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The Brontës and their Conception of the Masculine Hero: the Case of Heathcliff and Mr Rochester

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The Brontës and their Conception of the Masculine Hero: the Case of Heathcliff and Mr Rochester

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The Brontës and their Conception of the Masculine Hero: the Case of Heathcliff
and Mr Rochester.

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Introduction:

Charlotte and Emily Brontë are two outstanding writers of the Victorian period. They cannot be compared to any of their contemporaries. First known under the pseudonyms Currer and Ellis Bell, their novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* were both published in 1847 and they were quite revolutionary. The authors' talent was recognized by all their contemporaries, however once their real identity as female writers was made public, they were very criticised because of their unconventional stands as women¹, especially Emily Brontë, whose novel, 'despite its utterly assured mastery of form, (...) remains the most unconventional and demanding of all English novels.'². So we can wonder what was so shocking in their novels to disrupt Victorian morality and its standards. At this period, women were not supposed to be famous and subversive writers: 'It was held by many that if a woman must write, she should limit her subject-matter to seemly situations and emotions.'³. Indeed, women writers were expected to write about their own sphere, which was home and domestic matters. Obviously, Emily and Charlotte Brontë were far from having written such stories. Several elements could explain the unconventional status of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, and then help us understand the major impact they had in the nineteenth century, and still today. We are going to study in details the masculine heroes of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, which are respectively Mr Rochester and Heathcliff, and see in what ways they are disturbing characters for the era. Their approaches of the masculine hero and gender issues are worthy of attention.

Wuthering Heights and *Jane Eyre* marked the nineteenth century, and are still immensely read today. They are part of the inevitable list of English novels that every passionate reader should have in his library. The fact that these novels were written by two young sisters is also noteworthy, especially in a period when women were supposed to be submitted to patriarchal power. They were not expected to write such subversive novels. So it is very interesting to study their work, especially their conception of the masculine hero, which allows us to see what they were thinking about gender at that time.

¹ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, (London and Southampton: The Camelot Press Ltd, 1969), p 9

² Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p 423

³ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 36

Emily and Charlotte Brontë come from a long lineage of female writers and they follow directly the Romantic period. Famous female authors such as Jane Austen, Ann Radcliffe preceded the Brontës and were part of that era. The Romantic period extends between 1780 and 1830⁴. At that time, '(...) women novelists frequently employed the novel as a site of ideological contestation and subversion, exploiting its generic capacity (...) for disruptive laughter and a sustained interrogation of existing social codes (...)'⁵. Indeed women writers were already using novels as a means to treat ironically different aspects of society, to question certain codes and conventions. In *Pride and Prejudice* for example, Jane Austen depicts with irony the position of women and how the only path of life for them is to get married to a respectable man. They are not independent and can be defined only through a fine marriage: it is presented as the only aim of their life. Austen and many other female authors '(...) implicitly contested the domination of this benign patriarch.'⁶ They criticized the patriarchal system through irony, and so not explicitly. So we can observe that Emily and Charlotte Brontë are descendants of these authors, who were already fighting against conventions. They contested, like it was done before them, the patriarchal system and the various conventions weighing over women. However we will see that the Brontës are far from being implicitly subversive like their predecessors, and that is the reason why they shocked many Victorian readers. They are worthy successors of the female writers of the Romantic period, when '(...) the 'feminized' novel was in fact the site of a powerful struggle over the very construction of gender.'⁷ The Brontës continue this struggle, and through the characters of Heathcliff and Rochester, create their version of masculinity. They are also the successors of Ann Radcliffe through their use of the Gothic in novels, which as several feminist critics have demonstrated, '(...) are particularly compelling fictions for the many women who read and write them because of their nightmarish figuration of feminine experience within the home.'⁸

Emily and Charlotte Brontë are comparable to some of the authors of the Romantic period. However we must define the word 'romantic', which is often used to describe different contexts.

⁴ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, (Great Britain: Routledge, 1993), p 186

⁵ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 9

⁶ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 9

⁷ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 10

⁸ Lyn Pykett, 'Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Deirdre David (editor), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p 198

The difference between its common use and its literary use has to be pointed out. The common use of 'romantic' usually designates situations related to 'love or romance' or 'showing or regarding life in an unrealistic and idealized way'⁹. Indeed, in everyday use, 'romantic' tends to refer to love, in a sort of naive, innocent and sometimes even negative way. People who are romantic tend to be very sentimental. Romantic persons see everything in an 'idealized' way, and are disconnected from reality.

We are now going to see the literary use of the word 'Romantic', which is not the same as its common use. When it first appeared in the middle of the seventeenth century, the word 'romantic' meant 'like the old romances'¹⁰, and shows that there was suddenly 'a real need to give names to certain characteristics of the chivalrous and pastoral romances.'¹¹ So it was not so different from its common use: it was related to love and romance, and was not always a positive term. Then, in the eighteenth century, a 'new current in taste can be discerned (...): there is a growing tendency to recognize the importance of imagination in art.'¹² This new movement was called 'Romanticism', and the word 'Romantic' '(...) though continuing to mean something slightly absurd, takes on the flavour of *attractive*, suited to please the imagination.'¹³ This movement was then favourable to the artist's imagination, and not just to a faithful representation of reality: 'The essence of Romanticism consequently comes to consist in that which cannot be described.'¹⁴ Emily and Charlotte Brontë are two authors, even if outside the limits of the Romantic period, who have similarities to some authors who were part of it¹⁵.

Heathcliff and Rochester are the two masculine characters of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, and they are still very famous nowadays. They are unavoidable Victorian masculine heroes. They are very interesting and complex men, and studying them permits to understand the Brontës' conception of the masculine hero and their ideas on gender. Are Heathcliff and Rochester traditional or rather unconventional? What are their particular characteristics? Can

⁹ Catherine Soanes (editor), *Paperback Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p 654

¹⁰ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954) , pp 11-12

¹¹ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, pp 11-12

¹² Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, p 12

¹³ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, p 12

¹⁴ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, p 14

¹⁵ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 186

they be compared to any other hero? How were the Brontës influenced to create such characters? We will consider various aspects of Heathcliff and Rochester, their differences and similarities, and their status compared to other conventional models of the Victorian hero. We will then be able to determine the Brontës's conception of the masculine hero and of gender in general. Do Emily and Charlotte Brontë have the same notions of masculinity? Which one is the more subversive author, which one is closer to tradition? By what means did they create their male hero and what are their ideal definition of masculinity?

In the first part, we will consider what were the traditional men for the Victorian period and what society expected of them. Then we will study briefly Heathcliff and Rochester and see how they apparently correspond or not to the standards of the era. Through some other masculine characters of the novels, it will be made obvious how the Brontës considered what should be the masculine heroes. After that, we will take into account the fact that Heathcliff and Rochester are two men created by women, and how this fact is essential. And finally, we will observe the influence of the Gothic in both novels and heroes. In the second part, we will examine the influence of Byron over the Brontës and how it comes out through their heroes. Then we will consider various aspects of Heathcliff and Rochester such as their demonization, their uncommon life course, their association with exoticism which will help us uncover the Brontës' definition of the masculine hero. In the third part, we will study more closely the two love stories in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, and determine if the male heroes are able to make a woman happy, if they are conventional and reasonable in their love. Did the Brontës create a strong male figure unable to love without drama, or did they make their hero reflective and moderate? And finally in the last part, we will try to determine why and in what ways is Rochester closer to the Victorian tradition than Heathcliff is. Both heroes are unique, and we will see in this study how the Brontës imagined masculinity in this patriarchal society of the nineteenth century.

D) Victorian Masculinity and the Brontës' heroes:

1. The 'Norm' during the Victorian Era:

- The Masculine Expectations of Society:

Gender is used 'to refer to the socially constructed roles and functions allotted to an individual on the basis of perceived sexual difference.'¹⁶ Men and women are indeed given roles and attitudes to have. Victorian men are expected to have many qualities such as honesty, respectability, honor, loyalty, intelligence and moral righteousness¹⁷... This is, of course, an ideal hard to reach for the masculine population. In many novels of the period, most of the authors have their heroines marry men who possess all these characteristics, in order for them to be able to reach happiness¹⁸. It seems then that if a man is lacking any of these qualities, he is not able to take care of his family and be acceptable. Men are also supposed to be the head of the family, to provide for it and to control it to be seen as respectable. We can observe that the Victorian period is indeed a time when men are the center of everything in society and when women are not considered as independent. Men are burdened by a lot of public and also private duties to be respected, when they have to take all the decisions and to make sure their family is provided for. Men are extremely powerful in the Victorian period. Their most important role is to be a patriarch and to ensure the comfort of their family; so they have to have a respectable job in order to fulfill their duty. Except in the working classes where women usually work to help the family, men are the only ones in the household allowed to work in order to be respectable. Respectability is a very important aspect of Victorian life. Women are expected to stay in the private sphere, to take care of their children, of the house, and of their husbands while men are involved in the public sphere to sustain the family.

- Religion: an Important Institution in Society

¹⁶ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 17

¹⁷ Suzanne Hesse, 'The Victorian Ideal: Male Characters in Jane Eyre and Villette', in *The Victorian Web* (website), last accessed January 20, 2012

¹⁸ Suzanne Hesse, 'The Victorian Ideal: Male Characters in Jane Eyre and Villette', in *The Victorian Web* (website)

The nineteenth century was marked, according to Altholz, ‘by a revival of religious activity unmatched since the days of the Puritans’¹⁹. He adds that this revival shaped the morality, the spirit and the attitudes of the period: ‘Above all, religion occupied a place in the public consciousness, a centrality in the intellectual life of the age (...)’²⁰. Indeed, the Church was a powerful institution and was at the center of people’s lives. They were baptised and got married in church, they went to service every Sunday. It was then an outward sign of respectability. If a couple had a child out of wedlock or just lived together without being married, they were harshly judged and rejected by society, and even by their own family. In *Wuthering Heights*, the Lintons represent the respectable Victorian family, and they pass judgement over the Earnshaws’ lack of religious concern: ‘ “What culpable carelessness in her brother!” exclaimed Mr Linton, turning from me to Catherine. “I’ve understood from Shielders” (that was the curate, sir) “that he lets her grow up in absolute heathenism.” ’²¹. The fact that someone can be brought up without religion is condemned by the Lintons, and through them by Victorian society. In *Jane Eyre* as well, religion is essential in society and it is obvious when Jane is in Lowood. Each day, the pupils follow a ritual: ‘Business now began: the day’s Collect was repeated, then certain texts of Scripture were said, and to these succeeded a protracted reading of chapters in the Bible, which lasted an hour.’²². Religion is the base of a respectable education.

We can observe that the consciousness of the British population during that period was still largely dominated by religious precepts and ideals. The morality then was very strict and people had to conform to it entirely and to be respectful of religion in order to be accepted.

- Gender Relationships: Heterosocial and Homosocial Contacts

During the Victorian period, the relationship between men and women is simply hierarchical. Patriarchy reigns. Women are subordinated to men. First of all, they are dependent upon their father and have to answer to all their wishes and, most of the time, they can marry only a man he approves of. If their fathers die, women then become subordinated to their brother. And once they get married, they depend on their husband. They are usually never totally

¹⁹ Josef L. Altholz, ‘The Warfare of Conscience with Theology’, in *The Victorian Web* (website), last accessed January 20, 2012

²⁰ Josef L. Altholz, ‘The Warfare of Conscience with Theology’, in *The Victorian Web* (website), last accessed January 20, 2012

²¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, (Great Britain, Collins Classic, 2010 , 1st published: 1847), p 53

²² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, (Mineola New York: Dover Thrift Editions, 2002, 1st published: 1847), p 43

independent and cannot take any decision by themselves. For them, marriage is seen as the only way to live a decent life. To describe women's situation towards men, Nance Armstrong writes: 'Marry a man with whom you were emotionally compatible if you could, but marry a man of material means you must (...), or else face the degradation of impoverishment or, worse, the need to work for a living'²³. They have to be married to do something right with their lives. If they have a job, and are, for example, governesses, they belong to the master of the house and are in a state of degradation. They are supposed to stay in their own sphere, at home, while men control them. Men are their superior in every aspect, and women are supposed to silently accept this state of things. They are supposed to learn from men. When they are allowed to speak, it is only to entertain their husbands and their friends. As they are inferior to men, women are obviously not allowed to have more knowledge than them. Victorian society is a patriarchal institution, so men and women do not stand as equals, they are in a relationship based on power, and women have none.

The relationships between men among themselves are quite superficial in the upper classes. As we can see in *Jane Eyre*, when Rochester meets with his 'friends' at Thornfield Hall, their topics of discussion are not personal and rather uninteresting to anyone but them. They seem to meet just out of habit or to entertain themselves. They talk a little, play and sing, but nothing more. When among themselves, men talk about public matters: 'Sir George Lynn, Colonel Dent, and Mr Eshton discussed politics, or county affairs, or justice business.'²⁴ Jane is not interested and hardly listens to them: 'Colonel Dent and Mr Esthon argue on politics; their wives listen.'²⁵ This proves once again the superficiality of the discussion and the subordinate position of women.

We can see that gender relationships concerning men and women are rather clear and hierarchical. The homosocial relationship between men seems to be superficial, whereas respectability is of primary importance: they meet to talk about public matters and to entertain. They cannot be called friends.

We are now going to study Emily and Charlotte Brontë's characters, Heathcliff and Mr Rochester, and see if they both correspond or not to the Victorian norm.

²³ Nancy Armstrong, 'Gender and the Victorian Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Deirdre David (editor), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p 97

²⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 179

²⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 167

2. The Brontës' Masculine Characters: the Female Authors' Conception of the Masculine Hero

- Emily Brontë and her Male Hero: Heathcliff

Heathcliff is obviously the main character of *Wuthering Heights*. The whole plot revolves around him: 'he is also structurally the protagonist, the only one whose lifetime spans the whole novel'²⁶. Indeed, from his childhood to his death, his story is being told through different narrators. He is Emily Brontë's hero, even if he is not a traditional Victorian hero. Watson says that 'Heathcliff has been considered both protagonist and villain'²⁷ by reviewers. Indeed, he is the centre of the novel but he is far from the ideal conception of the Victorian period. He is very different from all the common heroes of the time: he is not an honest and respectable gentleman, he does not have a job and does not provide for a family... *Wuthering Heights* is considered to be completely 'outside the main tradition of nineteenth-century fiction'²⁸. Cecil adds that Emily Brontë's 'characters have extremely intense emotions, the most intense in English fiction'²⁹. Heathcliff is indeed a very wild and passionate character. We will see that his passions destroy everything and everyone around him. He causes death and unhappiness. He does not repress his emotions as men are supposed to, in the public sphere at least. He does not go to church and is not concerned at all with religion. The readers do not know how he made his fortune when he returns after three years of absence, so we can imagine that it is not respectable and fully legal. Regarding the men-women relationships, he is the equal only to Cathy: 'Cathy and Heathcliff are woman and man but, more importantly, they are joints rebels against the human condition (...)'³⁰. They are both different from the common people and they are equal in this status of outcast. They just do not fit in society. The other characters feel they are in the presence of different sorts of beings. In the novel, just before Catherine dies and during her last meeting with Heathcliff, Nelly describes their wild passion: 'I did not feel as if I were in the company of a

²⁶ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1966, p 97

²⁷ Melvin Watson, R., 'Wuthering Heights and the Critics', in *Wuthering Heights, An Antology of Criticism*, Alastair Everitt (editor), (Great Britain, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1967), p 40

²⁸ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, p 89

²⁹ David Cecil, 'Emily Brontë and Wuthering Heights', in Lettis R. & Morris W. (editors), *A Wuthering Heights Handbook*, (New York: The Odyssey Press Inc, 1961) p 25

³⁰ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, p 88

creature of my own species'³¹; 'The two, to a cool spectator, made a strange and fearful picture'³². They are unique and different compared to other heroes. However, Heathcliff is a fascinating character: 'No one would deny that he is the most compelling and puzzling character in the novel'³³. Indeed, he is an unavoidable man in the study of Victorian novels and masculine characters: 'readers are thus tempted to admire Heathcliff as the Romantic critics admire Satan, for his energy and decisiveness, even his ruthlessness'³⁴. It is true that generally, readers are more fascinated by the rebellious characters, the ones who defy society and its conventions, even if they do not always admit it. Throughout the novel, Heathcliff is called by different names translating his actions and personality such as 'an incarnate goblin, a monster, a hellish villain, a devil (...)'³⁵... Of course these nicknames are not compatible with a traditional and ideal Victorian hero, but rather with the character of a villain. He is a damnable character. Van Ghent adds that he 'might really be a demon'³⁶ and not a real human. In the novel, Heathcliff is a demon-lover in the first part of the book, then he is a paternal ogre in the second part³⁷. Indeed, with Cathy he is both passionate and destructive, then he becomes a sort of father-figure who destroys every chance at happiness in 'his' children. Heathcliff is also a stranger, he is not described as white but more as a 'gypsy', which is not really a characteristic of the Victorian conception of the perfect hero. So we can see that Heathcliff is the opposite of the expected hero of the period. He is quite an exceptional character in nineteenth century literature.

We are now going to briefly study the character of Charlotte Brontë, Mr Rochester, and his relation to the Victorian norm of the fictional hero.

- Charlotte Brontë and her Male Hero: Mr Rochester

Contrary to Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, we cannot consider Mr Rochester to be the hero of Charlotte Brontë's novel. Indeed, he appears late in the story. We follow Jane's life and

³¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 172

³² Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 171

³³ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, pp 96-97

³⁴ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of *Wuthering Heights*' in *Wuthering Heights, An Antology of Criticism*, Alastair Everitt (editor), (Great Britain, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1967), p 127

³⁵ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of *Wuthering Heights*', p 135

³⁶ Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On *Wuthering Heights*', in *Wuthering Heights, An Antology of Criticism*, Alastair Everitt (editor), (Great Britain, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd, 1967), p 158

³⁷ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of *Wuthering Heights*', p 167

not at all Mr Rochester's: when Jane is a child, then her life at school and when she leaves to become a governess. This is when she finally meets him. Maybe at first, he appears to be a traditional character of Victorian novels: he is rich, educated, he leads a life of travels and parties with other members of his class. However, throughout the story, he appears to be more and more unconventional: 'His appearance is not heroic in any way, he has an illicit past that we soon find out about, and he keeps secrets that, while adding to his mystery, subtract from his honesty and forthrightness'³⁸. Indeed, he is often described as ugly: 'Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked'³⁹. He is certainly not good-looking enough to inspire shyness in Jane. Besides, Rochester has had mistresses before, and maybe a daughter outside wedlock. He confides in Jane on that subject: 'But unluckily the Varens (...) had given me this *fillette* Adèle, who she affirmed was my daughter; and perhaps she may be; though I see no proofs of such grim paternity written in her countenance (...)'⁴⁰. Furthermore, Rochester has important secrets: his marriage to a mad woman who is locked somewhere in his castle. He totally fails to meet the standards of respectability and of honesty of the ideal Victorian man, among other characteristics. Besides, Jane is not immediately attracted to him like in any conventional love story: 'In fact, Jane has to rescue her hero and rather than being inspired or awed by him, she finds him unremarkable'⁴¹. When Jane first sees Rochester he falls from his horse, which is quite unusual to begin a love relationship. She helps him get back on his feet, and is not inferior to him as she is supposed to be according to Victorian norms, and she does not fall in love immediately because he is simply not attractive enough. Throughout the novel, the relationship between Rochester and Jane is unconventional. He is not superior to her. They learn from each other and Jane is not helpless and silent when a man is talking as women are supposed to be: it 'obliterates conventional social superiority'⁴². During their time at Thornfield Hall, Rochester and Jane often meet in the evening to talk, and we can always observe that they stand on equal ground:

‘ You are human and faillible.’

