

**Heathcliff's Blurred Mirror Image:  
Hareton Earnshaw and the Reproduction of  
Patriarchal Masculinity in *Wuthering Heights***

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2003, 2006

Since its publication in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* has been associated to masculinity. Until 1850, when Charlotte Brontë dispelled the enigma of the true identity of the androgynous Ellis Currer who had signed this novel, most reviewers attributed its authorship to a male writer, on the grounds that only a man could have written a work of such rough power and genius. When the family life of the Brontës was publicised in Elizabeth Gaskell's acclaimed biography *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (1857), it seemed obvious to some that the only male Brontë sibling, the beloved Branwell, must have played an important role in the lives of his sisters, and in particular in the composition of Emily's masterpiece. Even though the sexist notion that Branwell was the real author of the novel has been completely discarded today, critics such as Everard Flintoff (1994) still defend the complementary view that Branwell did nonetheless contribute a significant number of relevant ideas which the far more talented Emily imbued with life. As Gaskell disclosed, Branwell died as a consequence of a severe bout of depression, compounded with diverse addictions, originating in a disastrous love affair with a disloyal married woman.<sup>1</sup> Branwell's disgrace and his close relationship with Emily have often been invoked to explain where Emily drew her inspiration from to create Heathcliff. Jane Miller, for instance, has argued that "The adult love of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* alludes to and comes out of Emily's close identification with a brother who is both part of herself, a reflection of herself and fierce even in his submission to her." (1986: 82)

Emily's alleged identification with masculinity whether through Branwell or on her own has been even celebrated by feminist critics. In *Romanticism and Gender* (1993) Anne Mellor claims in a surprisingly misogynistic remark that "In preferring the strong to the weak, the brave to the cowardly, [Emily] allied herself to the realm of the masculine; in preferring passion to reason, she joined Blake, Byron and Percy Shelley against the feminine Romantic exponents of rational love and self-control" (1993: 192). According to Mellor, in its first half *Wuthering Heights* "explores and subtly affirms the masculine Romantic values of love or Eros, of revolutionary energy, of imagination, of that life-force in nature and the mind which Percy Shelley called 'power'" (204), only to abandon this stimulating exploration in the second half. The intense Romantic bonding between Cathy and Heathcliff makes way in it for the duller love story between her daughter Catherine and Hareton, a subplot which, in Mellor's opinion, responds to Brontë's "obligation to her sex, her need to imagine *what is the best possible* for women who wish to survive, to bear children, to become mothers" (205; original emphasis). No man, Mellor observes, would have continued the story of Heathcliff's life after Catherine's death in this disappointing way. She even hints that it would be a mistake to read the final happiness of the younger couple as a celebration of placid love, as there are clues to believe that Hareton will not be an easy husband to manage.

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| Sara Martín, "': Blurred Mirror Images: Heathcliff and Hareton'"

Since the introduction of the notion of intentional fallacy by W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in the eponymous article they published in 1946, the discussion of the author's intentions has been practically tabooed. In the particular case of *Wuthering Heights*, the manifest distance between the author and her two narrators –the homely Nelly Dean and the urban Mr. Lockwood– and the novel's lack of moral focus, add important difficulties to the task of attempting to determine what Brontë meant with her novel, if she meant anything at all. We can, however, re-read the novel in the light of new points of view. What I propose here is a reconsideration of the key role of Hareton Earnshaw as a blurred mirror image of Heathcliff and a reading that considers, above all, the representation of masculinity in *Wuthering Heights*.

My contention is that masculinity has been often mentioned in the discussions of *Wuthering Heights* because it *is* its most relevant theme. Actually, the most important relationship in the novel is the one established between Heathcliff and his victimised foster son Hareton. Through their paradoxically successful male bonding, Brontë binds the story of the two generations and presents a possible alternative to Heathcliff's doomed Romantic-Gothic, patriarchal power. She proposes in Hareton's person a new model of masculinity better suited to fulfil the needs of the heroine, the younger Catherine. Far from being, as Mellor and other commentators suggest, a failure of nerve, the second part of *Wuthering Heights* successfully culminates the project of justifying Heathcliff's dismissal to help women readers overcome their idealisation of brutal men like him as Romantic heroes. The renewal of idealised masculinity is to culminate in Hareton and Catherine's announced wedding. It must be noted, however, that even though Catherine, and to a certain extent, Nelly, counteract the victimisation Hareton has endured under Heathcliff's rule, the young man remains loyal to his foster father. This suggests that patriarchal attitudes will survive in Hareton's behaviour as a husband, which needn't mean that he will be an intolerant husband as Mellor hints. Men do not simply reject previous models of masculinity to please women's demands: a compromise must be reached and this is what Brontë deals with in *Wuthering Heights*.

