in her letter: "I assure you, a tiger, or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens" (Brontë 144). She demonstrates she is courageous. In this way, she is rebelling against that education, but also against the patriarchal society which is oppressing her and saying that she is weak and that she has to stay with her husband even though he mistreats her. So, she has courage and strength in spite of having been educated to become the perfect lady: quiet and subjected. She breaks with the Victorian rules and ends with her suffering. Finally, it is also important to point out that Isabella again rebels against the education she had received when she regrets of not having reconciled with Catherine. She challenges with this feeling that patriarchal education she had received based on the female competition and the lack of sorority among women.

1.3 Women social standing in the conservative sphere of *Wuthering Heights*

The social standing is a main aspect to take into account in order to understand what happens in *Wuthering Heights*. In general, the social standing of the characters that appear in the novel represent every social stratum which conformed the society of the Victorian era totally. The Lintons represent the elitist social class of the Victorian age. Although the Earnshaws have also power, they represent the middle-class, they are landowners and they are below the Lintons although they are not meaningfully below them. In this way, they do not work in the lands they own. For that job, they have servants. In *Wuthering Heights* it can be seen how the female characters depend totally economically on the male characters. For that reason, this fact lead the reader and critics to consider the decision of Catherine of getting married with Edgar as a way to raise in the social scale. It can be perceived as a selfish action but it has to be taken into account that: firstly, in that age women were submitted roughly to men and by marrying a man from a higher social class they could achieve some kind of independence in some way. Money was something important and powerful because it was a way to control women and another obstacle for them in order to achieve their gender equality. Thus, being part of the middle or high social class you would not have to work outside of the domestic sphere and you would have more time in which you could access to read some books, learn and become aware of the situation of women in that moment. Although they were not totally free, these ones, the middle class women were the only ones who could promote the fight for the gender equality because they have more tools than the other ones who were really poor and were submitted to work intensively in the industries and then taking care of their families. Secondly, it is important to point out that Catherine is profoundly in love with Heathcliff although then this love became into an obsession. In this way, she is so generous that she is disposed to sacrifice her own happiness in order to help Heathcliff in his poverty. She thinks that if she can achieve a higher social position and power through marrying Edgar she would be able to help him. However, it is not possible because unfortunately what women thought or wanted in the Victorian age did not matter and she is not going to have the enough power to change Heathcliff's situation. So, she

is not really as selfish as the society of *Wuthering Heights* wants to portray her, which is no more than the representation of what Victorian society thought about women. And also she marries Edgar as a way to "escape from a disorderly, comfortless home into a wealthy respectable one" (Brontë 79), because it is important to point out that her brother had become an alcoholic. According to the social standing of women in the novel, it is also important to mention the character of Isabella because it is the fact that she belongs to the elitist family of the Earnshaws what makes Heathcliff wants to marry her. He is selfish and is looking for revenge against her brother Edgar. However; although he marries her only for economic interests, it can be seen how the money gives power to Isabella over Heathcliff in this way because he needs her more than she does it. It is in this last aspect in which some kind of female empowerment can be perceived. Probably it was one of the aims of Emily when she wrote the novel. Nevertheless, she is going to fall in love with him and she is going to live one of the most terrible nightmares which is to suffer his mistreatment. This also transmits to the reader the idea of that this romantic love with which the women of the novel were educated only lead them to the suffering. This romantic love can be described as the tomb of women, because they raised with the idea that everything can be tolerated in the name of love. However, Emily by giving this character a high social standing within *Wuthering Heights* society gives her also the possibility to escape from her torture transmitting the idea that women did not have to support the mistreatment. This also reveals that for all those Victorian women who belong to a lower social class was even worse to escape from that horrible situation because they were totally dependent economically on their husbands. It can be also seen some kind of female empowerment through the character of Cathy because the future of Heathcliff's offspring depends highly on her. She is the only one who descends from the elitist family; so she is the one who has the power and, for that reason, Heathcliff forces her to marry Linton. Talking about the social standing of women in *Wuthering Heights*, it is important to highlight the character of Nelly, she is the servant of *Wuthering Heights*. However, she is not a manual worker. She belongs to what it was called the lower middle-class. Through this character it can be appreciated how it was a woman the one who was relegated to the domestic chores. She is going to dedicate all her life to take care of the family as every woman in the Victorian age. Even, having been raised at the same time as the Earnshaws children, she is not going to have the possibility to raise in the social scale as it was the case of Heathcliff. It does not matter he was from a lower social stratum because he was an orphan, what matters is that he was a man. It is in this last aspect in which it can be also seen the discrimination women of *Wuthering Heights* and, therefore, women of the Victorian age had to endure.