‘ I am: so are you - what then?’

³⁸ Suzanne Hesse, 'The Victorian Ideal: Male Characters in Jane Eyre and Villette', in *The Victorian Web* (website)

³⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 108

⁴⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 137

⁴¹ Suzanne Hesse, 'The Victorian Ideal: Male Characters in Jane Eyre and Villette'

⁴² Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, pp 199-200

‘ The human and fallible should not arrogate a power with which the divine and perfect alone can be safely entrusted.’⁴³

Such a conversation between a man and a woman is extremely rare, and between a master and its governess, it is totally unimaginable. Jane is not talking just to entertain her master, but she is giving her opinion, her judgement, and he admits his faults to her. Jane considers Rochester to be a ‘human’, and not a superior being to whom she must submit. He is ‘fallible’, which is not a common masculine characteristic for the period, where men were supposed to be perfect and reliable. Charlotte Brontë makes Rochester and Jane equal human beings, which is quite revolutionary because of her subordinate position and mostly because she is a woman. She even goes further as to deprive Rochester of a part of his glorious masculinity: ‘Mr Rochester is too willfully male for Jane, and the effect of the divinely inspired fire that ultimately strikes him to reduce, but not to annul, his overaggressive masculinity’⁴⁴. Indeed, after the fire which has destroyed his castle, he is badly injured and he ends up blind and without a hand. Only then can Jane and he be together, once he is very far from any Victorian ideal. Hesse says that Rochester breaks ‘with the Victorian ideal and give us more realistic heroes’ and that Charlotte Brontë has conceived a ‘new feminine hero for the Victorian age.’⁴⁵. Rochester is then a new sort of masculine character, a man who respects the heroine and is equal to her.

- The Rejection of the Traditional Victorian Masculine Hero: Edgar Linton, John Reed, St John Rivers, Mr Brocklehurst

In both novels, the traditional male hero of the Victorian period is clearly rejected or even turned to ridicule. In *Jane Eyre*, ever since she was a child, Jane has had a ‘dark image of the male sex’⁴⁶. Indeed, the first ‘male’ she deals with is her cousin John Reed. He is very mean to her and treats her infernally: ‘He bullied and punished me; not two or three times in the week, nor once or twice in the day, but continually: every nerve I had feared him, and every morsel of

⁴³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 130

⁴⁴ F.A.C. Wilson, ‘The Primrose Wreath: The Heroes of the Brontë Novels’, in *Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Vol 29, N°1, June 1974) p 45, accessed December 4, 2011

⁴⁵ Suzanne Hesse, ‘The Victorian Ideal: Male Characters in Jane Eyre and Villette’

⁴⁶ F.A.C. Wilson, ‘The Primrose Wreath: The Heroes of the Brontë Novels’, , p 42

flesh on my bones shrank when he came near'⁴⁷. She is terrified by him, psychologically and physically. Indeed he 'bullied' her so much that her body reacts in his presence, her 'nerve' feared him and her bones 'shrank'. His masculinity is a threat both to her body and her mind: she is so scared that she cannot control her reactions. His cousin is the cause of a sick nervous state. We can see how he dominates her in this extract: "You have no business to take our books; you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us (...)"⁴⁸. He considers and treats her as an inferior being because of her origin. So we can see that John Reed, a son from a respectable family, who can be expected to become 'a gentleman', is shown under a very different light. From the outside, maybe his situation in life and his future would have appeared ideal, but John Reed becomes an alcoholic and dies in debt. Charlotte Brontë clearly rejects this kind of man, who is profoundly mean and who was not properly raised despite his upper-class origins. After that, Jane Eyre leaves her aunt's house and goes to Lowood, a school for girls.

There she meets the director Mr Brocklehurst. He is supposed to represent an ideal in Victorian society: he is a church man, supposedly honest and apparently charitable. But he is cruel to Jane as well as to all the other girls of the institution. He tries to ridicule her in front of everyone and uses religion to justify what he is doing. Indeed, in this extract, we can see what sort of punishment he inflicts on pupils: he puts Jane on a stool in front of the whole school and says: "You must be on your guard against her; you must shun her example; if necessary, avoid her company, exclude her from your sport, and shut her out from your converse. (...) this girl is - a liar!"⁴⁹. This is not a correct behaviour from a supposedly honest man, especially toward a little girl. The author once again rejects a form of respectable masculinity of the period by showing these men from the inside. Finally, when Jane flees from Thornfield Hall, she meets her cousin St John Rivers. He is a very respectable and religious man. He can be considered as ideal, modest and perfect as a potential good husband. But when he proposes to Jane, we understand that he is blind to Jane's desires:

'God and nature intended you for a missionary's wife. It is not personal, but mental endowments they have given you: you are formed for labour, not for love. A missionary's wife you must - shall be. You shall be mine: I claim you - not for my pleasure,

⁴⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 10

⁴⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 10

⁴⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 63

but for my Sovereign's service'⁵⁰.

He repeats 'you shall' to Jane, as if she had no choice: he is the man so she must obey him. His masculinity is powerful and indisputable, like God's will. He sees in marriage a duty, a convention and not love. He proposes to Jane only so that she can help him in his task abroad. He does not respect Jane when he says she is not made for love, as if she did not deserve as much, but only to be treated as an object of labour. Jane declares about him:

'As for me, I daily wishes more to please him; but to do so, I felt daily more and more that I must disown half my nature, stifle half my faculties, wrest my tastes from their original bent, force myself to the adoption of pursuits for which I had no natural vocation.'⁵¹

This extract seems to represent what all the women had to endure during the Victorian period to be a good wife. They had to do everything they could to please their husband, forgetting their own wishes and desires. They also had to stop using all their faculties, in order to be inferior to them. Jane's discourse reflects what wives could have said during this period: '(...) such a martyrdom would be monstrous'⁵², '(...) if I were his wife - this good man (...) could soon kill me (...)'⁵³. Such a match would indeed 'kill' her and her personality. A slow death: it is as if she would cease to exist. So we can see that even if St John Rivers is a respectable man, he is not fit to become a good husband. Charlotte Brontë shows her disagreement with the idea that finding a husband is of primary importance in a woman's life, and that she considers that love should be the first criterion and not convention and obligation.

All these characters in *Jane Eyre* may have constituted traditional Victorian heroes in other novels. But here their flaws are made visible and they appear to be completely unattractive. Charlotte Brontë is clearly rejecting this Victorian ideal image of men and creates her own.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë turns even more clearly to ridicule all the characteristics of traditional Victorian heroes. First of all, as we have seen, Heathcliff is the main character of the book and he is far from being traditional. We can deduce that she is in favour of more exceptional characters, who are different and step out of line and tradition. Then, through

⁵⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp 375-376

⁵¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 372

⁵² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 378

⁵³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 383

characters like Edgar Linton, she rejects the Victorian values. Edgar is supposedly perfect for the period: he is respectable, he goes to church, he comes from an important family. He has the expected attitude in every domain. Contrary to Heathcliff, Edgar is ‘gentle to the point of weakness’⁵⁴. And ‘weakness’ is obviously not a very masculine trait : it can here be associated with impotence. Edgar is not very courageous and he is far less charismatic than Heathcliff is. When Edgar argues with Heathcliff, he looks ridiculous:

‘Heathcliff measured the height and breadth of the speaker with an eye full of derision.

«Cathy, this lamb of yours threatens like a bull!» he said. «It is in danger of splitting his skull against my knuckles. By God, Mr Linton, I’m mortally sorry that you are not worth knocking down!»⁵⁵.

In this extract, Heathcliff clearly dominates him. It is like a boxing match between the two characters, Heathcliff wants to destroy Edgar physically. He also says sarcastically about Edgar during their fight: ‘Is he weeping, or is he going to faint for fear?’⁵⁶. Edgar is treated like a child, or even worse like a woman: he is not strong enough, he ‘weeps’ and ‘faints’. Heathcliff also calls him ‘a sucking leveret’⁵⁷. Even when compared to an animal, Edgar is only a rabbit, so not a strong and powerful animal. He is very inferior and not worthy of consideration. Nelly Dean herself notices Heathcliff’s superiority when he returns after three years of absence:

‘He had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man; beside whom my master seemed quite slender and youth like. (...) His countenance was much older in expression and decision of feature than Mr Linton’s; it looked intelligent, (...)’⁵⁸

Edgar looks frail next to him and does not appear to be a real man. They do not belong to the same category: Heathcliff is a real masculine, brutal man, while Edgar is merely ‘a lamb’. He is weak and ‘slender’ which are feminine attributes, while Heathcliff is ‘tall’ and ‘athletic’, which is very masculine. Physically, Edgar is completely overpowered. Intellectually, it is the same: Heathcliff looks ‘older’, more mature, and Edgar is like a child. He is even boring, because he is

⁵⁴ Philip Drew, ‘Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of Wuthering Heights’, p 127

⁵⁵ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 120

⁵⁶ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 121

⁵⁷ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 121

⁵⁸ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 101

not passionate and wild like the main characters, Cathy and Heathcliff, are. Furthermore, he cannot defend himself: so how could he possibly be able to protect his wife and family? And indeed, later on in the novel, Edgar loses his wife and also his daughter to the hands of Heathcliff. He fails in his role as a husband and as a father. Catherine Earnshaw eventually ends up marrying Edgar after Heathcliff flees, but it becomes obvious that she has made a mistake. Cathy is ‘superficially attracted to Edgar’⁵⁹ because of his looks, his manners, his nice personality... She is indeed attracted to the Victorian ideal, but temporarily and ‘superficially’, because of exterior signs of respectability: she thinks she will be happy because of what people will think of her. It is all about appearances. She ends up unhappy in her married life with Edgar. Emily Brontë seems to have made this marriage fail to show how vain it is to marry only by convention, and she clearly rejects this Victorian tradition. And we can see that she turns to ridicule her traditional Victorian character, the one who could be expected to be the hero in other novels of the period, making him weak and uninteresting compared with the other passionate characters of the novel.

- Heathcliff and Edward Rochester: Men Written by Women

As we have mentioned before, Emily and Charlotte Brontë both published their novels in 1847 under pseudonyms: Ellis Bell and Currer Bell. At this period, women were not supposed to write novels, especially such revolutionary ones as are *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. And thus their work did not remain unnoticed. Indeed, the various reactions to their novels were either enthusiastic or completely shocked, but nobody was indifferent to them⁶⁰. They were two young women when they wrote these novels, but the most surprising was that they were very isolated geographically and socially⁶¹. Indeed, they lived in a remote part of England, in Yorkshire. They very seldom left their home, especially Emily Brontë. So we can only wonder how two women so far away from the world and from society, with a very limited experience of social interactions, were able to write two novels so intense and especially such exceptional male characters.

Emily Brontë created Heathcliff, a man driven by his desires, his need for revenge, his use of violence, a man who is ready to do anything to reach his goal. Obviously he was a very

⁵⁹ David Cecil, ‘Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*’, p 25

⁶⁰ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 9

⁶¹ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 28

shocking character for the strict Victorian morality. Many attributed this novel to a male author :‘Its coarse and vulgar language, its display of fierce passion and physical violence, could only have been constructed by a man (...)’⁶². So we can see that *Wuthering Heights* stands out in the Victorian period. How could Emily Brontë create such a man? Why did she make him so different from all the other heroes? In the following extract, Sherry explains her creation of Heathcliff:

‘She was not irked by the restrictions placed on women in society, and presumably viewed Branwell’s self-destruction as the action of a free soul going its own way - as did Heathcliff (...). She was able to see such events, she observed the reasons for certain actions, but she was so removed from the influence of everyday morality that she did not need to judge, or to point a warning lesson. (...) This attitude is responsible for lifting the universe of *Wuthering Height* beyond the limitations of the contemporary moral world to a wider belief in the basic qualities of human nature.’⁶³.

Emily Brontë had vivid powers of observation, and even if she was living in a remote area, she could still watch her family (her brother Branwell) as well as some people from the neighbourhood. But still she was far enough from society to be free from any restrictions and from the strict Victorian morality, especially concerning a woman’s position. And indeed, she does not give any moral lesson in her novel nor does she give any judgement, she just lets her characters live freely. According to Sherry, we can say that she created Heathcliff in this perspective of freedom. Indeed, even if he is sometimes cruel, it is only because of what society has done to him. Otherwise, he only answers to his human desires without restrictions. So we can say that Emily Brontë imagined her extraordinary male character thanks to her own experience of life, using what she thought should be his real human nature.

Charlotte Brontë created Edward Rochester, a character not as disturbing as Heathcliff is. Compared to her sister, she had many more contacts with the world, even if they were still limited⁶⁴. But thanks to them, she wrote a different novel and a different male character. Rochester is an unusual hero for the period, especially because he was created by a woman. He has a troubled past, secrets, he is unattractive and not so young, he is ready to become a bigamous, he has a changing mood... He is not exactly the perfect husband, but she managed to make him much more fascinating than all the traditional heroes of the period. In the novel, Jane says herself about another man ‘For a handsome and not an unamiable-looking man, he repelled

⁶² Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 190

⁶³ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 40

⁶⁴ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 38

me exceedingly: there was no power in that smooth-skinned face (...): no firmness in that aquiline nose (...)’⁶⁵. She wants a masculine man, not someone with feminine features: usually, it is women who are ‘smooth-skinned’, who have soft traits, devoid of ‘firmness’. There we can see that Charlotte Brontë wanted to create a totally different man than the ones we can find in other Victorian novels. She did not want a smooth character, with a mild personality and feminine faces: she wanted a rugged male.

Heathcliff and Rochester are then two outstanding male characters, written by women who had a very particular life and an uncommon vision of society, and these facts together made them quite different from any other Victorian hero.

3. Gothic Influence in both Novels and Male Heroes:

- Traditional Elements of the Gothic Tale: Atmosphere, Settings, Uncanny Occurrences

In *Jane Eyre* and particularly in *Wuthering Heights*, we can find a lot of signs which prove the influence of the Gothic genre over Charlotte and Emily Brontë. We will study in this part the various components of the novels which are traditionally Gothic, then we will study what is modern in their conception of the genre, and finally see why their male heroes are very representative of the genre. Freud defines the ‘uncanny’ as ‘(...) that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar.’⁶⁶. He adds that ‘Many people experience the feeling in the highest degree in relation to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead, and to spirits and ghosts.’⁶⁷. In both novels, the uncanny is present.

First of all, the most obvious feature of the Gothic novel is the presence of the supernatural and of frightening occurrences, with or without natural origins⁶⁸. In *Wuthering Heights*, such events happen, and they are linked to the character of Heathcliff. At the beginning of the novel, Cathy’s ghost appears to Mr Lockwood: ‘(...) my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice-cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me, (...) and a most melancholy voice sobbed,

⁶⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 181

⁶⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, last accessed June 1, 2012, <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf>, pp 1-2

⁶⁷ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, p 13

⁶⁸ Robert, D. Hume. ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Reevaluation of the Gothic Novel’ in *PMLA*, (Vol 84, n2, March 1969), p 282, published by Modern Language Association, accessed April 20, 2012

‘Let me in - let me in!’⁶⁹. It may be just a nightmare, but still it is full of fear, typical of the Gothic. Besides, Heathcliff believes that what Lockwood tells him is true, and he himself calls for Cathy: “Come in! come in!” he sobbed; ‘Cathy, do come. Oh do - *once* more! Oh! my heart’s darling, hear me *this* time - Catherine, at last!’⁷⁰. In this extract, it is obvious that Heathcliff is accustomed to such uncanny appearances since he says ‘*once* more’. He lives in a world of supernatural elements, and is an intricate part of the Gothic aspect of the novel. In the end, Heathcliff is himself a ghost after his death. Nelly explains the neighbourhood’s beliefs to Mr Lockwood: ‘But the country folks, if you asked them, would swear on their Bible that he *walks*. There are those who speak to having met him near the church, and on the moor (...)’⁷¹. Heathcliff then becomes himself an uncanny and supernatural being. In *Wuthering Heights*, the supernatural is both a narrative and a character feature, and the masculine character is linked to it all along. In *Jane Eyre*, supernatural is less visibly present, it is more subtle. When Jane has fled from Thornfield Hall and lives far away, one night she hears Rochester calling her. Later in the novel, we learn that he actually called her name:

“(...) my heart’s wishes broke involuntarily from my lips in the words - ‘Jane! Jane! Jane!’”
‘Did you speak these words aloud?’
‘I did, Jane.’⁷²

Jane heard what he has said, and he adds that he has heard her answer. This is obviously a very strange event, difficult to explain plausibly. This is typically Gothic. Besides, it is also linked to the masculine character of the novel. So Charlotte Brontë also uses a typical Gothic device for her story, and links it to Rochester.

In the Gothic genre, we can also find some ‘secret panels and stairways’⁷³. There are secrets in *Jane Eyre*, hidden behind panels. These secrets are linked to Rochester and are at the origin of apparently supernatural events. Indeed, in Thornfield Hall, Bertha, the first wife of Rochester is hidden for many years from everyone: ‘He lifted the hangings from the wall, uncovering the second doors: this, too, he opened.’⁷⁴. The secret was hidden in the Rochester’s manor. Bertha,

⁶⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 26

⁷⁰ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 30

⁷¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 354

⁷² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 417

⁷³ Robert, D. Hume. ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel’ , p 282

⁷⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 274

throughout the story, is the source of very strange events. For example, when Jane hears noises at night : ‘(...) a savage, a sharp, a shrilly sound that ran from end to end of Thornfield Hall.’⁷⁵. This is quite mysterious, as if Thornfield were a haunted castle. The fact that it always happens at night is also very typical of the Gothic genre⁷⁶: ‘What mystery, that broke out, now in fire and now in blood, at the deadest hours of night?’⁷⁷. The typical elements of the Gothic genre are all linked to the masculine character of Rochester.