### **Heathcliff: The Misunderstood Man**

Despite the fact that it only occupies roughly the first part of Brontë's novel, the romance between Cathy and Heathcliff is the main focus of the ongoing literary debate around *Wuthering Heights*. Its Romantic vocabulary proves to be highly contagious, apparently disabling critics from considering this novel outside the very ideological framework it questions. Steven Vines, for instance, offers an excellent discussion of the twin concepts of identity and otherness in the relationship between Cathy and her platonic lover in an article titled "The Wuther of the Other in *Wuthering Heights*" (1994). In it, he defends the thesis that

Throughout the novel Heathcliff's unquiet presence articulates and exacerbates the internal instabilities of the world he invades. In this sense he is the mode of the novel's deconstruction of its own world, for his indeterminate social and symbolic position introduces a wuthering into the structures that compose the text's frame of reference. (343)

This wuthering or disturbance affects most powerfully Cathy; furthermore, her own example of insubordination turns Heathcliff “from a figure of Earnshaw’s paternity ... [in]to a figure of Cathy’s perversity.” (Vines: 345)

The fact that Cathy seems to play a leading role in their romance has inspired two very different responses. On the one hand, since 1979, when Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar published their seminal volume *The Madwoman in the Attic*, feminist critics have been developing the idea that, as this authorial team claimed, the total identity between the lovers makes them anti-patriarchal idols. Cathy and Heathcliff’s joint rebelliousness would explain the charm of the novel for post-Romantic readers. On the other hand, as Patsy Stoneman notes in her well-informed book *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights* (1996), the scholarly feminist tradition plays no role at all in the many 20<sup>th</sup> century stage and screen adaptations, written and produced mostly by men. At a popular level, therefore, Heathcliff is by no means seen as complicit with Cathy, but, rather, as his victim.

In the chapter they devoted to *Wuthering Heights*, “Looking Oppositely: Emily Brontë’s Bible of Hell,” Gubar and Gilbert identify Heathcliff with Victor Frankenstein’s unfortunate creature. Nina Auerbach, incidentally, agrees, claiming that Heathcliff “seems less a fully realized demon than a stricken Frankenstein monster, unable to live independently of the women who create him” (1982: 102), namely, both Emily Brontë and Cathy. Gilbert and Gubar further argue that “despite his outward masculinity, Heathcliff is somehow female in his monstrosity” (1979: 293), for he opposes patriarchy from a position of powerlessness. Heathcliff’s paradoxical feminine Otherness is not always welcomed by the women in the novel, though. As an outsider to the Earnshaws and the Lintons’ world, Heathcliff has more affinities with the servant Nelly than with Cathy; Nelly, though, apparently hates him because unlike herself he is given the chance to become a member of the Earnshaw family. This hatred animates Nelly’s account of Heathcliff’s failure. (Yaeger 1988: 227). Regina Barreca, who believes that women in Brontë’s novel render patriarchal discourse ineffective and obsolete (1990: 228) plainly sees men’s inability to articulate desire in *Wuthering Heights* as a feminist achievement, a silencing of aggressive masculinity. Powerlessness marks Heathcliff but in Barreca’s interpretation this is a masculine rather than a feminine attribute.

In many senses, *Wuthering Heights* is a romantic female fantasy of male control with pornographic overtones, in the sense of using extreme violence, rather than sex to thrill its readers. Romance, Jane Miller explains,

soothes women and mediates for them the painful ambivalence they internalise about men's power over them in the world by proposing to reduce men to their level, inducing dependence in a man on a woman, a dependence viewed by other men as grovelling and abject. Pornography, on the other hand, reasserts for men images of conquest and control, desperate consolation for childhood losses and adult defeats. (1986: 161)

The first half of the novel, centring on Cathy’s decision not to marry Heathcliff follows romance codes; the second, focusing on his violent reaction against his loss, beginning at the time of his return, is pornographic, specifically Gothic. Romance is reintroduced, though, when Catherine falls in love with Hareton.