2. The consequences of trying to defy the female stereotypes in *Wuthering Heights*

Catherine is going to be forced to leave behind her childhood and with this her freedom. "Catherine has always been different, independent minded, and an outsider of sorts -- all of the things which a woman in the nineteenth century was not supposed to be." (Thilmany 15). She is going to be deprived of her freedom of choice when she is educated to become a lady of good reputation by Mrs Earnshaw. She is going to choose what is going to be the best for Catherine instead of being Catherine herself who decides. This transition from childhood to maturity and

what this meant for women in the Victorian age makes that Catherine has to support a great pressure. As it has been mentioned before, she was really happy when she was a child and the obligation to meet expectations and become a proper lady according to the patriarchal ideology about women, 'the Angel in the house', make her to be a wretched woman. It is not only this but also that she has to follow the female stereotype of seeking a husband and create a family to take care of. And with this, she also has the pressure of choosing a husband who is going to be well-accepted by the Victorian society although she does not really love him. Moreover, she has to face the obligation of getting pregnant and give descendants to Edgar. In that age, it was not an option and if you did not have it you were not considered a complete woman. Even, it was considered that the main objective of women in life was to have children. This was the way to feel completely as a real woman and to have a sense of fulfilment. It did not matter if you were not really sure or if you were scared of that as it is the case of Catherine. She has to do it because to get married meant to get pregnancy. Catherine has to be a mother when what she really wants is to be a child again and to be free from all those female stereotypes which were oppressing her. This symbolizes some kind of internal fight between what society wants her to be and what she really wants to be. With all this, she does not find any other possible solution apart from letting herself die in order to end with the suffering. She is condemned to live a life which she does not want to. She only wants to come back to childhood. She does not want to be and adult because if you become a mother you lose your strength and your freedom. She feels enclosed in her house. Her home is hell for her. She only finds some kind of peace and asylum in nature. In fact, she herself declares to Nelly how unhappy she is: "Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors- I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free... and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed?"(Brontë 125) For that reason, she is going to provoke in some way her own death. She starts to stop eating and even at the same time "she alternatively raves, and remains in a half dream, knowing those about her, but having her mind filled with all sorts of strange ideas and illusions" (Brontë 132). She also starts to do this as a way of rebellion and having some kind of control over her own life by taking her own choices. This is going to lead her to her own death after giving birth to her daughter. She dies from anorexia although in that time this was an unknown illness. Her death can be perceived as the consequence of all the pressures she had to support because of the female stereotypes. This was a way to end with them and to break with everything which was imposed to her. For that reason, it is a means of female empowerment because she rebels against all which oppresses her. She ends with that horrible patriarchal society which has made her so unhappy. It cannot be therefore considered as a defeat because she ends with her suffering. She is victorious. And it is also a revenge against Heathcliff and Edgar who had made her suffer during all her life. This is so because she dies but at the same time Heathcliff also dies in earth and even Edgar too. Thus, this is like a torture for them, especially for Heathcliff, who is going to be persecuted by Catherine's ghost until his own death. He himself asserts: 'she has disturbed me, night and day, through eighteen years- incessantly- remorselessly' (Brontë 289), as a way to explain that she was trying to make him become mad and that he cannot rest in peace. There is also another aspect which can be considered as a consequence of defying female stereotypes. This is the fact of that Edgar does not forgive his sister when she disobeys him and marries Heathcliff. She is, in

some way, challenging the authority and honour of her brother and, for that reason, she is going to be repudiated by him although this means to be alone when Heathcliff mistreats her.