The major characteristic of the Gothic novel is not just founded on the supernatural events that happen: ‘The key characteristic of the Gothic novel is not its devices, but its atmosphere. The atmosphere is one of evil and brooding terror. (...) In other words, the setting exists to convey the atmosphere’⁷⁸. Obviously, uncanny events such as ghosts in *Wuthering Heights* and mysteries in *Jane Eyre* convey a sense of terror and make the atmosphere different than in traditional novels. However, more is needed to create an atmosphere of ‘evil’. The settings are essential. In Emily Brontë’s novel, the story takes place in a desolate landscape called the ‘moors’ which Lockwood, when he arrives, describes as follows: ‘In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society.’⁷⁹. It is a place that it is very isolated, with fierce weather conditions. This setting and the haunted house of the Heights create a very particular atmosphere of fear, typical of the Gothic genre. Besides, the wild landscape also represents Heathcliff’s personality, which is savage. In *Jane Eyre*, there is also a haunted and quite isolated castle which create the same kind of atmosphere.

In both novels, typical elements of the Gothic genre can be found, and they are all closely associated with Heathcliff and Mr Rochester, who can then be considered as Gothic characters. The Brontës have both been influenced by the same movement for their stories. The uncanny, or ‘das unheimlich’, is present in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* through familiar places and persons, which become frightening because their state changes: people are ghosts and the houses are haunted.

- Modernizing the Gothic Genre:

⁷⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 195

⁷⁶ Robert .D. Hume ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel’ , p 282

⁷⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 199

⁷⁸ Robert, D. Hume, ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel’, p 286

⁷⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 3

Charlotte and Emily Brontë, as we have seen, are both faithful to some features of the traditional Gothic genre. However, they are known to have modernized it a bit, by adapting some characteristics with their own style. We will see how they changed some of the conventions of the genre.

In the following extract, Pykett explains what Emily and Charlotte did, and how they managed to do so:

‘Each of the Brontës (...) contributed to the process of modernizing gothic - by both domesticating and psychologizing it - which occurred in the Victorian period. They domesticated gothic by locating their tales of female imprisonment, confinement, or persecution (...) in everyday, domestic settings among the middling classes of society. Indeed, much of the strange power of their novels derives precisely from this juxtaposition of the domestic and the fantastic (...).’⁸⁰

The Gothic that the Brontës have created is new. First of all, they have changed the location of their stories. Usually, heroines of Gothic novels are imprisoned in a very isolated castle, away from civilization with very few contacts with other people. In *Wuthering Heights*, Cathy is not imprisoned in the Heights, but she clearly is at Thrushcross Grange, a typical Victorian house in a typical Victorian family. In this house her nature is repressed, and she often talks about leaving; “Oh, I’m burning! I wish I were out of doors - I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free...”⁸¹. In this extract she is sick and feverish, but what she says can represent the life of women during the Victorian period: they are no longer free once they are married, they have to stay indoors. She has to repress her true nature. This is a metaphorical imprisonment. Emily Brontë has confined her female character, not in a dark castle, but in a typical Victorian house. In Charlotte Brontë’s novel as well, Jane seems to be always confined somewhere: at school, then at Thornfield as a governess. She is apparently a typical Victorian woman who does not go out a lot. Both Brontës have modernized the Gothic by putting their heroines enclosed in a traditional Victorian home. And this is the most surprising element of this new genre, since fantastic events occur in more classical domestic areas: ‘In the fiction of each of the Brontë sisters it is usually the English home (rather than some remote castle) that is the locus of terror and uncanny, a threatening place of physical and psychological violence, a prison rather than (or as well as) a place of shelter.’⁸². Indeed, Thrushcross Grange and Thornfield Hall are perfectly normal English

⁸⁰ Lyn Pykett, ‘Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel’, p 199

⁸¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 132

⁸² Lyn Pykett, ‘Sensation and the Fantastic in the Victorian Novel’, p 199

homes for the period. And in each of them, Cathy and Jane seem to be locked in physically, since they cannot go out, and psychologically, because of their status as women. Besides, as we have already seen, uncanny occurrences happen in Thorfield Hall.

Thus the Brontë have modified some elements of the traditional Gothic genre, making it more modern and adapted to the period.

We are now going to take a closer look at the two masculine heroes, and see how they both represent a typical Gothic character: the villain.

- The Villains:

In every traditional Gothic tale, a villain can always be found, and he is also the hero of the novel: ‘We also call a living person uncanny, usually when we ascribe evil motives to him.’⁸³ In *Wuthering Heights* it is Heathcliff and in *Jane Eyre* it is Mr Rochester. They are indeed sublime villains who can terrorize the other characters of the novel, and who are also very fascinating: they are often defined as ‘fearsome and profoundly ambiguous.’⁸⁴ We will see how each character of both novels are considered as a villain-hero, how they repulse as well as attract people because of their double facets: both good and evil.

In *Wuthering Heights*, we can observe that Heathcliff is often considered as a villain by various characters. Nelly refers to him as ‘the black villain’⁸⁵ or even ‘the devil’⁸⁶ instead of his name or any other qualifier. At the end of the novel, when he behaves strangely and stops eating and sleeping, Nelly asks herself: ‘Is he a ghoul, or a vampire?’ I mused. I had read of such hideous, incarnate demons.’⁸⁷ So we can see that he is not a traditional Victorian hero by the names given to him: he is associated with evil darkness, like any Gothic villain. Nelly thinks, even if she is not really serious, that he might be a ‘vampire’, which is a very famous creature of the Gothic genre, something Nelly must have learned in the books she has read. Some of Heathcliff’s actions are also linked to the Gothic genre. For example he commits an act of necrophilia when he digs the earth to find and open Cathy’s coffin: “I got a spade from the

⁸³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, p 14

⁸⁴ Robert, D. Hume, ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel’, p 287

⁸⁵ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 118

⁸⁶ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 116

⁸⁷ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 348

toolhouse, and began to delve with all my might - it scraped the coffin (...)”⁸⁸. Heathcliff is strongly linked to the world of death and ghosts: he believes in them and is not afraid to search for them. It is a true Gothic attitude. Heathcliff is clearly alike the ‘villain-heroes’ of the conventional Gothic stories: he is dangerous and frightening, he is linked to supernatural attitudes and occurrences.

Villain-heroes are also known to be passionate, ambiguous, and their knowledge about good and evil is confusing⁸⁹. We are tempted to see good in Heathcliff through his love and affection towards Cathy Earnshaw. His love is passionate and more powerful than anything else. Someone capable of such feelings cannot be entirely bad. Heathcliff is then the perfect villain-hero of a Gothic novel, he has all the required characteristics.

Rochester can also be seen as a traditional ‘villain-hero’. He is a most ambiguous character. He can be quite devilish and sometimes really pure. As we have already seen, he is also linked to supernatural manifestations as Heathcliff is. Rochester is often associated with darkness, physically but also in his moods. Jane mentions his ‘dark eyes’ and his ‘swarthy skin’⁹⁰. Physically, at least, he can be compared to a conventional villain. Then, his mood is often gloomy. When she first met him, Jane noticed ‘the frown, the roughness’⁹¹ of Rochester. Rochester is close to the villain-hero of the Gothic novels, since he behaves more like them than like a nice Victorian gentleman. Rochester is also very passionate too, and his love for Jane makes the good side in him reappear: ‘He rose and came towards me, and I saw his face all kindled, and his full falcon-eye flashing, and tenderness and passion in every lineaments.’⁹². Jane seems to be in the presence of a nice, affectionate and true lover here. He himself declares to Jane that he has committed mistakes, that he was confused about what was right or wrong, but he also says: “Then take my word for it, - I am not a villain (...)”⁹³. He knows he may appear to be a real villain to people, but appearances are misleading. Charlotte Brontë has also created a Gothic villain-hero in the masculine character of her novel. Rochester is indeed quite close to some characteristics of the Gothic villains, which is what makes him so interesting.

⁸⁸ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 305

⁸⁹ Hume Robert .D. ‘Gothic Versus Romantic: A Revaluation of the Gothic Novel’, p 287

⁹⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 174

⁹¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 108

⁹² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 256

⁹³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 128

We are now going to study closely all the aspects of Heathcliff and Rochester which prevent them from being traditional Victorian heroes and transforms them into somewhat antiheroes.

II) Heathcliff and Mr Rochester: Antiheroes?

1. The Descendants of the Byronic Heroes:

- Byron's Influence over the Brontës:

It was often said that Byron's poetry really influenced the Brontës, that they had read his poetry a lot in their home in Yorkshire. Byron also impressed Emily and Charlotte through the 'aspects of exile, violence and romantic love'⁹⁴ which were part of his life. Obviously, if they grew up with such readings, it is only logical to find some common features between their respective work. The notion of exile have attracted them because they were in the same daily situation, and we can observe that they both reproduce it in their novel: the story of *Wuthering Heights* takes place in a remote area, far from civilization, the characters almost never leave, and in *Jane Eyre*, it is the same. The characters are always shut out from the world, in Lowood school as well as in Thornfield Hall. Both stories do not occur in a big city or even in a village.

Byron also influenced them in the creation of their male characters for *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*. Heathcliff and Edward Rochester can indeed be considered as Byronic heroes. A typical Byronic hero is 'a man proud, moody, cynical, with defiance in his brow, and misery in his heart, a scorner of his kind, implacable in revenge, yet capable of deep and strong affection.'⁹⁵ This definition can obviously be associated with the characters of Heathcliff and Mr Rochester. Indeed, the first one is a very proud man who is very cruel to everyone during his revenge. He is also quite miserable at various moments of his life: when he is tortured by Hindley Earnshaw, when he loses Catherine to Edgar and then when she dies, leaving him completely desperate. We can see through their uncommon love that he is also capable of very strong emotions, so intense that they destroy everything and everyone around him: 'Actually, he feels more deeply than anyone'⁹⁶. Of course, he despises everyone of his kind with the exception of Catherine, and Mr Earnshaw who took care of him when he was a child. The rest of the population of the novel only represents objects to be manipulated and destroyed by him. Mr

⁹⁴ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 29

⁹⁵ Helen Brown, 'The Influence of Byron on Emily Brontë', in *The Modern Language Review*, (Vol 34, N°3, July 1939), p 379, published by Modern Humanities Research Association, accessed November 26, 2011

⁹⁶ F.H. Langman, 'Thoughts on Wuthering Heights', in *Wuthering Heights, An Anthology of Criticism*, Editor: Alastair Everitt (Great Britain: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1967), p70

Rochester can also be described as proud and subjected to his dark humours: 'He was moody, too; unaccountably so; I more than once (...) found him sitting in the library alone, with his head bent on his folded arm; and, when he looked up, a morose, almost malignant, scowl blackened his features'⁹⁷. So we can see that he is not a joyful man and that he is rather dark. There is in him 'something of the Byronic hero with his rough charm, mysterious background, his wild life, brusque, often cruel manner, but tragic and strong emotions.'⁹⁸. He is not handsome but his charm has allowed him to have several mistresses. He has also a 'mysterious background', we do not learn a lot about his past except on rare occasions. He also led a life of travels and unreligious love. His manners are rather 'brusque' to Jane or to Adèle, and he can speak quite harshly to them. When the little girl wants to accompany them in town after the wedding proposal, he says to Jane: 'I told her no. I'll have no brats!'⁹⁹. So we can observe that it is not a nice and elegant term to use. He also expresses how miserable he was before he met Jane: 'After a youth and manhood passed half in unutterable misery and half in dreary solitude, I have for the first time found what I can truly love - I have found you'¹⁰⁰. Once again, it matches the description of the Byronic hero, both miserable, and capable of deep and true feelings.

Even if both Emily and Charlotte Brontë have created a Byronic hero, Heathcliff and Rochester are not exactly the same kind. Indeed, different aspects can be attributed to Byron. As Brown explains, Charlotte Brontë was attracted by 'Byron, the man of the world, (...) - Byron the breaker of hearts, fascinating, irresistible, and very, very wicked - (...) Byron as he wished to appear to the world.'¹⁰¹. Rochester is a 'man of the world'. We are aware that he has travelled during his life, that he knows a lot of people outside his house and its close neighbourhood. He receives men and women of the upper-class in his castle. We also know that he broke some hearts in his past, and also that he is wicked.

'It was the deeper Byron, the self which he often tried to conceal and deny, who influenced Emily - the unhappy boy (...); the friendless young man (...); the Byron (...) who distrusted everyone and everything, most of all himself.'¹⁰². Obviously, Heathcliff can neither be described as a 'man of the world', nor as a heart-breaker. He is another kind of 'Byron'. This second

⁹⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 138

⁹⁸ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 51

⁹⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 249

¹⁰⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, pp 294-295

¹⁰¹ Helen Brown, 'The Influence of Byron on Emily Brontë', p 379

¹⁰² Helen Brown, 'The Influence of Byron on Emily Brontë', p 379

description fits him well: he was an unhappy child, despised by his adoptive brother Hindley. As a young man, we can see that he is not surrounded by friends, he only has Cathy as a confidante. And finally as an adult, he is still alone, trusting no one, just seeking for revenge.

Heathcliff and Rochester correspond to the description of a 'Byronic hero', even if they differ on several points. The Brontës have been quite influenced by the poet Byron to write their novels and to imagine their male characters.

- On Evil Qualities and the Lack of True Heroic Virtue:

Being a Byronic hero also means lacking in true and traditional heroic virtues. Obviously, if a man is moody, mysterious, vengeful or cynical, he is far from the traditional Victorian hero who is expected to be honest, respectable and loyal.

Heathcliff never conforms to any sort of norm: he does not match the standards of the Victorian period and he does not listen to anyone in the novel. He behaves the way he wants. He is a rebel on every level. As a kid, he rebelled against Hindley's abuses. In this extract, he reacts violently after being treated like a servant: "I shall not!" replied the boy, finding his tongue at last, 'I shall not stand to be laughed at, I shall not bear it!'"¹⁰³. We can see here that he defends himself and we can also notice that he is very proud and does not want to be reduced to the rank of simple servant. He repeats several times the verb 'shall', which proves that he is determined and strong, he can decide as to what he wants about his own destiny. When Heathcliff returns after three years of absence, he looks like a gentleman who has succeeded and he clearly dominates Edgar Linton, who seems afraid of him: '(...) he remained a minute at a loss at how to address the plough-boy, as he had called him (...)'¹⁰⁴. Then we read that he is staying at the Heights with his enemy Hindley, and we understand that he has manipulated him. Here Heathcliff's pride has led him to return and to dominate the two men who are responsible for his unhappiness. It is the beginning of his vengeance, which will last for the rest of his life. Indeed, the novel retraces his revenge, and how he destroys everyone in the two families living in Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff is incapable of restraining himself and taming his desires. And yet for Emily Brontë and Victorian society, '(...) only those capable of governing their desires could assume a position among the respectable classes.'¹⁰⁵.

¹⁰³ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 57

¹⁰⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 102

¹⁰⁵ Nancy Armstrong, 'Gender and the Victorian Novel', p 102

Edward Rochester is a man who also lacks some qualities and heroic virtues. He is a proud man, full of arrogance. After having asked Jane to become his wife, he intends to buy her a lot of jewels: ‘I will myself put the diamond chain round your neck, and the circlet on your forehead (...).’¹⁰⁶ ; ‘I will just - figuratively speaking - attach you to a chain like this.’¹⁰⁷. This is obviously a way to show everyone that Jane is his property, that she belongs to him. ‘Figuratively’, she is going to be like a slave with her ‘chain’, while he is the master. It is an intimate version of slavery. This behaviour is typical of men who need to expose what they own, to assert their power over women. Rochester is also a very mysterious character, he has an extraordinary secret which we learn about later on in the novel, during the wedding ceremony: ‘It simply consists in the existence of a previous marriage. Mr Rochester has a wife now living’¹⁰⁸. We can see that Rochester is a liar, that he lied to Jane who is supposed to become his wife. It is a weird behaviour for a supposed hero. It cannot be said either that Rochester knows how to contain himself and conceal his desires. He is sometimes on the verge of violence. In the following extract, he is so melancholic after the cancellation of the wedding that he says “Jane, will you hear reason?” (...) ‘because if you won’t, I’ll try violence.’¹⁰⁹. Charlotte Brontë has created a violent sort of male character who possesses some scary faults.

2. A Demonization of the Male Characters:

- The Evil Treatment of their Acquaintances:

Heathcliff and Mr Rochester are consciously and purposely demonized in the two novels. They are not very genteel and nice heroes, especially in the way they treat their close entourage. They are very harsh and cruel, even to the ones they love. It is as if they were possessed by a demon.

Rochester is a very temperamental man, who can be merry a day and gloomy the next. And when he is not in a good mood, he can speak brutally to everyone, including sometimes Jane whom he loves dearly. He is not often very nice to Adèle, the girl he is in charge of. Most of the time, he just wants to get rid of her: “Away!” he cried harshly; ‘keep at a distance, child; or go in

¹⁰⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 243

¹⁰⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 254

¹⁰⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 271

¹⁰⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 283

to Sophie!”¹¹⁰. And after he offers her some presents, while she is unwrapping them he tells her: “don’t bother me with any details of the anatomical process (...) let your operation be conducted in silence - tiens-toi tranquille, enfant; comprends-tu?”¹¹¹. He is not emotionally concerned with Adele, throughout the story she is only a burden to him and he treats her as such. A man not nice with children is generally unattractive to women, Rochester is demonized through this relationship. It is interesting to see how deeply disturbed he is when we learn he has been keeping his wife Bertha Mason locked in his manor for several years. Such a treatment of a human being is unacceptable. Rochester can be considered as a devil for inflicting onto his wife. Lying to Jane about this previous marriage and about the treatment he has reserved for Bertha is not acceptable either. He has manipulated Jane so that she stayed ignorant of everything in order to obtain what he desired. This is not a decent treatment for someone you love. Jane herself has observed that Rochester can be rather mean to people: ‘(...) in my secret soul I knew that his great kindness to me was balanced by unjust severity to many others.’¹¹². Even if most of the time he is kind to her, he is not the same to other people. This behaviour proves that he has a demonic inclination. Charlotte Brontë has imagined a very particular masculine character, who can be very kind to a governess but she also demonizes him through his very harsh treatment of other characters.