The key moment in which this romance fantasy of control is enacted is the famous scene in which 15-year-old Catherine Earnshaw tells Nelly she has decided to accept Edgar Linton's offer of marriage, despite loving brutalised, impoverished Heathcliff:

“... My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees –my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath– a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff! –he's always, always in my mind - not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself– but as my own being –so don't talk of our separation again –it is impracticable...” (81)<sup>2</sup>

Cathy's proclamation of Romantic or neo-platonic identity in Shelleyan style is quite problematic. “To Catherine,” as sceptical Marianne Thormählen points out “Heathcliff is an extension of her self and an integral component of her egomania; this is why she cannot understand why the marriage to Edgar Linton would separate her from Heathcliff.” (1997: 186) Her declaration actually annuls Heathcliff's personality –would he ever claim he *is* Cathy?– and his right to decide about their relationship. It is, besides, pointedly incompatible with another potent declaration which Cathy makes three years later, when she is already married to Edgar, and tries to persuade Isabella to fall out of love with Heathcliff:

“Nelly, help me to convince her of her madness. Tell her what Heathcliff is –an unreclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone. I'd as soon put that little canary into the park on a winter's day, as recommend you to bestow your heart on him! It is deplorable ignorance of his character, child, and nothing else, which makes that dream enter your head. Pray, don't imagine that he conceals depths of benevolence and affection beneath a stern exterior! He's not a rough diamond –a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic: he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man...” (101)

Despite her protestations of eternal love, Cathy does not even seem to *like* Heathcliff. This reaction possibly responds to the fact that, as Carol Jacobs suggests, the very moment Cathy announces her identity with Heathcliff division ensues (1979: 61). The more mature Cathy, no longer blinded by love, simply sees that the brute remains just beneath Heathcliff's new gentlemanly person and goes on loving him as a brother, with all his faults, something which, of course, he resents.

Many critics have been puzzled by Cathy's lack of sexual interest in Heathcliff and have justified it by stressing the fact that they have been raised as brother and sister. Brontë's redefinition of “romantic attraction in terms of erotic identification rather than sexual antagonism” (Boone 1987: 143) uses the brother-sister bond as an idealized model because, unlike conventional romance, this bond excludes confrontation. Yet, as Dorothy Van Ghent explains,

The foster kinship provides an imaginative implicit reason for the unnaturalness and impossibility of their mating. Impassioned by their brother-and-sister like identity of kind, they can only destroy each other, for it is impossible for two persons to *be* each other (as Catherine says she “is” Heathcliff) without destruction of the physical limitations that individualize and separate. (1953: 169, original emphasis)

Other women critics, such as Elizabeth R. Napier (1984: 105) or Q.D. Leavis (1986), have blamed Cathy for her inability to make a mature choice, while Marianne Thormählen has attributed her selfish rejection of Heathcliff to the “mental instability, which must diminish her responsibility for her notions and actions” (1997: 187). Going beyond the incest taboo, Martha Nussbaum argues that Cathy finds “The extreme exposure of true passion, and its links with pain and death, ... intolerable, ultimately” (1996: 378). She just cannot deal with sexuality, hence her decision to give her body to the sexually less threatening Edgar and to deny Heathcliff’s sex appeal.

Cathy, somehow, expects Heathcliff to be eternally faithful to her in mind if not in body –she is ready to accept his marriage to Isabella, provided his motivation is sexual. This begs the question of what exactly she thinks love is and, indeed, why Heathcliff fails to express his love in a clear physical way. Her odd behaviour suggests that her main satisfaction lies in Edgar’s and Heathcliff’s submission to her capricious whims. When quite rightly Edgar refuses to put up with them and forces Cathy to choose between him and Heathcliff, for Edgar can only see that relationship in terms of adultery, she, like a spoilt brat, throws a tantrum, goes mad and dies. How literary critics have mistaken her selfishness and Heathcliff’s paralysing despair for an endorsement of Romantic love beyond the grave is to be wondered at.