3. Conclusion

In order to conclude, it is of great significance to point out what the main objective of Emily Brontë was when she wrote *Wuthering Heights*. Through its reading, it can be perceived how she wants to transmit the reader what the situation of women in that age was and to which pressures and female stereotypes, based on a patriarchal ideology about women, they were submitted to. Emily is going to challenge those female stereotypes through the main female characters she presents in her novel. However, she is going to express her ideas within the limits of being the Victorian age the moment in which she writes. An age totally controlled by men and in which women had to publish their own works under the use of a penname because what they wrote was considered as something without value and without appreciation unlike what was written by men. Nevertheless, she is going to challenge this patriarchal world. Firstly, she is going to present as the main character of her novel a woman who is Catherine in a moment in which the main characters of the novels were always men. Women only appeared portrayed in relation to men as their wives, mothers, daughters, etc. Their values, skills and personal achievements were completely ignored. For that reason, she presents a character who defies the female stereotypes because she does not want to become a proper lady. She does not want to raise and become 'the angel in the house'. She wants to remain being a child because this is the only state in which she can be as free as men. She does not want to follow the rules of the patriarchal society, marrying a man and becoming a mother because this is not what makes her to be happy. "Bronte is setting Catherine up as a character who wishes to be master of her own world, rather than being mastered by someone outside of it" (Thilmann 15). Moreover, she rebels against those who force her to follow the patriarchal gender roles and female stereotypes. In this way; she escapes from the jail in which she is enclosed, which is the home she has created with Edgar, by provoking her own death. She goes from hell to heaven. Emily also challenges the patriarchal society of the Victorian age through the character of Isabella who also defies those female stereotypes. Although she is raised under a patriarchal female education she decides to escape from the torture to which she is submitted exerted by Heathcliff. She decides not to remain there and escapes from that mistreatment. And most importantly, she tells it by herself through a letter. She has the courage and strength to do it. This is a sign of female empowerment which Emily uses in order to empower women of the Victorian era. It is true that the two female characters die before the male ones. However, Emily empowers them throughout their deaths because they both achieve some kind of relief because they end with their suffering. In the case of Heathcliff and Edgar, the two are condemned to a torture after the deaths of Catherine and Isabella because they are going to die in earth. They are not going to be able to live without them and to rest. Heathcliff is not going to be able because he is obsessed with and addicted to Catherine. In fact, he asserts that: "two words would comprehend my future-death and hell- existence, after losing her, would be hell" (Brontë 148). And Edgar because is in love with Catherine and also because he feels guilty for the torture her sister had to suffer due to Heathcliff's mistreatment. Throughout this novel Emily wants to show a new perspective of what romantic love really is different from that which

literature and female education until that time transmitted. This kind of love is like a torture for women. Emily demonstrates how dangerous could be this kind of love through Catherine's own words about Heathcliff: "I am Heathcliff- he's always, always in my mind-not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself- but, as my own being" (Brontë 82). The idea of that romantic love is crazy and makes the individual insane and able to fall in love with a bad man as it is the case of, for example, Isabella. It is not a rational love. It is a love which make the subject not to matter about his/her necessities and whose only objective is to devote totally to the lover. Emily also transmits the idea that due to the fact that Catherine's life becomes a torture she comes to the point to end with that hell although it means to end also with her own life. She also shows the feeling of captivity that women of the Victorian era felt because of her lack of freedom. And another point that is crucial: to make women aware that there were other women in the same situation as they were. This alludes to one of the main features of Emily as a writer which is that she is highly realistic. With this; she wants to create references for women who really represent women of that age, not the image that men had constructed about women. In this way, she creates a feminist novel whose main objective was to awake women from the nightmare of the patriarchal world and thus empower them.

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