Heathcliff is also demonized throughout *Wuthering Heights*. Emily Brontë’s masculine hero treats people around him infernally, especially once Catherine is married to Edgar Linton. From then on, his only goal is to destroy everybody in the Earnshaw and the Linton families, except maybe Cathy, but she is eventually killed by the situation. We will now see how he harshly treats the characters and ruins their lives. Even Catherine suffers from his demonic personality.

To begin, the first enemy Heathcliff wants to ruin after he returns is Hindley Earnshaw, his childhood persecutor. Even when he was still a child, he told Nelly about this threat: “I’m trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don’t care how long I wait, if I can only do it, at last. I hope he will not die before I do!”¹¹³. He has indeed waited a very long time to take his revenge. It is an obsession of his. The first action against Hindley he undertakes is to become the owner of the Heights. After that, once he is the master of the house, he daily humiliates Hindley and he even manages to make Hareton like him and turn against his father. When Nelly visits the

¹¹⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 135

¹¹¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 123

¹¹² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 138

¹¹³ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 64

Heights and sees Hareton, he himself says that he is fond of Heathcliff: ‘Desiring to have his reasons for liking him, I could only gather the sentences. ‘I know’n’t - he pays Dad back what he gives to me - he curses Daddy for cursing me (...)’¹¹⁴. Heathcliff has succeeded in taking his revenge upon Hindley; he has nothing left, not even his son. He is completely desperate, as he says himself: ‘Am I to lose all, without a chance of retrieval? Is Hareton to be a beggar?’¹¹⁵. Heathcliff does to an innocent child what Hindley has done to him when he was himself young: he is and forever will be wretched.

The second enemy Heathcliff hopes to destroy is, of course, Edgar Linton. He has taken the love of his life from him. So he begins by seducing his sister Isabella and flees with her to get married. This is a huge sadness for Edgar. Then he makes Isabella unhappy and treats her very harshly: ‘Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?’¹¹⁶. Once again, we observe that he uses an innocent and naïve person to reach his goal. Many years after Catherine is dead, Heathcliff is not done with his revenge, and inflicts on Edgar his last blow: taking away his daughter Catherine Linton, and, in the process, becoming the landlord of Thrushcross Grange. Edgar has prevented her from getting involved with Heathcliff, calling him ‘(...) a most diabolical man, delighting to wrong and ruin those he hates, if they give him the slightest opportunity’¹¹⁷, but it is too late. During a visit to the Heights to see her cousin, Catherine is made prisoner until she marries Linton. Such are Heathcliff’s threats: ‘I shall be your father tomorrow - all the father you’ll have in a few days (...)’¹¹⁸. Indeed, Edgar is dying, and Heathcliff wants to torture him during his last days. Catherine is the object of his revenge, he does not care at all for her sufferings. Heathcliff is a very diabolical man, whose only aim seems to make everyone suffer because of what he himself endured before.

The only one Heathcliff does not intend to see in pain is Catherine: ‘I seek no revenge on you, (...) You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only, allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style (...)’¹¹⁹. But, in the vengeful process, she is hurt. After a fight with Edgar, she falls ill and dies. Heathcliff has thus become a devilish character, whose revenge is without limits. Even his love is dangerous, since Catherine died because of him. Emily Brontë

¹¹⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 116

¹¹⁵ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 148

¹¹⁶ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 143

¹¹⁷ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 235

¹¹⁸ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 285

¹¹⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, pp 118-119

has created a demon, a monster who is at the source of despair and unhappiness in everyone around him. In René Girard's words: 'La malédiction du héros est si terrible, si totale qu'elle s'étend aux êtres et aux choses qui sont directement sous son emprise. (...) le héros contamine les êtres et les choses dont il peut faire usage.'¹²⁰. This clearly applies to Rochester and Heathcliff, who influence and contaminate people around them.

- From Repulsion to Fascination

We are now going to see that despite the fact that Rochester and Heathcliff can be considered as demonized characters, they are nonetheless very famous Victorian heroes. They have indeed fascinated many readers throughout the years. We will try to understand why.

We have seen previously that they both can be repulsive characters. However they are very interesting men, they have inspired generations of readers and writers. Most of the time, gentle and soft fictional characters are not appreciated and do not bring much to the plot. In real life, people prefer to be in contact with benevolent human beings, but when they read, they prefer to discover complex and devilish characters. Reading is a form of escape, so it is only logical that one would be attracted to characters who are different and who trigger passions.

Heathcliff is entirely this sort of character. He is the center and the heart of the novel. Even if he is very far from the standards of the Victorian period, readers are fascinated by him, they can either love or hate him, but they are not indifferent to his existence. Readers are 'thus tempted to admire Heathcliff as the Romantic critics admire Satan, for his energy and decisiveness, even his ruthlessness'¹²¹. Heathcliff can indeed be compared to Satan, because of his actions and also for the effect he has on readers. In *Wuthering Heights*, he is the character who brings vitality into the lives of the other characters: 'Into this deathly stillness, Heathcliff's reappearance as a dark form lurking amidst shadows brings life, movement, intense excitement (...). Heathcliff's presence awakens all the latent passions in others.'¹²². He flees from the Heights during three years, and the story continues only once he returns, as if nothing notable had happened while he was gone: nothing worth telling, at least. It is only logical then that we like it better when he is present. Furthermore, readers are not only fascinated by him, but they

¹²⁰ René Girard, *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque*, (France: Hachette Littératures, 1999), p 72

¹²¹ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of *Wuthering Heights*', p 127

¹²² J.F. Goodridge, *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights*, (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1971, 1st ed: 1964), p 29

often like him. It is surprising since he only wants to hurt people. The sympathy we feel for him, it seems 'is more akin to the compassion we feel for those who are fated to work out their doom in torment and despair.'¹²³. Heathcliff has had a difficult life since childhood, he is not privileged even after being saved from the slums by Mr Earnshaw, he is still rejected and ill-treated. So he has to fight to make a place in the world for himself, and readers usually like this kind of arduous path. As Langman rightly explains: 'Our sympathy is drawn by the struggle of life to triumph over killing contempt.'¹²⁴. He fights everyone who rejected him and who denied him his right to exist and to be happy in the past: Hindley, Edgar... And so, we continue to like him because he still has human feelings despite everything he does: 'Beneath his callousness, there is a child-like capacity for elemental feelings, which reaches a terrible intensity when he describes his yearning to see Catherine once more.'¹²⁵. His love is immense and unique, and we can only admire such a strong feeling which nothing can annihilate, not even time. He has been devoted to Catherine ever since he first met her; and such a long-lasting relationship can only but fascinate. Emily Brontë has then created an amazing masculine character, who is damnable but who still arouses sympathy.

Charlotte Brontë also imagined a character who can be quite vicious in his treatment of his friends and family, but who is interesting and likeable nonetheless. Mr Rochester is indeed often quite harsh with people around him: the most shocking act being that he has locked his wife up in the attic. Furthermore, even if he is not the center of the story as Heathcliff is, he brings a new attractive dimension to Jane's life. He is a very original lover for a governess. He is quite mysterious, so the readers are fascinated by this man and want to discover his past and what happened to him in order to explain his unusual personality. As Heathcliff, he is at the cause of certain striking events in the novel. He is also capable of true and deep feelings, he is a complex and stubborn man in his relationship with Jane. He waits for her and is quite desperate after her departure. We can then understand the fascination of generations of readers for this uncommon man, they usually come to adore and worship such unconventional masculine characters in novels.

3. Their Unusual Life Course:

¹²³ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of Wuthering Heights', p 136

¹²⁴ F.H. Langman, 'Thoughts on Wuthering Heights', p 82

¹²⁵ J.F. Goodridge, *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights*, p 44

- The Broken Childhoods of Outcasts:

Emily and Charlotte Brontë have both created male characters who have had a difficult beginning in their lives. Heathcliff and Rochester had to overcome many hardships and obstacles to become men. They are rejected as children and outcasts as young men: ‘Le héros de roman est toujours l’enfant oublié par les bonnes fées au moment de son baptême.’¹²⁶ We will study in this part the courses of their peculiar life.

Heathcliff was an orphan. He was found in the streets of Liverpool by Mr Earnshaw who took pity on him and decided to bring him home, at Wuthering Heights. But even after he finally found a family to rescue him, he is barely happier: ‘Heathcliff, the outcast, rejected and humiliated, is only accepted by Catherine’¹²⁷. Just after he arrives at the Heights, Nelly admits: ‘I was frightened, and Mrs Earnshaw was ready to fling it out of doors: she did fly up - asking how he could fashion to bring that gypsy brat into the house (...)’¹²⁸ and also that ‘(...) Hindley hated him, and to say the truth I did the same (...)’¹²⁹. We can see that everyone except Cathy and Mr Earnshaw is prejudiced against him and scorns him directly, without trying to accept him. He never is an accepted member of the family but is considered as an outcast and an usurper of affection. This situation became worse when Mr Earnshaw died. Heathcliff had to grow up without any father-figure as a model. He had to construct his personality by himself. During his entire childhood, Hindley tortured him: ‘This endurance made old Earnshaw furious when he discovered his son persecuting the poor, fatherless child, as he called him’¹³⁰. Once his adoptive father had gone, Heathcliff was exposed to Hindley’s various attacks. He experienced a ‘(...) slavery-like oppression’¹³¹. Indeed, after he arrives at the Heights when Mr Earnshaw dies, Hindley decides to take his revenge on Heathcliff, who he believes has deprived him from his father’s love: he had to work in the farm like a slave, and to obey his ‘master’ Hindley. In the following extract, we can see that he brings him down to a lower status: ‘He drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he

¹²⁶ René Girard, *Mensonge Romantique et Vérité Romanesque*, p 74

¹²⁷ F-H Langman, ‘Thoughts on *Wuthering Heights*’, p 78

¹²⁸ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 38

¹²⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 39

¹³⁰ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 39

¹³¹ Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Race and the Victorian Novel’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Deirdre David (editor), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p 160

should labour out of doors instead, compelling him to do so, as hard as any other lad on the farm.’¹³² Heathcliff must now work all day long on the farm and he is not admitted in the same rooms as the family: he is everyone’s inferior, from now on. He is even called a servant by Hindley when Catherine comes home after her stay at Thrushcross Grange: ‘Heathcliff, you may come forward,’ cried Hindley, enjoying his discomfiture (...) ‘You may come forward and wish Miss Catherine welcome, like the other servants.’¹³³ Heathcliff was already an outcast in the family but now he is not even part of the family anymore. However, despite how badly he was treated, he does not become a desperate and fragile person. He rather becomes a strong man, very charismatic. Langman argues that his personality, his bond with the world is the product of the treatment he received by the people he lived with and not the result of ‘his own perverse will’¹³⁴. Indeed Heathcliff was treated very ‘wrongly’ in the house, as we learn from Nelly: ‘(...) and we plagued and went on with him shamefully, for I wasn’t reasonable enough to feel my injustice, and the mistress never put in a word on his behalf, when she saw him wronged.’¹³⁵. Nobody intervened in his defense, so he had to learn to defend himself and to be insensitive to attacks: ‘(...) he would stand Hindley’s blows without winking or shedding a tear (...)’¹³⁶. He is then very resistant to physical and psychological mistreatments: he refuses to cry, he is a strong boy already.

Emily Brontë has imagined a very ‘masculine’ male character: Heathcliff is indeed a strong man, proud and charismatic. She makes him go through a very difficult life, especially a harsh childhood, where almost everyone of his acquaintances despises him and tortures him. Many other boys would have become very fragile and weak after such a treatment. But not Heathcliff, who becomes an aggressive man. Emily Brontë shows that becoming a man is something you must learn and fight for, that resistance is needed to have a place in the world. Heathcliff was not born with a brutal masculinity, he acquired it through his harsh life. It is a construction. Some feminist theories ‘(...) claim that gender is the cultural interpretation of sex or that gender is culturally constructed (...)’¹³⁷. Masculinity would then be defined and constructed by society’s

¹³² Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 48

¹³³ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 56

¹³⁴ F-H Langman, ‘Thoughts on *Wuthering Heights*’, p 79

¹³⁵ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 39

¹³⁶ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 39

¹³⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Great Britain: Routledge, 1990), p 7

norms. However Heathcliff did not construct his own through conventions but through the obstacles he met.

Mr Rochester also had a tough life and had to fight his way through obstacles. At the beginning, when he appears in the novel we can think that it is not the case, since he lives in a castle and comes from a rich and respectable family. Mrs Fairfax says to Jane “(...) the family have always been respected here. Almost all the land in this neighbourhood, as far as you can see, has belonged to the Rochesters time out of mind.”¹³⁸ So Rochester should be a son from an upper-class family and then have no particular trouble growing up and becoming the man he is. In fact, as we learn later, he is the second son. He reveals to Jane that he had an older brother and that his father gave everything to him: ‘(...) it was his resolution to keep the property together; he could not bear the idea of dividing his estate and leaving me a fair portion: all, he resolved, should go to my brother. (...) I must be provided for by a wealthy marriage.’¹³⁹ In many ways, Rochester was abandoned by his family: he received nothing to help him, even though it is surprising in such a family. Then, his father found him a wealthy woman to marry. Usually, fathers plan arranged weddings for their daughter, so they can be sustained by their husbands. Here Rochester has the traditional Victorian role of a woman: he has to marry someone rich in order to be provided for. The roles are inverted. He becomes the responsibility of his wife and not his father anymore. This is very unusual. He inherited the whole property only after his brother died. Before that he had to fight to become a man. Charlotte Brontë created a male character who is not an outcast from society like Heathcliff is, but Rochester is an outcast in his own family. He was obviously not so miserable and ill-treated, but he has been growing up being considered as inferior to his brother, and then forced to marry as women were at this period, in order to survive in society. We can imagine that before, Rochester was not so strong for he was not able to resist his father’s wishes. Maybe his masculinity was tamed. When he meets Jane he possesses an aggressive masculinity. Again, it is something he must have acquired because of the difficulties he had to go through: as De Beauvoir says ‘(...) no one is born with a gender - gender is always acquired.’¹⁴⁰ Charlotte Brontë wants to show that becoming a man, a ‘masculine’ sort of man is not something innate and natural but something you learn thanks to life. It is a literary construct, and Emily and Charlotte Brontë made sure to create this difficult path for their male characters.

¹³⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 99

¹³⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 286

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in: Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble, Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p 111

- Self-advancement, Upward Mobility, and Delight in Mastery

We have seen that both Heathcliff and Rochester have had difficult beginnings in their lives, that they have not been helped by anyone. They had to make their way through life and rise by themselves without assistance. In the following extract, Michie clearly explains what they did:

‘(...) Heathcliff and Rochester move from being oppressed to a position of dominance, (...) the two are also positioned at the start of their careers as excluded from the realm of private property and inheritance, Heathcliff because of his anomalous, extra-familial origin, Rochester because of his position as second son. As a result, both, like the oriental despot, must acquire power and wealth through conquest or appropriation.’¹⁴¹

She says that they were both considered inferior since their childhood for different reasons, and that their only solution to overcome their position is through conquest and appropriation. And they successfully manage to do so. Indeed Heathcliff comes back after three years completely transformed, he is not a boy anymore but a man, he is well dressed and apparently wealthy. However it is still not enough and even if he has impressed his enemies Hindley Earnshaw and Edgar Linton, he needs more. He then decides to destroy them, to acquire their property and to have a complete power over them and their children. When Rochester meets Jane, he is also very wealthy and does not seem to have fought to reach this position in life. But he had to leave his home to assert his power and to become rich. Michie adds that ‘Once they have amassed wealth, both return home to act the part of the tyrant, assuming a semi-godlike status, taking the law into their own hands and delighting in mastery to the point of torture.’¹⁴². Indeed, when Heathcliff returns, he clearly becomes a tyrant to everyone, and he can also be considered as a terrifying ‘semi-god’ because he decides that Catherine (the daughter) will marry his son Linton: he imposes his will on them. He is then the master of Wuthering Heights after he drove Hindley to a sad fate, and he clearly enjoys being at this position. He also becomes the master of Thrushcross Grange once Edgar Linton is dead. Heathcliff likes to torture the people around him: Hindley, Catherine, Edgar, Linton, Hareton, and even Nelly suffer from his tyranny. Rochester is quite wealthy too when he returns at Thornfield Hall, and he obviously takes the law in his hands when he decides to marry Jane and then to commit the felony of bigamy. He is also assuming the

¹⁴¹ Elsie Michie, ‘From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference’, in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, by Duke University Press (Vol 25, n°2, Winter 92), p 135, accessed February 5, 2012

¹⁴² Elsie Michie, ‘From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference’, p 135

role of semi-god, thinking it is acceptable since his first wife is mad. He likes being the master, it is surely a kind of revenge for him, after having been cast aside when he was younger. 'The literary figure associated with both these characters' self-advancement is Satan.'¹⁴³. This entity may represent their nature, especially Heathcliff's, who is often called a 'devil' in the novel.

These stories of upward mobility can be compared to colonial expansion through the character of Heathcliff and Rochester¹⁴⁴. Indeed, Heathcliff arrives when he is a child in an unknown territory, and through time he totally conquers it, looking for power and accumulating wealth. He mistreats the inhabitants of the place, making them his 'puppets' for his benefit. On his side, Rochester travels abroad to acquire wealth and become powerful. So we can see that their success can be associated with the British colonial Empire.

Heathcliff and Rochester had to fight to be able to have a proper place in society, because they had nothing at the beginning. However, they both became quite tyrannical once they succeeded. Emily and Charlotte Brontë chose to show the danger of brutal masculinity. It is because of what they endured that their characters become such men, even though they will never be respectable and good-tempered in the end.

4. Exotic and Erotic Lands:

- Heathcliff: a Stranger with Gypsy Origins

In *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte and Emily Brontë created, as we have previously seen, very unusual heroes, and they also have in common another feature which clearly distinguishes them from other Victorian male heroes: they are both linked to exotic characteristics. Indeed, as Michie points out '(...) Heathcliff and Rochester are repeatedly linked to exotic images of racial difference.'¹⁴⁵. In *The Romantic Agony*, Praz adds that '(...) the exotic and the erotic ideals go hand in hand (...)'¹⁴⁶. So if the heroes are linked to foreign places, they must also inspire desire and eroticism. And it is interesting to see how such images appear in the novels and how they have come to build a new sort of masculinity in the Victorian period..