Screen and stage adapters, mostly men, reject the identity motif. Adaptations tend to interpret Brontë’s novel as the story of Heathcliff’s victimisation by an over-ambitious woman who betrays his love. Academic critics such as Terry Eagleton concur with this view. He criticises in *Myths of Power* Cathy’s behaviour, arguing that she fails to love Heathcliff for who he is, preferring instead the easy choice of rich Edgar Linton, whom she does not love as a man either (1988: 102). The title of the main hit song of Cliff Richards recent musical *Heathcliff* (1996), also says it all: Richards’ hero –note that the musical is named after him– is a “Misunderstood Man.”

The Victorians had no doubt that Heathcliff was a Gothic monster; perhaps, a villain hero like Victor Frankenstein, but a monster nonetheless. Modern misreadings of Heathcliff as a young, dark, handsome man in the grip of a manipulative young lady begin in the 1930s, with the stage adaptation by John Davidson (1937, still performed in 1986) and the very popular film by William Wyler (1939), with charismatic Laurence Olivier in the main role. Wyler’s film, U.C. Knoepfelmacher points out, “probably did more to reinstate Emily Brontë’s masterpiece than any sober revaluation by literary critics” (1994: vii). It reinstated *Wuthering Heights*, though, in a way that, in Patsy Stoneman’s words “reinforced ... the ‘triangulation’ of the plot of *Wuthering Heights*” (1996: 155), disregarding altogether Cathy’s pregnancy and the second part of the novel. Most film adaptations, except Peter Kosminsky’s (1991), cover only Cathy and Heathcliff’s failed romance, but, then, so do most academic discussions of *Wuthering Heights*.

It is quite exasperating to notice that Heathcliff receives all the readers’ and critics’ sympathy, despite the staggering evidence Brontë piles up against his cruel Gothic manners. In her Preface to the 1850 re-edition of her sister’s masterpiece, Charlotte Brontë wrote that “Whether it is right or advisable to create things like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is” (2000: xlvi). There is not a single moment in *Wuthering Heights* when Heathcliff behaves as a decent human being, not



even in his earliest childhood. Heathcliff himself has no illusion about his personality. He tells Nelly that naive Isabella abandoned her comforts to marry him "...under a delusion ... picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion. I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she persisted in forming a fabulous notion of my character and acting on the false impressions she cherished..." (148) Joyce Carol Oates observes that "Heathcliff's mockery makes us aware of our own bookish expectations of him, for he is defiantly not a hero, and we are warned to avoid Isabella's error" (1982). We, however, persist in misreading him as masochistic Isabella does. Many Victorian critics found, like Oates, that "Heathcliff's enduring appeal is approximately that of Edmund, Iago, Richard III, the intermittent Macbeth: the villain who impresses by way of his energy, his cleverness, his peculiar sort of courage; and by his asides, inviting, as they do, the audience's or reader's collaboration in wickedness." (1982) Jacobean villains, above all those of the bizarre revenge tragedies of the period, were also mentioned as Heathcliff's kinship.

We, however, tend to see Heathcliff through the tinted lenses of romance, as an unfortunate Byronic hero rather than a Gothic villain in love. The possession of physical beauty is the main difference between traditional Gothic villains and Byronic heroes. Emily Brontë ambiguously chose to characterise her Gothic villain as a handsome man, possibly because, unlike what Charlotte did in *Jane Eyre*, she could not dissociate fictional romance from physical beauty. As Catherine Belsey writes

There are in the reading process... two desires in play: on the one hand, the desire of the fictional figure within the text, and on the other the desire of the reader. What stories of demon lovers suggest is that the desire defined in the fiction cannot be met by a mortal lover, because in the end desire is not of the other, but of the Other, and its gratification is both forbidden and impossible. The desire of the reader, however, is permitted. (1994: 182)

Cathy, in short, cannot have this Other demonic lover but we, readers, can and do because Heathcliff is made irresistible by virtue of his dark handsomeness. Emily Brontë also possibly miscalculated the powerful effect that Heathcliff's desperate reproaches to the dying Cathy have on Isabella-minded female readers:

"You loved me –then what right had you to leave me? What right –answer me– for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart –*you* have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine. So much the worse for me that I am strong. Do I want to live? What kind of living will it be when you –oh, God! would *you* like to live with your soul in the grave?" (160, original emphasis)

Readers enticed by the emotional eloquence of the text into wishing they could elicit such strong passion from a lover are disabled by this melodramatic scene from feeling pity for those who do deserve it: the victims of Heathcliff's awful revenge.