¹⁴³ Elsie Michie, 'From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference', p 132

¹⁴⁴ Elsie Michie, 'From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference', p 133

¹⁴⁵ Elsie Michie, 'From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference', p 129

¹⁴⁶ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, p 197

The character of Heathcliff is a stranger at Wuthering Heights. He arrives in a home, in the Earnshaw family and he is not a real member of this new environment. We have seen that he is immediately considered as an outcast by everyone. However, he is considered as such not only because he is a newcomer, but also because he looks like a ‘gypsy’ with a ‘dark face’. Indeed, after being first brought home from Liverpool, Mr Earnshaw declares to the household: ‘(...) you must e’en take it as a gift of God; though it’s as dark as if it came from the devil.’¹⁴⁷. At this stage of the novel, it can be deduced that if he is dark it is only because he is dirty from living so long out in the streets. But then he is repeatedly called a ‘gypsy’. For example, when he escapes with Cathy to Thrushcross Grange, the Lintons catch them and give a physical description of him. Isabella says that ‘He’s exactly like the son of the fortune-teller (...)’¹⁴⁸, which means that he must have dark skin. Mrs Linton calls him a ‘gypsy’ and Mr Linton declares he is ‘(...) a little Lascar, or an American or Spanish castaway.’¹⁴⁹. From then, Heathcliff’s racial status is defined as non-white¹⁵⁰. He is physically differentiated from everyone else in the novel. The author has pushed his difference very far: he is not only an outcast of society but also a racial outcast. His social and racial condition are linked. In the following extract, Brantlinger accounts for his situation:

‘(...) analogies between gender, race, and social class domination are evident in the story of Heathcliff, whose unclear but ‘dark’ racial identity is linked both to his untamable passions and to the slavery-like oppression he experiences after the death of Mr Earnshaw, who rescued him from the slums of Liverpool. Because Liverpool was the major British port for the slave trade, perhaps Heathcliff has some connection to slavery and abolition.’¹⁵¹

He explains that Heathcliff’s status is defined by his gender as well as by his race and social class. He adds that the fact that Heathcliff is passionate and disobedient is caused by his origins, which might be related to slavery. Indeed, he comes from Liverpool, which was an important port for slave trade at that time, and then he is again in a state of submission, he has to become a servant for Hindley. But he is never submitted, he rebels and, finally, he is free. His story might indeed represent slavery and then its abolition. Maybe Emily Brontë wanted to make Heathcliff

¹⁴⁷ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 38

¹⁴⁸ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 52

¹⁴⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 53

¹⁵⁰ Elsie Michie, ‘From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference’, p 133

¹⁵¹ Patrick Brantlinger, ‘Race and the Victorian Novel’, p 160

an incarnation of colonial slavery: he finally manages to fight it and be free. Her conception of masculinity is born out of foreign lands and the fight for freedom.

However this apparently exotic origin can also be interpreted in a derogatory sense: 'In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff is likened to a vampire, a ghoul, and a cannibal - the last, a gothic metaphor that associates him with the 'dark races' of the world.'¹⁵². Indeed, he is not only referred to as a 'gypsy' or a 'Spanish castaway' - terms that associate him to the colonies - but also as a 'vampire' and a 'cannibal': those denominations transform him into a monster from some 'dark races of the world'. His racial status is generated by something frightening, truly evil, and not just by his simple position as an outcast. He is deeply different from anyone else in the novel, he can be seen as scarcely human. So this foreign masculine character is also dangerous to the core.

Through Heathcliff, maybe Emily Brontë also desires to show how society is prejudiced against foreign people and how it always excludes them despite what they do: 'Though Heathcliff has achieved a position of dominance, he continues to be characterized in terms that link him to non-white stereotypes, specifically to the figure of the oriental despot.'¹⁵³. Despite his success, his gentleman-like appearance, he is still rejected by society. His first characteristic is still his exotic origin. The author might have wanted to show this state of fact and to disapprove by making Heathcliff the hero of the novel, even if he is quite an uncommon one. He is the center of the novel, the one who is at the heart of everything: 'It is, after all, the 'gypsy' street urchin Heathcliff who provides the two central families of the novel with a lineage that invigorates them and lift them out of commonness.'¹⁵⁴. Thanks to Heathcliff, the Earnshaws and the Lintons discover a life which they would not have known without him. They would have been quite traditional Victorian families, rather uninteresting and common. But thanks to his arrival, it is as if real life was unveiled.

Emily Brontë has created a very special male hero. His masculinity is clearly fostered by exotic places, which makes him an outcast, sometimes very dangerous and frightening, but still very interesting and lively. She might have considered traditional English men boring and then had to create a character with a foreign origin to bring life and passion to her novel, because the

¹⁵² Patrick Brantlinger, 'Race and the Victorian Novel', p 161

¹⁵³ Elsie Michie, 'From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference', p 134

¹⁵⁴ Deborah Epstein Nord '«Marks of Race»: Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing', *Victorian Studies* (Vol 41, N°2, Winter 1998), p 197, published by Indiana University Press, accessed April 3, 2012

‘(...) love of the exotic is usually an imaginative projection of sexual desire.’¹⁵⁵. Heathcliff arouses passion and eroticism in Catherine.

- Rochester: a Mysterious Outsider

Charlotte Brontë has also imagined a male character with foreign features and relationships. Rochester is indeed mentioned along exotic lands several times in the novel: ‘In *Jane Eyre* as in *Wuthering Heights*, Rochester, like Heathcliff, is differentiated from other characters on the basis of physical attributes’¹⁵⁶. For example, when Jane first meets him after he falls from his horse, she notices his ‘(...) dark face, with stern features and a heavy brow (...)’¹⁵⁷. He is not as pale and white as any typical Englishman. He is ‘dark’, which can mean that he is, similarly to Heathcliff, a dark, mysterious and uncommon character, quite different from his peers. Later on in *Jane Eyre*, there is a scene where Rochester dresses up, and his foreign attributes are made obvious:

‘Seated on the carpet, by the side of this basin, was seen Mr Rochester, costumed in shawls, with a turban on his head. His dark eyes and swarthy skin and Paynim features suited the costume exactly: he looked the very model of an eastern emir, an agent or a victim of the bowstring.’¹⁵⁸

His skin is defined as ‘swarthy’, and Jane thinks he looks like someone from the Eastern part of the world. He would fit perfectly in another context, in colonial countries, and he would not seem to be a stranger. He is associated with exotic places through this description. He is also called sometimes ‘a sultan, a bashaw and the Grand Turk.’¹⁵⁹. Charlotte Brontë chooses to create her masculine character with elements not typically representative of the British men. Rochester is even characterized as a gypsy, exactly like Heathcliff is throughout *Wuthering Heights*, when he wishes to make a joke and transform himself into a fortune-teller. He meets Jane in a room while he is all dressed up, and “during their interview, the gypsy woman’s ‘black and brown’

¹⁵⁵ Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, p 197

¹⁵⁶ Elsie Michie, ‘From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference’, p 129

¹⁵⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 108

¹⁵⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 174

¹⁵⁹ Elsie Michie, ‘From Simianized Irish to Oriental Despots: Heathcliff, Rochester and Racial Difference’, p 129

face marks her connection to Rochester (...)”¹⁶⁰. It is clear that Rochester can be considered as a gypsy since no one has been able to discover that it was him under the gypsy’s clothes. He also refers to himself as someone rather dark: ‘I would advised her blackaviced suitor to look out (...)’¹⁶¹ speaking of himself as Blanche Ingram’s suitor.

Beyond his physical appearance, Rochester is associated to foreign places throughout his life. At some point in the novel, Mr Mason comes to Thornfield Hall to see Mr Rochester, but he is not there. In the following extract, while he speaks with the people present in the manor, Jane learns about how they met in the past:

‘Presently the words Jamaica, Kingston, Spanish Town, indicated the West Indies as his residence; and it was with no little surprise I gathered, ere long, that he had there first seen and become acquainted with Mr Rochester. (...) I knew Mr Rochester had been a traveller (...)’¹⁶²

We know that Rochester has been travelling very far away in the past, in British colonies especially. He lived in Jamaica for some time, and this makes him a man who is very open to the world, whose life has not been confined to the British Isles. Charlotte Brontë created some sort of masculine character who has travelled and knows the world and who has returned with some knowledge of it. It is as if her conception of the ideal masculinity is not possible with only traditional British characteristics: her male character has to possess some exotic features.

Mr Rochester is also associated to foreign countries through his ‘secret’ wife, Bertha Mason. Once discovered, we learn that she is ‘(...) herself ‘blackaviced’, dark-haired and dark-browed, a large and powerfully built woman (...)’¹⁶³. She is then projected into exotic lands through the colour of her skin. Jane notes when she can look at her carefully that ‘she was a big woman, in stature almost equalling her husband, and corpulent besides (...)’¹⁶⁴. Her complexion is quite dark and she is also very imposing, like a man. Besides, as a critic explains it, she is ‘ugly, masculine in form, and almost hideously swarthy’ and that ‘the gypsy and Bertha resemble one another, and

¹⁶⁰ Deborah Epstein Nord, ‘«Marks of Race»: Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing’, p 195

¹⁶¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 190

¹⁶² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 181

¹⁶³ Deborah Epstein Nord, ‘«Marks of Race»: Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing’, p 195

¹⁶⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 275

both resemble Rochester himself.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Bertha is ugly like Rochester, she is dark and masculine, so she can be compared to him. They are very similar. Charlotte Brontë is then associating through this character the foreign and exotic places with masculinity. Everyone who has any connection in the novel with life abroad is defined as very masculine, despite their gender. But Bertha is also associated with danger and fear. Jane describes her to Rochester after she attacks her in her room just before the wedding:

“(…) it was a savage face. I wish I could forget the roll of the red eyes and the fearful blackened inflation of the lineaments!
‘Ghosts are usually pale, Jane.’
‘(…) the lips were swelled and dark (…)’¹⁶⁶

Bertha is here mad and frightening. Her masculinity might then be considered as dangerous. Rochester looks like her and is married to her; they are both related to a foreign country and a colony. Charlotte Brontë has created a masculinity connected to the colonial history of England, and, through Bertha, she might be showing its dangerousness.

As her sister does, Charlotte Brontë also imagines her masculine character in relation to foreign places, with exotic physical and psychological features. Traditional Victorian characteristics are not sufficient for her to create a passionate character, so she includes other elements to create Mr Rochester, making him an exotic and erotic character. Later, at the end of the nineteenth century, as Smith explains, ‘a new form of masculinity, one associated with Empire, for example, therefore became constructed during the period.’¹⁶⁷ Indeed, it is only more than fifty years after *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* that such a masculinity became more common in literature. Charlotte and Emily Brontë were then quite visionary and modern for their time to invent such masculine characters. In different ways, they make Heathcliff and Rochester two heroes in connection with exotic lands, thus creating two erotic men, arousing passion and desire in the female characters.

¹⁶⁵ Deborah Epstein Nord, ‘«Marks of Race»: Gypsy Figures and Eccentric Femininity in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing’, p 195

¹⁶⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 266

¹⁶⁷ Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons, Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-siècle*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p 2

III) The Conception of Masculine Love in *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*:

1. Heathcliff's Attitude Towards Love:

- A Destructive and Indescribable Love

Love is one of the most traditional characteristic of Romanticism: 'it is the ultimate, even transcendent, human experience (...)'¹⁶⁸. In *Wuthering Heights*, love is the central element of the whole plot. And the love story between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw is the most important. Indeed, every event of the novel is linked to it and to its consequences. We will study in this part what kind of a lover Emily Brontë has created through Heathcliff, and what sort of relationship he has with Catherine.

Heathcliff's love toward Cathy is destructive. He is a very passionate character, and when he returns after three years of absence and finds that she is married to Edgar, his violent feelings destroy everyone, including Catherine. She dies shortly after, from a disease provoked by her own passion which itself resulted from Heathcliff's presence. They have a very particular relationship that is a danger to the people around them, as if they were not of the same species. For them, it is '(...) the transcendental experience of a fullness of being beyond cultural construction, even beyond gender.'¹⁶⁹. Their love is unique, and not influenced by conventions: 'The affinity existing between Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff is a product of natural growth and is not amenable to reason. (...) When frustrated, the energy which it has generated is turned into paths of destruction'¹⁷⁰. The love between them is indeed very difficult to understand and to explain. They did not meet randomly and fall in love like in any traditional romance in a Victorian novel. They have known each other since childhood and the bond that links them is a mystery to everyone around. For example, before marrying Edgar, Cathy tries to explain to Nelly what Heathcliff represents for her:

"If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. (...). Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff - he's always, always in my mind - not as a pleasure, any more than I am always

¹⁶⁸ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 24

¹⁶⁹ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 193

¹⁷⁰ Bruce McCullough, 'The Dramatic Novel: *Wuthering Heights*', in *A Wuthering Heights Handbook*, , Lettis R. & Morris W. (editors) , (New York: The Odyssey Press Inc, 1961), p 60

a pleasure to myself - but as my own being - so, don't talk of our separation again (...)'
She paused (...) I was out of patience with her folly!
'If I can make any sense of your nonsense, Miss,' I said, 'it only goes to convince me that
you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying (...)'¹⁷¹

In this extract, we can observe that what exists between her and Heathcliff is very special, impossible to describe with simple words. They are identical beings, and that is the '(...)' fundamental desire of a romantic lover: to find in female form a mirror image of himself, a soul within his soul or second self (...)¹⁷². That is exactly what Catherine describes. Their love is incredibly powerful and unreasonable and it cannot be clearly defined. Common human beings are not able to understand such a relationship: it is shown through Nelly's reaction. Indeed, she does not understand at all what Cathy is telling her, talking of 'folly' and of her future wedding, which is irrelevant. Later on in the novel, just before Catherine's death and during their last meeting, Nelly witnesses the scene and describes Heathcliff: '(...) he gnashed at me, and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy. I did not feel as if I were in the company of a creature of my own species; it appeared that he would not understand, though I spoke to him (...)'¹⁷³. There we can see, once again, that Nelly is lost when she is confronted to them, she does not recognize a human being in Heathcliff but rather an animal. She cannot make any sense out of their behaviour and their love, in general. Emily Brontë has imagined a very particular masculine character regarding this love: Heathcliff is not 'human-like' in his feelings, his love is impossible to describe reasonably and it is a source of destruction because of its exceeding form of power. Langman explains their relationship :

'The Cathy-Heathcliff relationship is handled in neither sexual nor even particularly human terms. (...) It is, in short, a love so peculiar that it transcends, by definition, all possibility of intelligible discussion. (...) It belongs to the realm of the imagination where myths are created.'¹⁷⁴

This love is so transcendent that it is impossible to explain and to talk about it rationally. As we have seen, the other characters are in awe as they would be in front of a mad person. He also says that their relationship is a myth, completely imagined. Indeed, such a powerful link, such a

¹⁷¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 87

¹⁷² Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 25

¹⁷³ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 172

¹⁷⁴ F-H Langman, 'Thoughts on *Wuthering Heights*', p 63

destiny in love and such a revenge after Catherine's death resemble more a mythological tragedy than reality as such. Emily Brontë's character seems scarcely human. Especially after Catherine died, Heathcliff is particularly cruel. For example, when Nelly announces her death to him, he declares: "May she wake in torment!" he cried, with frightful vehemence (...) Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest, as long as I am living!"¹⁷⁵. This is not an usual discourse to pronounce about someone you deeply love. Any traditional lover would wish Catherine to be at peace. Instead of that, Heathcliff is cruel to her, he does not react as a caring human being. Besides, '(...) when we look closely at the gender implications of romantic love, we discover that rather than embracing the female as a valued other, the male lover usually effaces her into a narcissistic projection of his own self.'¹⁷⁶. Indeed, this love is destructive because Heathcliff considers Catherine as 'his soul' and not as another distinct human being.

We can observe that the love invented by Emily Brontë for her masculine character is very special and inhuman. Heathcliff's passion causes both destruction and incomprehension. Such a love seems unrealistic and belongs to another world. The traditional characters, such as Nelly, does not comprehend it. They represent the Victorian society, and the readers of the period, who could not understand this relationship either.

- The Absence of Satisfaction and of Happy Ending

We will now see if Heathcliff's attitude toward love can be a source of happiness and satisfaction. Is his affection a blessing to him or to Catherine? Are they happy in their adult life together?

Heathcliff and Cathy are rather cruel toward each other. Their love is not peaceful and benevolent. Indeed, 'their passion for each other is so compounded with jealousy, anger, and hatred that it brings the only unhappiness, anguish and eventually death.'¹⁷⁷. It is true that they are very jealous: when Heathcliff learns that Cathy has accepted to marry Edgar, he is hurt and flees for many years. This flight brings him and Cathy unhappiness. If he had stayed, she may not have married, in the end. Maybe he should have fought for her. Once he returns to the Heights, it is too late, and their effort to reunite is responsible for their mutual anguish, and for Cathy's death. As we have already studied, Heathcliff is a very wild and passionate character, and his

¹⁷⁵ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 179

¹⁷⁶ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 25

¹⁷⁷ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of *Wuthering Heights*', p 129

strong personality, in the presence of Catherine's own strong personality, is a cause for despair. He cannot reduce his over-aggressive and dangerous masculinity. Heathcliff's passion is so violent that 'it destroys its own object. (...) He finds that he can demonstrate that he has feelings only by expressing them as cruelty.'¹⁷⁸. Once an adult, Heathcliff is not kind to Catherine, it seems that he has come back only to make her suffer from what she did to him by marrying Edgar. He could not stay away and let her live her life: 'his passion for Catherine was not a blessing but a curse.'¹⁷⁹. He never made her happy, and his violent nature only destroys her, even if he really loves her, and vice versa. However Catherine resembles Heathcliff, their nature are identical like twin souls. She never made him happy, and she only tormented him. She was cruel in her choices and that destroyed him: '(...) finally disintegrated from within by the very energies out of which they are made.'¹⁸⁰. They mutually destroy themselves. Their passionate and violent personalities are not compatible for a happy ending. Van Ghent rightly adds that '(...) if they could be happily together, it would be something altogether asocial, amoral, savagely irresponsible, wildly impulsive (...)'.¹⁸¹. It is indeed hard to imagine Cathy and Heathcliff as a sound and happy couple with children.

They are too cruel with each other: just before her death, they argue and their words are very painful. They are not reassuring, there is not any classic declaration of love just before dying. For example, in the following extract Cathy declares to Heathcliff her anger towards him:

“You have killed me - and thriven on it, I think.(...) I wish I could hold you’, she continued, bitterly, ‘till we were both dead! I shouldn’t care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn’t you suffer? I do! Will you forget me - will you be happy when I am in the earth?’¹⁸²

She accuses him of being responsible for her illness, and declares that she does not care if Heathcliff is sad after her death. Heathcliff's masculinity is the origin of her death, because it is too powerful and aggressive. She is cruel and selfish in her declaration. But we also can see that she is unhappy because of him, and that she loves him in her own way. Heathcliff also says something to her during their last meeting:

¹⁷⁸ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of Wuthering Heights', p 136

¹⁷⁹ Philip Drew, 'Charlotte Brontë as a Critic of Wuthering Heights', p 136

¹⁸⁰ Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On Wuthering Heights', p 161

¹⁸¹ Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On Wuthering Heights', p 163

¹⁸² Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 170

“*Why* did you betray your own heart Cathy? I have not one word of comfort - you deserve this. You have killed yourself. (...) Do I want to live? What kind of a living will it be when you - oh God! Would *you* like to live with your soul in the grave?”¹⁸³

In this speech, the anguish and deep despair of Heathcliff are quite obvious. Catherine is everything to him. However, he is still cruel towards her and accuses her of their unhappiness. He considers her responsible, so she deserves what is happening to her. This is obviously not a traditional Victorian way of saying adieu to a loved one. It mirrors Heathcliff's personality: cruel, passionate and violent.