It is tempting, though, to read *Wuthering Heights* as the story of how the second Catherine corrects the mistakes made by her mother especially because their names suggest there is a clear continuity between them. The story begins with a child, Catherine Earnshaw, who becomes Catherine Linton when she marries Edgar Linton.

She meets him at the age of 12 and marries him at 18. Catherine Linton dies aged 19 when she gives birth to her daughter, also named Catherine Linton. At the age of 13 this second Catherine meets the man she is to marry at 19, Hareton Earnshaw –her own cousin, the son of Catherine’s brother, Hindley. Before this, though, Catherine Linton is forced to marry her other cousin, Heathcliff’s son, confusingly named Linton Heathcliff, and so, her name becomes, ironically, Catherine Heathcliff. By the end of the novel she is to marry Hareton and take the name of Catherine Earnshaw –her mother’s maiden name– thus completing the circle.

This interpretation, however, must face an important objection: the younger Catherine ignores the details of the love between her mother and her uncle, and father-in-law, Heathcliff. If her romance with Hareton corrects, as it seems, the mistakes her mother incurred in when she rejected Heathcliff, this is something we deduce rather than something we are told. In contrast, Nelly explicitly moralises about other characters in tragic predicaments:

I used to draw a comparison between him [Edgar Linton], and Hindley Earnshaw, and perplex myself to explain satisfactorily, why their conduct was so opposite in similar circumstances. They had both been fond husbands, and were both attached to their children; and I could not see how they shouldn't both have taken the same road, for good or evil. ... One hoped, and the other despaired: they chose their own lots, and were righteously doomed to endure them.

But you'll not want to hear my moralising, Mr. Lockwood; you'll judge, as well as I can, all these things: at least, you'll think you will, and that's the same. (183)

Rather than connect mother and daughter, Emily Brontë seems intent on making sure no such connection is made beyond their shared name and blood tie. Catherine II, Nelly tells us was as a little child

... a real beauty in face –with the Earnshaws' handsome dark eyes, but the Lintons' fair skin, and small features, and yellow curling hair. Her spirit was high, though not rough, and qualified by a heart, sensitive and lively to excess in its affections. That capacity for intense attachments reminded me of her mother; still she did not resemble her; for she could be soft and mild as a dove, and she had a gentle voice and pensive expression: her anger was never furious; her love never fierce; it was deep and tender. (187)

Despite Nelly’s commendations –or perhaps because of them– the second Catherine frequently elicits negative reactions from readers and literary critics. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum blurts out at the end of an article that deals with Christian compassion in *Wuthering Heights* that “Hareton, following her flirtatious pretty lead, will soon, we feel, be as dead as she.” (1996: 379) This strange overreaction totally disregards the fact that the dead one is the elder Catherine and not her daughter.

In an article published in 1958, Miriam Allott first defended the idea that Heathcliff’s rejection is necessary to counteract the death wish he represents. She further argued that Catherine II and Hareton do not really triumph over Heathcliff, as he somehow survives in the Heights. Morally, we know that his behaviour is wrong but still we accept him for “There is, after all, no escaping the compulsive emotional charge identified with Heathcliff; there can only be an intellectual judgement that for the purposes of ordinary life he will not do.” (1992: 180) One of the points I am making here is that there are indeed rational and irrational ways of escaping this emotional

stranglehold and they *must* be found, for we can no longer sustain on ethical grounds the celebration of Heathcliff's supposed Romantic heroism when he is nothing but a villain, uncomfortably too close to our everyday abusers.