Emily Brontë has decided to create an unhappy love story, where the two characters' personalities are not compatible and cannot live peacefully together. Heathcliff is not able to satisfy his lover, his love is too mean and destructive. It indeed never brings joy neither in his life, nor in Catherine's. Brontë imagined a masculinity which is too harsh, cruel and proud to be capable of benevolence or empathy toward a loved one. However, the love of the masculine character is one of the strongest ever witnessed, it is transcendent and implacable. Heathcliff's hate is fierce, but his love is the same:

‘Be with me always - take any form - drive me mad! only *do* not leave me in the abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh God! It is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul!’¹⁸⁴

This scene occurs just after Nelly announces Cathy's death, and we can observe how truly desperate he is. Death seems to be the only outcome for such a love story:

‘Since the object of romantic or erotic love is not the recognition and appreciation of the beloved woman as an independent other but rather the assimilation of the female into the male (...) the woman must finally be enslaved or destroyed, must disappear or die.’¹⁸⁵

Indeed, Heathcliff's love for Catherine is not sound and simple, it is passionate, erotic. Catherine is not an independent being but a part of him. She cannot exist in such a world so she dies: ‘(...) the frequent equation of heterosexual love with erotic passion produced a desire for a total union

¹⁸³ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 173

¹⁸⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 179

¹⁸⁵ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 26

between lover and beloved, a union that necessarily entails the elimination of otherness.’¹⁸⁶. Their love is then so wild and erotic that it could only end up in utter destruction: ‘(...) Catherine’s frustrated sexual desire (...) is so overwhelming that she literally dies of it.’¹⁸⁷. When Heathcliff returns, she realizes that she still desires him: he is a part of her. As they are unable to merge into one unique being, one has to die. No happy ending can exist for them.

- The Question of Unconventional Love

Emily Brontë is not an author who is very preoccupied by Victorian expectations and conventions. She has indeed written the story of a totally unreasonable and incomprehensible love. Heathcliff and Cathy’s relationship is unacceptable for the Victorian readership for different reasons.

First of all, Heathcliff and Cathy are not of the same social status. She is indeed a girl born and raised in a respectable family, while he is apparently a poor gypsy orphan who lived in the streets of Liverpool. So this is not a relationship which can be joyfully approved by society. Besides that, they are raised together. They might even be brother and sister, and that would be the reason of their tragic fate¹⁸⁸. Indeed, the origin of Heathcliff is quite mysterious all along the novel. When he is first brought to the Heights by Mr Earnshaw, no clear reason is given for his presence. Nelly explains how he justifies himself: ‘The master tried to explain the matter; but, he was really half dead with fatigue, and all that I could make out (...) was a tale of his seeing it starving, and houseless (...)’¹⁸⁹. This is a very strange explanation, not satisfactory enough to bring a new member into a family. So the fact that Heathcliff might be Mr Earnshaw’s unlawful son is possible: ‘(...) Heathcliff soon becomes Earnshaw’s favorite, more cherished than his own children, an unnatural occurrence surely - unless this is a natural child’¹⁹⁰. It is very odd that an abandoned child would become the favorite of the head of a family, and Nelly expresses her doubts when she describes the bond between Earnshaw and the child: ‘(...) the poor, fatherless

¹⁸⁶ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, pp 26-27

¹⁸⁷ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 194

¹⁸⁸ Eric Solomon, ‘The Incest Theme in *Wuthering Heights*’, in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, (Vol 14, N°1, Jun 1959), p 81, by the University of California Press, accessed April 10, 2012

¹⁸⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 38

¹⁹⁰ Eric Solomon, ‘The Incest Theme in *Wuthering Heights*’, p 82

child, as he called him. He took to Heathcliff strangely (...)’¹⁹¹. We can see that she thinks he might be her bastard son. Solomon says that Heathcliff and Cathy might be brother and sister, and how that would explain why they are so close: ‘(...) they obviously never could marry on earth, however violent their passion might be.’¹⁹². Such an interpretation of their tragic end is very unconventional, and their love is, in that case, incestuous and unacceptable for anyone. Emily Brontë has purposely cast a doubt over them.

The love between Heathcliff and Cathy is unconventional, on many levels. It is very violent and it does not abide by the conventions of the period. They do not marry, there is no courtship, no church, no respectability. When they are young, they spend all their time together, out in nature, and this is not acceptable for a girl of the period. They are supposed to stay at home and learn their proper role:

‘Such a way of handling love was revolutionary in English fiction in 1847. It is remarkable that the author was able to depict it so convincingly and with so little attention to the blinding conventions of the period. She was more completely honest and more convincing than Charlotte, who was much more pleasing to their own generation.’¹⁹³

Emily Brontë was indeed free from any restriction of the period. She did what she wanted with her characters, and created a totally unconventional masculine hero. She followed her instincts, and the passion is then very well represented. It is both very realistic and powerful.

- Comparing the Love Between Catherine and Edgar

The love between Heathcliff and Catherine is fierce, cruel, exclusive and impossible to name. It resists death and is indifferent to conventions. Heathcliff’s personality is so special and unique that the love he generates is the same. We will compare it to the love - if it can be called love - between Catherine and Edgar.

The relationship between Edgar Linton and Catherine Earnshaw is much more traditional. They are two young people from a respectable family when they meet. They become friends and spend some time together. Finally, Edgar proposes to Catherine and she accepts. We can see in the following conversation she has with Nelly the nature of her feelings for him:

¹⁹¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 39

¹⁹² Eric Solomon, ‘The Incest Theme in *Wuthering Heights*’, p 83

¹⁹³ Bruce McCullough, ‘The Dramatic Novel: *Wuthering Heights*’, p 61

“Why do you love him, Miss Cathy?” (...)

 ‘Well, because he is handsome, and pleasant to be with.’

 ‘Bad’, was my commentary.

 ‘And because he is young and cheerful.’

 ‘Bad, still.’

 ‘And because he loves me.’

 ‘Indifferent, coming there.’

 ‘And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood (...)’¹⁹⁴

This exchange clearly shows what Catherine likes in Edgar: their love is superficial and guided by conventions. It is not real love, it is just affection, and also a desire to have one day a respectable position. She is the victim of a delusion when she says she loves him. She thinks that it is what is expected from her by Victorian society, that she must marry someone like him. It is nothing like the love between her and Heathcliff, who is not reasonable at all: ‘Emily Brontë’s heroes and heroines do not love each other because they find each other’s personalities pleasant (...). They may be superficially attracted for such reasons, as Catherine Earnshaw is attracted to Edgar Linton.’¹⁹⁵ We understand there that she is attracted to him because he is perfect for the Victorian ideals, because he is gentle, nice, calm under any circumstances. This is what she is expected to like and Heathcliff is the opposite of this definition. However, she deeply loves him, and she is aware, deep inside that she does not love Edgar as much as she loves Heathcliff. She declares to Nelly what she really feels: “My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I’m well aware, as winter change the trees (...).”¹⁹⁶ In this extract, it is made clear that it is not really love she feels. She is attracted to culture, and ‘for her, the movement from nature to culture is the movement from life to death.’¹⁹⁷

Emily Brontë has defined Edgar’s and Cathy’s love in comparison to Heathcliff’s and Cathy’s, so it is made obvious that real feelings are stronger than everything, and that traditional and weak Victorian characters cannot generate passion and eternal love. Heathcliff’s powerful and masculine love is unreasonable and unpredictable, and much more interesting to witness than Edgar’s love:

‘Brontë’s text records the fierce battle between erotic desire and civilization, between

¹⁹⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 83

¹⁹⁵ David Cecil, ‘Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*’, p 25

¹⁹⁶ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 87

¹⁹⁷ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 198

nature and culture, between imagination and reason. (...) in preferring passion to reason, she joined Blake, Byron and Percy Shelley against the feminine Romantic exponents of rational love and self-control.¹⁹⁸

Emily Brontë chose passion over everything else. The love story of *Wuthering Heights* is without reason, and Heathcliff is a character which arouses such access of passion.

2. Rochester's Love Story:

- The Traditional Evolution of his Love Story:

Charlotte Brontë imagined a romance for her masculine character which is very different from what her sister created. We will study, in this part, how Rochester deals with love, how he and Jane overcome difficulties, and also how their relationship is more conventional than Heathcliff and Catherine's story but is still quite revolutionary for the Victorian period.

First of all, Rochester's love story with Jane seems to be more understandable for the readers than the love story of *Wuthering Heights*. Their relationship follows a normal path of evolution: they meet by chance, they talk and grow to know each other, they fall in love, then difficulties appear... It seems to be a perfect Victorian love story. We will try to understand the different stages of this relationship, how Rochester is considered in it and how it evolves.

Rochester and Jane meet randomly in the countryside, but the encounter is unusual: 'Man and horse were down; they had slipped on the sheet of ice which glazed the causeway.'¹⁹⁹ Then Jane intervenes to help Rochester who has hurt himself in the fall: 'He laid a heavy hand on my shoulder, and leaning on me with some stress, limped to his horse.'²⁰⁰ This would have been a classic meeting if the roles were not reversed: indeed, it is quite uncommon to witness, in a love story such an encounter between a man and a woman. It would have been more logical if the man had rescued the girl, then he would have made a good impression on her. But in this scene, it is quite the contrary, Jane does not know who she is dealing with, and she is not impressed by him and his situation: 'Had he been a handsome, heroic-looking young gentleman, I should not have dared to stand thus questioning him against his will, and offering my services unasked.'²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 192

¹⁹⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 107

²⁰⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 109

²⁰¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 108

We can see that Jane finds him unattractive and she feels that she can talk to him without being impressed or submitted. This is obviously not traditional. From his first introduction, Charlotte Brontë hurts Mr Rochester's masculinity and depicts him quite differently than a traditional Victorian character at the beginning of a love relationship. He is on the ground, below a woman and he does not inspire respect and admiration from her. His masculinity is not asserted. Still, this meeting is almost conventional. After that, Jane and Rochester learn to know each other, they spend some time together to finally fall in love. This is a classic and understandable evolution. There is no mystery in the nature of their love. But once again, Rochester's superiority as a man is challenged during his discussions with Jane: 'Miss Eyre, I beg your pardon. The fact is, once for all, I don't wish to treat you like an inferior (...)'²⁰², and Jane agrees when she says 'I don't think, sir, you have a right to command me (...)'²⁰³. They are equal human beings, and this is, of course, unusual in a period where women were subordinated to men and where patriarchy reigned. Rochester is a new sort of masculine lover; one who acknowledges an equal status to women. Their love story is also traditional because Rochester manages to make Jane jealous of other women. Indeed, he makes her think he is going to marry Blanche Ingram, just to make sure she cares about him too: 'Well, I feigned courtship of Miss Ingram, because I wished to render you as madly in love with me as I was with you; and I knew jealousy would be the best ally I could call in for the furtherance of that end.'²⁰⁴ Rochester acts like any lover, he wants to be sure of Jane's feelings, and he uses any ruse possible to make her love him too. Jealousy is a classical and famous medium to do so.

Rochester's love story is therefore quite consistent. It is the normal and expected evolution of a relationship between a man and a woman. Charlotte Brontë has however relatively reduced Rochester's masculinity compared to traditional Victorian heroes, making him equal to Jane. He does not control her, he does not curb her liberty of expression. Charlotte Brontë is less subversive than her sister concerning the love story of her novel, she is closer to women Romantic writers who '(...) tended to celebrate not the achievements of the imagination nor the overflow of powerful feelings, but rather the workings of the rational mind (...). They thus insisted upon the fundamental equality of women and men.'²⁰⁵ Rochester and Jane are indeed more reasonable than Heathcliff and Catherine, they respect each other as independent and equal

²⁰² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 126

²⁰³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 127

²⁰⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 247

²⁰⁵ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, pp 2-3

beings. Their love story follows an almost a perfect evolution as Rochester encounters difficulties to reach final happiness.

- Difficulties and Obstacles:

We will study what kind of difficulties Rochester has to deal with in order to finally be happy in his relationship with Jane. Are they linked to his personality? Or maybe to more general problems? Is it the nature of their love which is a source of unhappiness like Heathcliff and Catherine's? Rochester and Jane indeed encounter several obstacles they need to overcome before they reach their final bliss.

First of all, the most obvious inconvenience should be the incompatibility of their status. At least it would have been a problem in any traditional novel of the period. Indeed, a rich and important gentleman is expected to marry a woman of his class, like Blanche Ingram, for example. But in *Jane Eyre*, Rochester wants to marry a plain governess, without any money or connection. In the novel, this problem is hardly one. Of course society, represented by certain characters, is against such a union, but Jane and Rochester do not care and are decided to marry no matter what. Indeed, Mrs Fairfax, a conventional housekeeper, reacts in a certain way which can represent what Victorian society might think of this romance. When she catches the two lovers kissing after the wedding proposal, Jane notices her:

‘When I looked up, on leaving his arms, there stood the widow, pale, grave, and amazed.’²⁰⁶. Her first reaction is one of disapproval and shock. Then Jane explains to Rochester her attitude:

‘I believe she thought I had forgotten my station, and yours, sir.’

‘Station! Station! - your station is in my heart, and on the necks of those who would insult you, now or hereafter.’²⁰⁷

Even if some characters - and society through them - disagree with this relationship, Rochester does not care at all, for him only love matters. Charlotte Brontë has created a very modern masculine character who is ready to forget about conventions and judgements to be happy in love.

The second obstacle put in front of Rochester and Jane's happiness is the fact that the former is already married to Bertha Mason, a wife who is still alive and who is hidden in the attic of

²⁰⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 241

²⁰⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 248

Thornfield Hall. When this is revealed, the reader can be expected to judge Rochester as a bad man, dishonest and manipulative, who tried to use an innocent girl for his benefit. The male character of Charlotte Brontë would then be considered as an impostor. However, after the revelation, Rochester's misdeed is explained and justified. He is already married, but he was manipulated into an union with a mad woman: 'You shall see what sort of a being I was cheated into espousing, and judge whether or not I had a right to break the compact, and seek sympathy with something at least human.'²⁰⁸ Bertha is completely out of control, she is a real lunatic. So we understand that Rochester's personality is not at fault. The culprits are his father who tricked him into marrying this woman and also society which is responsible for arranged weddings and which is against the separation of a married couple. Charlotte Brontë might have wanted to denounce the problems of the Victorian period concerning marriage, and she uses Rochester for that. The obstacle to happiness is not the personality of her male character, as it is the case in *Wuthering Heights*, but it is the question of conventions and society.

The last problem in Rochester's love story is that Jane flees from Thornfield Hall after their aborted wedding. She refuses to be his mistress, to stay under his roof and to be judged by everyone. It is not Rochester's fault if she leaves, because he is sincere in his apologies:

'Reader, I forgave him at the moment and on the spot. There was such deep remorse in his eyes, such true pity in his tone, such manly energy in his manner; and besides, there was such unchanged love in his whole look and mien (...)'²⁰⁹

Jane immediately forgets what he has done to her and understands the issue. She still has faith in his love for her. But she does not want to be a mistress and to live unlawfully, being judged and disrespected every day: '(...) Charlotte Brontë's heroine do not consent to a masochistic destiny in love, and the rejection of this destiny is a central theme of *Jane Eyre*.'²¹⁰ She refuses to be a love victim, so she runs away. This is not the result of Rochester's personality. It has to do with Victorian society and its norms. Rochester is not directly and personally responsible for what happens and the misfortune of their love story. We can see that Charlotte Brontë's masculine character is not a cruel lover, as is Heathcliff, for example. He is a victim of conventions too.

²⁰⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 274

²⁰⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 280

²¹⁰ F.A.C. Wilson, 'The Primrose Wreath: The Heroes of the Brontë Novels', p 44

The author then criticises society, like the female novelists of the Romantic era, by ‘stressing the evils of a patriarchal culture which oppresses them.’²¹¹.

- Victorian Readers versus Revolutionary Stories

In this part, we will see that even if Mr Rochester’s love story is more understandable and acceptable to Victorian readers than Heathcliff’s, the situation described in the novel is still unusual and revolutionary for the time.

A relationship between a master and a governess is very unconventional for the period: they are not from the same social cast. Rochester is socially considered as superior to servants and governesses. He is the master of a manor, very rich, whereas Jane is a dependant without any family or money (at the beginning at least). This sort of union is generally not approved at all by Victorian society. But what is really revolutionary between Jane and Rochester is the particular relationship they build. It is not based on superiority and submission, as are supposed to be the relationships between a master and his servant, and also between a husband and his wife: ‘The master-servant relationship between Mr Rochester and Jane is essentially a loving one. The man’s feelings center on a genuine respect for Jane’s intelligence and moral distinction (...)’²¹². Rochester is indeed rapidly attached to Jane, as if he did not care about their different status. In the following extract, it is made clear that they do not have a normal master-servant relationship:

“I was thinking, sir, that very few masters would trouble themselves to inquire whether or not their paid subordinates were piqued and hurt by their orders.’
‘Paid subordinates! What, you are my paid subordinate, are you? Oh yes, I had forgotten the salary!’²¹³

We can deduce that Rochester cares about Jane as he would care for a woman of his rank, he wants to know if he has hurt her feelings. He is a very strong masculine character who, despite his status, considers a governess as his equal and not his subordinate. This fact would have been quite shocking for the Victorian public.

Another side of the novel which is original and unusual for the period is the fact that Rochester falls in love with a governess who does not consider herself as inferior. Jane is

²¹¹ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 60

²¹² F.A.C. Wilson, ‘The Primrose Wreath: The Heroes of the Brontë Novels’, p 44

²¹³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 127

convinced to be equal to everyone around her, mentally at least. She is quite a feminist; we as is proven by her speech:

‘Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; (...); they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings,(...). It is thoughtless to condemn them, or to laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.’²¹⁴

We can see that Jane is a very modern female character for the period. She considers that men and women are equals and that they need the same things in life. The fact that Rochester falls in love with such a girl is revolutionary since it means that he agrees with her point of view. It is even the reason why he loves her: Ewbank states that ‘Jane initially wins the love of Rochester through her own fearless sense of equality.’²¹⁵. He is attracted by her independence and sense of freedom. Charlotte Brontë has created a male character who can be quite shocking to the Victorian readership in his attitude towards Jane and gender relationship, in general. He does not consider himself as a superior being, and he is attracted by an independent and free-thinking girl, so ‘However much *Jane Eyre* has established itself as a ‘classic’ and popular love-story, it in fact insists on independence as forcefully as it recognizes the importance of sexual and marital interdependence.’²¹⁶. Rochester and Jane need each other, no one dominates the other: they are truly independent beings.

- A Traditional Happy Ending

We will consider in this part the ending of the love story between Rochester and Jane. Does it bring them happiness or pain and sorrow? We will closely examine two important moments in their relationship: the moment when Rochester declares to Jane that he loves her and then proposes to her, then the end of the novel, when Jane finds Rochester in his house hidden in the woods and when they finally marry.

²¹⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 104

²¹⁵ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, p 197

²¹⁶ Andrew Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, p 420

Contrary to Heathcliff and Catherine's love story, we have in *Jane Eyre* to true moments of happiness and declarations of love and bliss. Rochester is indeed a source of happiness for Jane, something that Heathcliff is not capable of. For example, when Rochester declares his love to Jane in Thornfield park, it is both romantic and traditional. First, he teases her about Blanche, then he admits that he loves her: "I ask you to pass through life at my side - to be my second self, and best earthly companion."²¹⁷ It is a true declaration of love with the realm of tradition. Then when Jane is not convinced, Rochester goes further and proposes to her: "My bride is here," he said, again drawing me to him, 'because my equal is here, and my likeness. Jane, will you marry me?'²¹⁸. This is a beautiful proposal, one which does not occur in *Wuthering Heights*. It brings happiness and hope not only to Rochester but also to Jane. She has this faith in the future and is truly joyful regarding what happens to her: '(...) I thought only of the bliss given me to drink in so abundant a flow. Again and again he said, 'Are you happy, Jane?' And again and again I answered, 'Yes'.²¹⁹ In *Jane Eyre*, love is blissful, and the masculine character of Rochester is a kind lover. It is completely opposed to the situation of *Wuthering Heights*.

However, this first wedding proposal ends up badly. We will now consider the end of the novel, when they finally marry after a long separation. Is it as traditional and satisfactory as expected? Is Rochester's masculinity still inferior to traditional Victorian heroes? At the end of the novel, he and Jane meet again after several months of separation. And for the first time in a while, they are truly happy again. Indeed, Jane describes what she feels and what Rochester feels, and we can see that they are made for each other: "Delightful consciousness! It brought to life and light my whole nature: in his presence I thoroughly lived; and he lived in mine. Blind as he was, smiles played over his face, joy dawned on his forehead: his lineaments softened and warmed."²²⁰ They are generous towards each other, their mutual presence is beneficial. As we have seen, it is not the case at all in *Wuthering Heights*: when Cathy and Heathcliff are together, they destroy each other and people around them. Rochester's love story is more sound. Just before his second proposal, it is Jane's turn to make Rochester jealous. She tells him about her cousin St John Rivers who asked her to marry him: 'Jealousy had got hold of him: she stung him; but the sting was salutary: it gave him respite from the gnawing fang of

²¹⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 239

²¹⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 239

²¹⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 240

²²⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 408

melancholy.²²¹ Then she explains what she really feels about St John, and how he is different from Rochester: ‘He is not like you, sir: I am not happy at his side, nor near him, nor with him.’²²² So we can see that he is a good man to her, that he really makes her glad and satisfied in love. He then again asks her to marry him: ‘I will at least choose - *her I love best*. Jane, will you marry me?’²²³ This last scene is loving and full of joy, they are in love, so they marry. They have a child together. Rochester’s role is a bit reduced, since it is Jane who finds him and saves him from despair. He is also blind, as if his masculinity has been considerably reduced.

There is a huge difference between the two masculine characters of *Jane Eyre* and of *Wuthering Heights* concerning love: one is able at last to reach bliss and to satisfy the woman he loves, while the other is unable to do so. His love only leads to death and destruction.

²²¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 412

²²² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 414

²²³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 415

IV) Masculinities: Rewriting Victorian tradition

1. Charlotte Brontë's more Traditional Conception:

- **A Good-hearted Gentleman**

Rochester is not totally different from a traditional masculine hero of the Victorian period. We will study in this part how he is sometimes closer to those standards than Heathcliff, and then see how Charlotte Brontë is more faithful to her generation than her sister.

First of all, Rochester is on different occasions very tolerant towards people around him. He has a good heart. For example, when he comes back from his trip, he brings presents to Adèle. The little girl then thanks him warmly: “Monsieur, je vous remercie mille fois de votre bonté; (...)”²²⁴. He is apparently ‘(...) capable of devastating gentleness.’²²⁵. This is definitely not something that Heathcliff could have done to anyone. Rochester likes to please other people, even if his nature is often stronger. Of course, he is particularly nice to Jane. It is obviously unusual for a rich master to be so kind to his dependant, but still, he is supposed to treat her with respect. And she receives far more than respect. She is herself surprized by his attitude, and when he leaves for several days, she says to herself: ‘You have nothing to do with the master of Thornfield, further than (...) to be grateful for such respectful and kind treatment as, if you do your duty, you have a right to expect at his hands.’²²⁶. We understand that she is used to receiving a lot of kind regards from him. Rochester is generous to the other servants too. He considers people around him as human beings, and not as inferior submitted persons. In that way, he is a respectful gentleman, capable of kindness and humility considering his status. Through Jane's point of view, it is made clear that his profound nature is good, and that the outward appearances of his character is just the result of a tough life: ‘I believed he was naturally a man of better tendencies, higher principles, and purer tastes than such as circumstances had developed, education instilled, or destiny encouraged.’²²⁷. She is convinced of his goodness, and that his aggressive masculinity and attitude is the product of his education and of the obstacles he

²²⁴ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 132

²²⁵ F.A.C. Wilson, ‘The Primrose Wreath: The Heroes of the Brontë Novels’, p 45

²²⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 155

²²⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 139

had to overcome. As if his strong nature was just a façade he built to protect himself, while, in fact, he is good-tempered and amiable. Furthermore, the more Jane knows him and spends time with him, the more she is convinced that he is entirely good: ‘It had formerly been my endeavour to study all sides of his character: to take the bad with the good; and from the just weighing of both, to form an equitable judgement. Now I saw no bad.’²²⁸. Of course, we can argue that she says so because she loves him, but Jane is a reasonable character, she is able to fight passion if she wants to. So it can be deduced that she has really observed him and that she has concluded that he is a truly kind man, and that he deserves to be forgiven for his faults. In this case, Rochester is a gentleman, benevolent to his peers, and this is rather close to Victorian expectations.

Besides his gentlemanliness, Rochester is rather traditional because he often meets with other people from his class, and he appears to fit in very well. Mrs Fairfax describes to Jane Rochester’s activities: “Gentlemen especially are often in request on such occasions; and Mr Rochester is so talented and so lively in society, that I believe he is a general favourite: the ladies are very fond of him (...)”²²⁹. In this extract, it appears that Rochester likes to be surrounded by ladies and gentlemen, and that he is particularly fond of such meetings, because he is very appreciated there. The ladies seem to be attracted to him, and to his traditional side in their presence. This aspect of Rochester’s life is part of the Victorian norm as he is integrated to the world.

We can conclude that Mr Rochester is sometimes, through different aspects of his personality and of his life, close to the traditional Victorian hero. Charlotte Brontë did not transform him into a completely excluded character, free from the expectations of the current society.

- An Over-aggressive Masculine Body

We are now going to concentrate on how Mr Rochester is sometimes quite traditional in his attitude, and how his masculinity is asserted towards Jane, then reflect upon this strong and proud masculinity as it is reduced because of an accident.

Mr Rochester is, on different occasions, quite authoritative, especially to women. In his attitude toward Jane, he often plays the traditional role of a man. For example, before their first

²²⁸ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 178

²²⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 151

wedding, Jane would like to bring Adèle with them during their day out of Thornfield, but Mr Rochester disagrees quite strongly. He is very harsh in his answer and tries to control Jane's wishes. We can see in what she says that she is expected to submit: 'He was quite peremptory, both in look and voice. (...) I half lost the sense of power over him. I was about to mechanically obey him, without further remonstrance, (...)'²³⁰. There Rochester is quite aggressive and authoritative to Jane, and she is almost ready to yield like any traditional woman would when talked to that way. He acts like a patriarch, and women must obey his wishes. There his masculinity is what could be expected from a master in the Victorian era. Later on in the novel, Rochester takes Jane to the closest city to buy her new dresses and jewels once she has accepted to marry him. Jane explains what she has to do: 'Mr Rochester obliged me to go to a certain silk warehouse: there I was ordered to chose half a dozen dresses.'²³¹. Once again, Rochester orders her to do something. We might think that he wants to spoil her after his proposal. But he knows Jane, and then he knows that she is not a girl to be rewarded that way. He just wants to own her, to reify her and to do whatever he wants with her; He expects her to be well-dressed, so she can appear next to him, and then only he will be proud. In this scene, Rochester is comparable to any Victorian man: he is trying to make his future wife look just the way he wants. He is the provider, so he buys her expensive dresses and jewels. So she becomes his property. This is a patriarchal attitude. Rochester's masculinity is clearly expressed there.

Now, we are going to see how Rochester's masculinity is reduced at the end of the novel, so that he and Jane can be together at last. Indeed, when Jane decides to go and find Mr Rochester after several months of separation, she goes back to Thornfield, but it has become a ruin. She finally finds someone in the next village who explains what happened: Bertha started a fire in the manor, then she went on the roof and Rochester tried to save her. But he fell and hurt himself: '(...) one eye was knocked out, and one hand so crushed that Mr Carter, the surgeon, had to amputate it directly. The other eye inflamed: he lost the sight of that also. He is now helpless, indeed- blind and a cripple.'²³². Rochester is now blind and missing an arm. He needs help and is not independent anymore. This is not a very masculine state at all. He used to be proud, arrogant, and rather dominant, and now he is diminished: '(...) a morbid anxiety connected with the eyes and with going blind is often enough a substitute for the dread of castration.'²³³. Why

²³⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 249

²³¹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 251

²³² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 400

²³³ Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, p 7

did Charlotte Brontë do such a thing to her masculine character? Wilson's theory is that 'Mr Rochester is too willfully male for Jane, and the effect of the divinely inspired fire that ultimately strikes him down is to reduce, but not to annul, his overaggressive masculinity. Jane has no desire for an emasculated lover.'²³⁴ Rochester is then less powerfully male because of his accident. He is perfect now to be with Jane. She feels more comfortable with him now that she is useful to him, and not just an object of pride. Through his body, Rochester's masculinity is reduced, enough for him to be able to live with Jane. Before, he was too aggressive for her complete happiness. But now that his masculinity has been wounded, he is perfect for '(...) a modern household.'²³⁵

Rochester's masculinity is rather traditional for the most part of the novel, when he is sure of himself and authoritative. But at the end of the novel, to reach happiness, his masculinity, even if still present, is quite reduced through the mutilation of his body. He has then at the right size to live with a woman and to not entirely dominate her. Charlotte Brontë is close to tradition, but still very modern for her time.

- Traditional Marriage and Life: the Regulating Power of the Church

Rochester is known to be an uncommon character in the Victorian novels. However, we will now see how Charlotte Brontë turns him into a more classical hero at the end of the story.

Mr Rochester is indeed closer at the end to the expected standards of the era. When Jane finally comes back to him, he is happy and mostly surprised that she was able to survive without him: 'Oh Jane, what did I feel when I discovered you had fled from Thornfield (...) ascertained that you had taken no money, nor anything which could serve as an equivalent! (...). What could my darling do, I asked, left destitute and penniless?'²³⁶ In his speech, Rochester acts like a protector and a provider for the woman he loves. He believes that she is totally unable to provide for herself and to be independent. He acts as if Jane desperately needed him. He does not trust her to take care of herself. This is a patriarchal attitude, which can be considered as traditional.

The most obvious aspect of the end of the novel which makes Mr Rochester a traditional male hero is the fact that he finally marries Jane. They can now live their unconventional love freely: '(...) much of what makes up the novel is conventional in the fictional sense (...). And her

²³⁴ F.A.C. Wilson, 'The Primrose Wreath: The Heroes of the Brontë Novels', p 45

²³⁵ Nancy Armstrong, 'Gender and the Victorian Novel', p 103

²³⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 411

story, with its gradual recognition of her virtues and strengths, is the romantic tale of Cinderella who marries her prince.’²³⁷. Indeed, their love story, even if surprising for the Victorians because of their different status, is finally rather common: they meet, fall in love, encounter obstacles, and at the end, they happily marry. The passionate character of Rochester is tamed and tied to a woman for ever. Their relationship becomes normal. Of course, they were married in a church, so we can say that Rochester has settled down. Sherry declares that the ‘(...) marriage to Rochester is not merely the conventionally romantic union of the novel, but a coming together of two sinners who have repented and suffered and whose union is thus sanctioned by God.’²³⁸. Indeed, Jane and mostly Rochester have both lived without particular religious precepts. He has had mistresses, he tried to get married while his first wife was still alive... He is a sinner, and he has greatly suffered from his faults: the woman he loved escaped, his manor was destroyed by fire and, in the process, he lost an arm and his sight. He has been punished enough. Then he repented and could finally marry Jane lawfully. The regulating power of the church is a noteworthy feature of the novel’s ending: religion has put everything back to its place. Their union is now accepted by society, through the characters of Mary and John: “I knew what Mr Edward would do (...): and he’s done right, for aught I know. I wish you joy, Miss!”²³⁹. They approve of this union: it is now acceptable. After this wedding, Rochester lives a conventional life with Jane: they are very happy, and become a family. He is still respectful of religious principles:

‘When his first-born was put into his arms, he could see that the boy had inherited his own eyes, as they once were - large, brilliant, and black. On that occasion, he again, with a full heart, acknowledge that God had tempered judgement with mercy.’²⁴⁰

In this extract, Jane describes his reaction when he recovers part of his sight: he is grateful to God to be able to see his son. He considers that God’s judgement has now mercy for him, and he is very thankful for that. So we can see that Rochester’s life is now calm, respectful of the precepts of religion and quite conventional for the Victorians.

²³⁷ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 52

²³⁸ Norman Sherry, *Charlotte and Emily Brontë*, p 55

²³⁹ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 419

²⁴⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 421

Charlotte Brontë's masculine character is then traditional at the end of the novel. He now fits into the Victorian mould: he is married, has a family and is respectful of God. He lives like any other Victorian hero is supposed to. His life is settled.

- Unusual Gender Relationships:

Charlotte Brontë's conception of the masculine hero is, as we have seen, rather traditional regarding several aspects. However, Rochester is still very different from conventions on the question of gender relationship. Indeed, even if he is sometimes authoritative to Jane, it does not work. She does not obey him, and he is fine with that. We will study, through different extracts, how they are equal human beings, and how they have a very particular relationship, almost an ideal one.

Rochester considers Jane as his equal, and does not want to control her life and her decisions. Jane is an independent woman and refuses the patriarchal model of men: 'Jane initially wins the love of Rochester through her own fearless sense of equality.'²⁴¹ It means that it is this desire to be considered as equal, to have the same status as men which has seduced Rochester. Jane declares her sense of equality in her speech during the scene in the garden of Thornfield: 'I am not talking to you now through the medium of custom, conventionalities, nor even of mortal flesh; - it is my spirit that addresses your spirit; just as if both had passed through the grave, and we stood at God's feet, equal, - as we are!''²⁴² She does not care about conventions and 'custom', she considers that their souls are the same: she has a feminist vision of her generation's ideals. The fact that Rochester is attracted to her, and his conception of women, prove that he is also a visionary. Jane herself observes that he likes to be challenged as she does: '(...) I could see he was excellently entertained, and that a lamb-like submission and turtle-dove sensibility, while fostering his despotism more, would have pleased his judgement, satisfied his common-sense, and even suited his taste, less.'²⁴³ Rochester is described as quite 'despotic' with people, as masters as expected to be during the Victorian period, but Jane knows he appreciates her attitude. She is not submitted and sensitive like any other conventional woman. Rochester wants someone like her, who is intelligent and who can speak her own mind, so that his judgement and common sense are satisfied. He is a truly modern hero and desires to

²⁴¹ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, p 197

²⁴² Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 238

²⁴³ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 257

be with a woman who is independent. Maybe he finds it more gratifying. There is no domination, psychological or even social. This gender relationship is quite revolutionary for the middle of the nineteenth century.

The peculiarity of the relationship between Rochester and Jane is that, as we have already seen, they stand on equal grounds, but they are also different in the way they interact with each other. Not only do they communicate, but they also teach each other: ‘The teaching situation is Charlotte Brontë’s favourite version of the love-and-power-game.’²⁴⁴ Their relationship is based on love, and also on power: no one lets the other take advantage. Usually, Victorian women are supposed to agree with their husband, to acknowledge what they say and, above all, they are not expected to know more about a subject than they do (except maybe on what is related to housework...). So they obviously cannot teach them anything. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester sometimes teaches Jane something, and sometimes it is the opposite. They exchange sources of power, talking about about life, experiences and various emotions. It is Mr Rochester who is the teacher: ‘You have no right to preach to me; you neophyte, that have not passed the porch of life, and are absolutely unacquainted with its mysteries.’²⁴⁵ Indeed, he is older and has seen more of the world than her, so it is normal that he knows more about such domains. Jane is young, but she is intelligent and perceptive, and she gives some pieces of advice to Rochester about the right thing to do. She is often more reasonable: ‘I advise you to live sinless, (...)’²⁴⁶, she says, after the aborted wedding. Throughout the story, she tries to teach him the right behaviour to adopt: ‘The teaching situation, then, not only obliterates conventional social superiority ; it is also in itself an image of the ideal man-woman relationship.’²⁴⁷ Indeed, such a relationship is, of course, completely unconventional for the Victorian period, and represents the perfect modern attitude a man and a woman should have towards each other.

So we have seen in this part that Rochester is sometimes rather close to the Victorian tradition of the male hero, while, in fact, he is rather different and modern. Charlotte Brontë has created a character in favour of women’s equal status.