Laura C. Berry, for instance, produces a Foucauldian reading by interpreting *Wuthering Heights* as a novel that “stages its battles for custody between Nelly's disciplinary tactics and Heathcliff's torturing acts.” (1996: 40) This is a road that must be pursued. Critics such as Joyce Carol Oates or Mary Burgan, who have considered in depth the role of the second generation, should also be taken as guides in the necessary reinterpretation of *Wuthering Heights* for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Oates pointed out the way twenty years ago when she wrote that

... the triumph of the second Catherine and Hareton (the "second" Heathcliff), not only in their union but in their proposed move away from the ancient home of the Earnshaws, is a triumph that quite refutes traditional readings of the novel that dwell upon its dark, brooding, unconscious, and even savage energies. How ironic, then, that Brontë's brilliantly imagined dialectic, arguing for the inevitable exorcism of the old demons of childhood, and professing an attitude toward time and change that might even be called optimistic, should have been, and continues to be, misread. (1982)

In an article also published in 1982 Mary Burgan read *Wuthering Heights* as a novel that explores adolescent identity confusion and the dynamics of generational interaction in relation to its concern for the abandonment of Romanticism. Burgan defends the thesis that Catherine and Hareton “enact a release from the agonies of negation suffered by Heathcliff and Catherine which is as dramatically necessary as it is psychologically sound.” (1982: 404) Moreover, “As Heathcliff embarks upon his plan to prove his own power of identity by acting the tyrant towards the remaining children, he continually neglects to reckon with the implacability of the future generation's capacity to discover its own identity through rebellion” (1982: 405). Generational rather than gender rebellion is, thus, Heathcliff's final nemesis. The essential message of the novel is not only that change cannot be stopped but that it is indispensable and, on the whole, positive.

### **Defending the second generation: A vindication of Hareton**

It is my contention, though, that ultimately Heathcliff is defeated by the inevitability of change as personified specifically by Hareton, only indirectly by Catherine. Typically, like all Gothic villains, Heathcliff has an Achilles heel, and this is Hareton Earnshaw. Charlotte Brontë's “Preface” contains a singular observation, not often commented on:

Heathcliff betrays one solitary human feeling, and that is *not* his love for Catherine; which is a sentiment fierce and inhuman. ... No; the single link that connects Heathcliff with humanity is his rudely confessed regard for Hareton Earnshaw. ... and then his half-implicit esteem for Nelly Dean. These solitary traits omitted, we should say he was a child neither of Lascar nor gipsy, but a man's shape animated by demon life a Ghoul –an Afreet. (2000: xlvi)

Interestingly, Peter Kosminsky's film version dramatises a brief scene which is reported by Hareton and that underlines Charlotte's remarks. This scene takes place in the last



chapter, once Heathcliff has discovered the new alliance between Catherine and Hareton and is getting ready to die. Worried about his ‘father’, who has walked out on his ‘family’ at dinner, Hareton follows Heathcliff to the garden:

“Well, is he coming?” cried Catherine, when her cousin returned.  
“Nay” [Hareton] answered, “but he’s not angry; he seemed rare and pleased indeed; only, I made him impatient by speaking to him twice; and then he bid me off to you; he wondered how I could want the company of anybody else.” (325)

This is the moment when Heathcliff sanctions the young couple’s love, since, out of an intense narcissism, he has come to realise that Hareton is lucky in having the love of his Catherine as he never was. “Assenting to the boy’s alliance with Catherine, Heathcliff does not achieve any integration of self, but he does attain some measure of peace.” (Burgan 1982: 408)

If we read, as we are doing, *Wuthering Heights*, as a novel about the birth of a new model of love that is to replace Romantic passion, we must also read it as a novel that portrays a turning point in the construction of femininity and masculinity, or perhaps a fantasy about it. Most critics seemingly think, as has been noted, that Cathy is a feminist heroine in rebellion with Heathcliff against patriarchy, but we can easily see that this is a role played, rather, by the second Catherine. She is the one who stands up to Heathcliff –a patriarchal ogre in Van Ghent’s words (1953: 156) – in his worst, most violent moments and even dares taunt him about his loneliness and his inability to love anybody. It takes a long time for this courageous girl to see the potential that Hareton has as her ally against Heathcliff’s tyranny, but, once she sees it, she begins a programme of seduction –focused on her teaching him to read– that ultimately helps disarm Heathcliff. Her feminism, however, must be read with caution, for although by the end of the novel she is the legal owner of *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange*, being Heathcliff’s nearest living relative, she will give it all away to Hareton by marrying him, as the laws of the time prevented married women from holding any kind of personal property.

I would like to consider next the generational gap between Heathcliff and Hareton in the light of Robert Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity. Borrowing Antonio Gramsci’s theories of social change, particularly his idea that societies change because the leading hegemonic groups convince rather than force the dominated to accept their ideology, Connell formulated in the late 1970s the concept of hegemonic masculinity to explain how patriarchy stays in power. For him it is quite clear that hegemonic masculinity has to make a continued effort to “sustain the social definition of gender ... precisely *because the biological logic*, and the inert practice that responds to it, *cannot sustain the gender categories*” (1987: 81; original emphasis). Change occurs constantly in specific historical settings; femininity and masculinity are not only “historically mutable” but also “multiple” (63). The crises that result in distinct changes in hegemonic masculinity must be always seen with caution, to say the least, as they often result in the reinforcement of men’s power even with women’s unwitting collaboration. The question I am asking here, then, is whether the transition from Heathcliff’s model of abusive, aggressively asexual masculinity to Hareton’s pliant, erotic masculinity effectively alters or simply reproduces the patriarchal system of power under which Catherine –born in pre-Romantic 1784– lived.

At the beginning of the novel, Nelly describes Heathcliff to Lockwood as an usurper, a cuckoo, that has dispossessed the rightful owner, Hareton, of his rights over Wuthering Heights. Nelly is, thus, complicit with patriarchy, though she draws the line at accepting Heathcliff's patriarchal violence. She, "is moved to compassion for Heathcliff's loss, but she cannot really feel compassion for him –so far as he, in her view, puts himself outside the common behaviour of human beings" (Nussbaum 1996: 371). In a sense, then, *Wuthering Heights* tells the story of how Nelly and Catherine impose their views on acceptable masculinity regarding Hareton's above Heathcliff's. Arguably, though, Brontë seems to aim at celebrating the ideal of the good patriarch – Austen's Darcy is another example– rather than at overturning patriarchy itself. Certainly, patriarchy wouldn't need renew itself so often if it fulfilled its own ideals and this, I think, is what Brontë indirectly argues. On the other hand, as Rafael Galán argues, Heathcliff himself could have been an alternative to the patriarchal figures of his generation –Hindley, perhaps Edgar– but his success as a capitalist and his uncontrolled desire (first for Cathy and then for death) prevent him from setting up a new model (1999: 95). In the years away from Wuthering Heights, the socio-economic system of patriarchal power lures Heathcliff away from his original anti-social stance and absorbs his potential for rebelliousness.

Hareton is Hindley Earnshaw's son and heir, the elder Catherine's nephew and the younger Catherine's cousin. His birth causes the death of his delicate mother, Frances and, like his orphaned cousin, he is raised by Nelly, at least until the age of five, when Hindley dies and Heathcliff, his greedy mortgagee, claims the boy as a foster son. In a former episode, a drunken Hindley accidentally drops his son, then about two, over the staircase and Heathcliff saves the child's life, breaking his fall out of instinct. The incident suggests that Heathcliff's unconscious drives will finally save Hareton's life no matter how low the boy is degraded and how hard Heathcliff tries not to love him. It also suggests that Hindley's parenthood is even more faulty than Heathcliff's and that alcoholic Hindley cannot help his son to renew the power which his patriarchal household has enjoyed for generations. To be precise, since 1500 when another Hareton Earnshaw built Wuthering Heights and left his name engraved above the house's main door –it is no accident at all that these are the first words illiterate Hareton teaches himself to read.

Heathcliff scapegoats Hareton in his revenge against Hindley, whom he rightly blames for his degradation, that is to say, for his marginalisation in the patriarchal structures of power, which is what prevents him from marrying Cathy (rather than their ties as foster siblings). Hindley cannot tolerate his father's preference for the 'gypsy' foundling that Mr. Earnshaw brings back from Liverpool. In retaliation, he destroys the intimate relationship between Heathcliff and Cathy, demoting him from foster brother to servant. Heathcliff, on his side, plans to apply the same treatment to Hareton, a strategy for revenge that, as can be seen, springs from Heathcliff's hurt masculine pride rather than his love for Cathy. Heathcliff succeeds initially in humiliating Hareton. He fails to foresee, though, the mutual sexual attraction that will slowly unfurl between the young man and young Catherine. This love will eventually place Heathcliff as regards the young couple in the same position Hindley occupied in the past regarding Cathy and himself; by seeking to destroy the son, he will become a replica of the tyrannical father, at which point Heathcliff knows his revenge plans have failed.