2. Emily Brontë’s Conception: Far from the Victorian Model:

²⁴⁴ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, p 199

²⁴⁵ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 129

²⁴⁶ Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, p 296

²⁴⁷ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, p 200

- Heathcliff: no Forgiveness, no Remorse, no Redemption

Heathcliff is obviously a very unusual character for the Victorian period. We have seen how his life and behaviour are very far from the required standards. But we can wonder if, like Rochester, he has still some features of the traditional hero, or if he, in any way, regrets his actions or is punished for them.

In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester leads a life of passion, not caring for what is conventional for someone of his rank. However, at the end of the novel, we have seen that he repents and leads his life according to religious precepts. He knows what he has done wrong, and does not wish to do the same mistakes again. In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff refuses to do the same: ‘We are not concerned here with characters, like Jane Eyre for example, who struggle resolutely to come to terms with life as it is, or whose speech is always ‘sincere’. Brontë’s characters are not reflective.’²⁴⁸. He explains that characters in *Jane Eyre* try, all along, to find a solution to their problems, and that it is obviously not the case in Emily Brontë’s novel. Indeed, Heathcliff is quite stubborn. He is not looking for a way to be happy and to make up for his mistakes: he only continues to be cruel and destructive throughout the book. He never says that he is sorry, he does not express any regret for what he inflicts on others. He always puts the blame on others. For example, when he has fled from the Heights and abandoned Catherine for three years, he does not ask her to forgive him. He blames her for being miserable after he returns, and does not see himself as responsible for her condition. He tells her when she is dying: “I have not one word of comfort - you deserve this. You have killed yourself.”²⁴⁹. Maybe she deserves what is happening to her, because she married Edgar Linton although she did not really love him, but Heathcliff deserves part of responsibility. If he had stayed, maybe she would have renounced and understood her mistake. Heathcliff is not reflective, he does not put himself into question at all. He just follows his passions and does not compromise with them, by admitting his faults²⁵⁰. Heathcliff does not have any remorse with Catherine, so we can suppose that he will not have any with the other people he hurts even more harshly. With the second generation of the novel, he is a monster and desires nothing more than everything to destroy them. It is as if he felt nothing. He imprisons Catherine Linton at the Heights so she will marry his son Linton. Catherine tries to persuade him to let her go:

²⁴⁸ J. F. Goodridge, *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights*, p 30

²⁴⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 173

²⁵⁰ J. F. Goodridge, *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights*, p 35

“Ah! you must look once - I’m so wretched - you can’t help being sorry and pitying me.’
‘(...) I’d rather be hugged by a snake. How the devil can you dream of fawning on
me? I *detest* you!’”²⁵¹

Catherine believes there is humanity in Heathcliff, and that he can feel sorry for what he does. Of course, she is wrong. He never regrets what he inflicts on people around him. Just before dying, he declares to Nelly: “(...) as to repenting of my injustices, I’ve done no injustice, and I repent of nothing - I’m too happy, and yet I’m not happy enough. (...)”²⁵². There will be no redemption, no confession before his death. He never doubts what he has done, unlike Rochester. He is satisfied with his actions. This is obviously not a honorable way to end his life. He is not destined to go to heaven.

Heathcliff is also a very unconventional Victorian character because he does not care for religion and does not respect the dead. Indeed, he is relieved when Edgar dies. It is not acceptable, even if he was his ennemy. Then, we learn that Heathcliff has opened Cathy’s coffin, years after her burial:

“You were very wicked, Mr Heathcliff!’ I exclaimed; ‘were you not ashamed to disturb the dead?’
‘I disturbed nobody, Nelly, (...)’²⁵³

He feels no remorse for what he did, even if it is an awful deed. He has no consideration at all for death. He has also lived his entire existence without caring at all for religion. A traditional ending would be that he would regret his actions and become a Christian to repent for all his mischiefs, and Nelly encourages him to do so:

“You are aware, Mr Heathcliff,’ I said, ‘that from the time you were thirteen years old, you have lived a selfish, unchristian life; and probably hardly had a Bible in your hands. Could it be hurtful to send for some one (...) to explain it, and show how very far you have erred from its precepts, and how unfit you will be for its heaven, unless a change takes place before you die?’”²⁵⁴

She is a traditional Victorian servant, very faithful, and she tries to open Heathcliff’s eyes on religion. If he had repented at this moment of the novel, he would still be fit to go to heaven

²⁵¹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 290

²⁵² Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 351

²⁵³ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 304

²⁵⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 352

according to her. Of course, Heathcliff ignores her recommendations. So he is very far from the Victorian ideals of the male hero. He should live his life while being respectful to God.

At the end of the novel, he ceases to be a demon to the second generation: he spares Catherine and Hareton from his revenge. We might see that as an exterior sign of goodness, but, he is just weary and does not feel any joy in destruction: “That sound as if I had been labouring the whole time, only to exhibit a fine trait of magnanimity. It is far from being the case - I have lost faculty of enjoying their destruction, and I am too idle to destroy for nothing.”²⁵⁵.

Finally, we can wonder if Emily Brontë has created such a character to criticise the Victorian ideals and if she is favourable to Heathcliff’s actions. Indeed, he is a very special male hero, and at his death, he is buried next to Catherine. He wanders in the moors alongside of her: ‘He never shows a sign of regret. (...) Finally - and oddest of all- after his death it is he who is rewarded by spiritual union with the first Catherine, no Edgar, her lawful husband and the supposed hero of the story.’²⁵⁶. Even if Heathcliff never shows any remorse, nor any sign of redemption, it is he who is happy with Cathy after his death. Emily Brontë has reunited the two lovers. He is never punished for what he has done throughout his life. The author rejects Edgar, prefers Heathcliff and gives him a reward. She is obviously rejecting the Victorian expectations about men, and Heathcliff, by being so unconventional, stands miles away from standards.

- Heathcliff and Gender Relationship: an Unconventional Approach

Heathcliff’s attitude towards women is obviously not conventional in *Wuthering Heights*. He is not a patriarch, he does not provide for a wife and children. Furthermore, he does not seem to consider women as inferior beings, who need to be taught and protected. Even as a child, he considers Cathy to be superior to everyone. He says to Nelly while Cathy is kept at the Grange when she is hurt: “(...) I saw they were full of stupid admiration; she is so immeasurably superior to them - to everybody on earth, is she not, Nelly?”²⁵⁷. Of course, he loves her, but this sentence proves that he is not prejudiced against women. He judges human beings independently from their sex. Ewbank explains that in *Wuthering Heights*, there is absolutely no concern at all with superiority or inferiority of one gender. It is not an issue in the novel²⁵⁸. Indeed, we do not

²⁵⁵ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 340

²⁵⁶ David Cecil, ‘Emily Brontë and *Wuthering Heights*’, p 30

²⁵⁷ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 53

²⁵⁸ Inga-Stina Ewbank, *Their Proper Sphere, A Study of the Brontë Sisters as early-Victorian Female Novelists*, p 88

follow the story of a woman fighting for independence and equality like in *Jane Eyre*, and the hero of the novel is not a nice Victorian man. Edgar Linton, the very conventional character is, as we have seen, completely turned to ridicule. Heathcliff is a violent masculine character, very aggressive and powerful, but he does not only treat women badly: he dominates and controls everyone around him. The novel is not focused on the plight of women and superiority of men, it is focused on the life of a man whose passions destroy everything and everyone, with no concern for their gender. So Heathcliff is obviously an unusual Victorian character: he does not fulfill the expected role of man.

The only apparently conventional act that Heathcliff does during his life is that he marries Isabella Linton, then brings her back to the Heights to live with him. To a stranger's view, it would appear rather traditional: Heathcliff is going to provide for his new family and act as a husband towards his wife. Of course, this is not what happens. He has married Isabella just to hurt her brother Edgar and to acquire his property in the end. At home, he is not nice to her at all and admits he has disillusioned her. Nelly says to him that Isabella has given up comfort and friends for him, and he declares: "She abandoned them under a delusion," he answered, 'picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion.'²⁵⁹. We understand that Isabella saw gentleness in him, that she believed he loved her and would be a traditional husband. But Heathcliff is not like that at all; he does not treat her as a woman and as a wife. He treats her as a means to reach his goal. He does not care at all for her sex and status. He could have used a man in the same way in order to obtain what he wanted. Heathcliff is very unconventional concerning gender: it is not his concern. He treats everyone in the same way, with the exception of Catherine. She is superior to everyone and he also considers himself superior to the others. He declares about himself, Edgar and Cathy that: "If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn't love as much in eighty years, as I could in a day. And Catherine has a heart as deep as I have (...)"²⁶⁰. He believes he and Catherine are superior to everyone, that they have a deeper soul and deeper feelings. It is not a question of gender or class. Heathcliff does not care for gender.

Emily Brontë has created a masculine character who thinks beyond the issue of gender. Heathcliff has an idol, and the rest is nothing to him. He judges human beings according to their nature, not their sex. It is obviously a very modern novel, leaving aside the contemporary issues of gender relationships.

²⁵⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 158

²⁶⁰ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 157

- The Powers of Animal and Weather-like Masculinity

Heathcliff is very far, as we have seen, from any standards of Victorian society. He does not lead a conventional life for the period, he is free from any obligation, he is not respectful of religion and he is not concerned with the issue of gender relationships. His masculinity cannot be defined according to normal terms, and cannot be compared with any other hero of the Victorian era. He is a unique character, and his extraordinary masculinity is one of a kind.

First of all, Heathcliff can hardly be seen as a human being, he is closer to nature and to the animal world: he is even called the ‘personification of nature itself’²⁶¹. Indeed, he is often referred to with animal terms. When Cathy describes him to Isabella, she uses uncommon terms: “(...) he’s a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man.”²⁶². Nelly herself says he is ‘an evil beast (...) waiting his time to spring and destroy.’²⁶³. He is so different than normal human beings that the characters have to search for another diction to find the words that would befit him. He is closer to an animal than anything else. His personality is better described as that of a ‘wolf’ or of a ‘beast’. Concerning his apparent lack of feelings, Nelly also uses inhuman words to refer to him: ‘(...) we do sometimes pity creatures that have none of the feelings either for themselves or others (...)’²⁶⁴. Heathcliff is not fully human in the mind of the people he knows. They have adopted a different language to talk about him. Even when he is experiencing the greatest misery of his life - the death of Catherine - he reacts more strongly and more passionately than any other character, and his sadness cannot be described with decent terms: ‘His agony is more like that of a beast deprived of his prey.’²⁶⁵. Nelly finds herself in the presence of a wild creature when she announces Cathy’s death to him: ‘He dashed his head against the knotted trunk; and, lifting up his eyes, howled, not like a man, but like a savage beast getting goaded to death with knives and spears.’²⁶⁶. His reaction is extremely violent, too violent to be human: he is an animal, he does not use words to express his anxiety, he ‘howls’ like a wolf being tortured. In many ways, Heathcliff’s masculinity is completely brutal and animal. This is obviously not traditional for the

²⁶¹ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 192

²⁶² Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 108

²⁶³ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 113

²⁶⁴ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 178

²⁶⁵ J. F. Goodridge, *Emily Brontë: Wuthering Heights*, p 36

²⁶⁶ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 179

Victorian period, when men were expected to be educated, to restrain themselves and to repress their primitive passions. Emily Brontë's character is the opposite of this description; Heathcliff is the product of nature, and not of culture: 'It is a nature that transcends gender.'²⁶⁷. So Heathcliff's gender cannot be described with conventional terms, since he is the son of nature.

Heathcliff's masculinity is also associated with the wildness of the landscape and the harshness of the weather. Indeed, Van Ghent explains that the personality of Heathcliff is clearly representative of 'the wildness of heath and moors - an anthropomorphized primitive energy, concentrated in activity, terrible in effect.'²⁶⁸. The setting of the whole novel is then symbolic of its hero's deep nature. His masculinity is then comparable to the landscape: wild, savage, powerful and 'primitive'. Mr Lockwood, Heathcliff's tenant, describes the land around Wuthering Heights when he first arrives in the neighbourhood, and it is very representative of the novel's sequel and, of course, of its hero's nature: 'Wuthering Heights is the name of Mr Heathcliff's dwelling, 'Wuthering' being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather.'²⁶⁹. Without knowing it, Lockwood has described the personality of his landlord by describing his house. He will later learn about all the 'tumult' that has happened in this landscape. Since Wuthering Heights is Heathcliff's house, it seems logical that it would be representative of his character. The weather is also linked to his different emotions throughout the novel: there is often a storm when he is angry or depressed. For example, when he hears Cathy talking to Nelly in the kitchen of the Heights, about Edgar's proposal and her positive answer, he flees from the house. The weather that night is representative of what he must have felt: 'About midnight, (...), the storm came rattling over the Heights in full fury. There was a violent wind, as well as thunder (...)'²⁷⁰. It is a very violent weather, and Heathcliff at that moment was completely desperate and angry to have lost Cathy to Edgar Linton, his enemy. The landscape and the weather clearly represent Heathcliff's nature and personality. His masculinity is so powerful that it can only be expressed through symbolic means. McCullough explains very rightly his true nature and its representation: 'The fury of Heathcliff is like the ungovernable fury of a storm. The feeling aroused in the reader is akin to the sense of powerlessness that one experiences in the presence

²⁶⁷ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 193

²⁶⁸ Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On Wuthering Heights', p 157

²⁶⁹ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 4

²⁷⁰ Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p 90

of unleashed forces of nature.²⁷¹ Heathcliff cannot be compared to anyone else, and he cannot be considered like any other: his masculinity is not human, his passions are too powerful, he represents the strength of nature. So he cannot be judged according to the Victorian standards, and its adepts of culture and refinements: 'Heathcliff is no more ethically relevant than is flood or earthquake or whirlwind. It is impossible to speak of him in terms of 'sin' and 'guilt' as it is to speak in this way of the natural elements or the creatures of the animal world.'²⁷² He is indeed closer to natural phenomena than to society and its norms. We cannot possibly talk about him in the same way as Rochester, for example. Since his nature is not human, he is not 'guilty' of anything, no more than a wolf is guilty of savagery. His passion and masculinity are so strong that 'beside them, even Mr Rochester's passions seem tame and tea-party affairs.'²⁷³ Rochester is indeed rather traditional, especially at the end, when he is less passionate, while Heathcliff is always far more unconventional.

So to conclude this part, it is clear that Heathcliff's masculinity is very far from the Victorian expectations for a male hero. Not one aspect of his personality is close to a common hero: he is an animal-like character. Emily Brontë has chosen nature over culture to create the personality of her masculine protagonist: 'Emily Brontë - and her novel - are finally on the side of nature, of primal energy, of uninhibited desire.'²⁷⁴

²⁷¹ Bruce McCullough, 'The Dramatic Novel: Wuthering Heights', p 67

²⁷² Dorothy Van Ghent, 'On Wuthering Heights', p 170

²⁷³ David Cecil, 'Emily Brontë and Wuthering Heights', p 25

²⁷⁴ Anne, K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, p 192

Conclusion:

Charlotte and Emily Brontë have undoubtedly written two major novels of the Victorian age. *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are both unique and incomparable, and their masculine heroes Rochester and Heathcliff have marked the period by their singularities.

They are very different from the Victorian masculine expectations because of several characteristics. Their childhood, their appearance, their life course, their character, their relationship with men and women, and their masculinity, in general, are not traditional for the era. The Brontë sisters were not concerned with the requirements of their society, especially Emily, who created a character who has none of the qualities expected for a proper man. Heathcliff, even if he was born in the Victorian period, cannot be called a Victorian hero. He is very singular and wild. Emily Brontë created him out of nature, in a period when men were expected to be culturally instructed and respectable. His masculinity is exotic, brutal and cruel. He is not gentle in any way. He is like an animal in an age of culture and refinement, but Emily Brontë associated that image with female features and constructed an all new version of masculinity.

Charlotte Brontë imagined a novel a little less challenging regarding her masculine hero, being more focused on the destiny of her female character, Jane. However, Rochester is a major male hero in Victorian literature. He is also highly dissimilar to any traditional hero, even if he is closer to the expectations of society than Heathcliff is. His masculinity is also linked to exoticism and cruelty, but it is also softened at the end, and equal to femininity. Not one gender surpasses the other in *Jane Eyre*: man and woman are equal in the end. Charlotte Brontë wrote a feminist novel, making her masculine character rival with her heroine: the novel revolves around the search for independence and equality of Jane. Emily Brontë has had that same goal in mind, she was not concerned at all with the struggle for the equality of the sexes. *Wuthering Heights* is a novel about passionate characters, fighting all the conventions of society. Thus Heathcliff was created. This masculine character is unique because he has none of the conventional features expected in men.

The Brontë sisters are notorious writers of the Victorian period, and they are particularly noteworthy thanks to their own vision of the masculine hero. In that sense, Heathcliff and Rochester are outstanding and unconventional male characters.

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MOTS-CLÉS : Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Heathcliff, Rochester, Masculinité, Genre, Gothique

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire est une étude détaillée des principaux personnages masculins des romans *Jane Eyre* et *Les Hauts de Hurlevent*: Mr Rochester et Heathcliff. A travers de nombreuses thématiques telles que leur statut, leur enfance, leur vies, leur relations avec les femmes et les hommes ou encore leurs histoires d'amour, leur masculinité et leur statut de héros sont questionnés et définis. Ce sont deux héros non conventionnels pour la période Victorienne, il est donc intéressant d'étudier les différentes raisons de leur cas à part. Heathcliff et Rochester sont parfois similaires, et parfois complètement différents. Ce mémoire permet donc d'étudier la conception du héros masculin chez deux soeurs du dix-neuvième siècle, et de définir leur point de vue concernant la question du genre.

KEYWORDS : Emily Brontë, Charlotte Brontë, Heathcliff, Rochester, Masculinity, Gender, Gothic

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a detailed study of the masculine characters from the novels *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*: Mr Rochester and Heathcliff. Through several thematics such as their status, their childhood, their life course, their homosocial and heterosocial relationships, or even their love story, their masculinity and their status as are questioned and defined. These two heroes are very unconventional for the Victorian period, so it is quite interesting to look at the different reasons for their outcast position. Heathcliff and Rochester are sometimes similar, and sometimes completely different. This dissertation then permit to study the conception of the masculine hero of two sisters from the nineteenth century, and to define their point of view concerning the issue of gender.

DECLARATION

1. Ce travail est le fruit d'un travail personnel et constitue un document original.
2. Je sais que prétendre être l'auteur d'un travail écrit par une autre personne est une pratique sévèrement sanctionnée par la loi.
3. Personne d'autre que moi n'a le droit de faire valoir ce travail, en totalité ou en partie, comme le sien.
4. Les propos repris mot à mot à d'autres auteurs figurent entre guillemets (citations).
5. Les écrits sur lesquels je m'appuie dans ce mémoire sont systématiquement référencés selon un système de renvoi bibliographique clair et précis.

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