Heathcliff's good looks, as I have noted, play an important role in his characterisation but, for all we know, his sexual life dwindles to nothing after his return from his disastrous wedding night with Isabella. The adult Hareton, in contrast, is often treated as an erotic object. Not even Lockwood can help noticing that "The fellow is as handsome a rustic as need be seen ... but then he does his best apparently to make the least of his advantages" (296). Years before this moment, ladylike Catherine, aged 13, is appalled to discover that brutish Hareton, aged 19, whom she has just met, is her cousin. Even Nelly feels the pull of Hareton's looks:

I could scarcely refrain from smiling at this antipathy to the poor fellow, who was a well-made, athletic youth, good-looking in features, and stout and healthy, but attired in garments befitting his daily occupations of working on the farm and lounging among the moors after rabbits and game. Still, I thought I could detect in his physiognomy a mind owning better qualities than his father ever possessed. (194)

"Mr. Heathcliff, I believe," Nelly continues "had not treated him physically ill; thanks to his fearless nature, which offered no temptation to that course of oppression..." (194) but has prevented Hareton from being educated. Hareton's pleasing appearance is the object of yet another peculiar moment which suggests that there is a certain homoerotic pleasure in the sadomasochistic relationship between Heathcliff and the boy, and that also announces the eventual birth of Catherine's love. When the still dismayed girl asks Heathcliff whether Hareton is indeed her cousin in his and Nelly's presence:

"Yes," [Heathcliff] replied, "your mother's nephew. Don't you like him?"

Catherine looked queer.

"Is he not a handsome lad?" he continued.

The uncivil little thing stood on tiptoe, and whispered a sentence in Heathcliff's ear.

He laughed; Hareton darkened: I perceived he was very sensitive to suspected slights, and had obviously a dim notion of his inferiority. But his master or guardian chased the frown by exclaiming –

"You'll be the favourite among us, Hareton! She says you are a –What was it? Well, something very flattering" (216)

Heathcliff sends then the couple away for a walk, boasting to Nelly he has completely annulled Hareton's capacity to relate to other people –and implicitly his sexuality. He falls next into a narcissistic reverie, praising himself for his success in degrading Hareton and, enjoying, above all, the pleasure that Hareton's devotion gives him. Apparently, Heathcliff cannot see he when he declares that "I can sympathise with all his feelings, having felt them myself" (216) that this sympathy will eventually cause his downfall. By identifying his youth with Hareton's and, later, the boy's looks with Cathy's, whom he eerily resembles, Heathcliff unwittingly characterises Hareton as the child he and his love could never have. The last part of the novel deals with Heathcliff giving in to the realisation that his 'son' Hareton is a better man than he has ever been. He must ultimately die not only to join Cathy but also to let Hareton enjoy the chance of being a whole man.

Young Catherine's role in this generational change in masculinity is at the same time essential and irrelevant. Possibly the most horrendous section of the novel concerns her marriage to his cousin Linton. Heathcliff humiliates her physically and psychologically, forcing her to marry his sickly son and endure alone his early death

caused by consumption. Heathcliff's own pride as a father, though, is mortified by this cruel, weak, effeminate boy who, despite his education, suffers much from any comparison with Hareton. Brontë is surely mocking Heathcliff's masculinity rather than Isabella's femininity by giving him this unsuitable son, making Heathcliff ashamed of his biological legacy. "Do you know", he tells Nelly "that, twenty times a day, I covet Hareton, with all his degradation? I'd have loved the lad had he been some one else..." (215) –implicitly his own son, unless we should give the word 'covet' an open homoerotic connotation.

Heathcliff senses months before the younger Catherine that Hareton is falling in love with her, when he sees how the boy craves for her books, that is to say, for an education. This is also the first time Heathcliff starts worrying about the uncanny similarity between Hareton and his dead aunt, the late Cathy. Her daughter starts warming towards Hareton once her husband Linton dies when she finds out he's been defending her from Heathcliff's threats. In a reversal of the confession scene in which the mother tells Nelly it would degrade her to marry Heathcliff, the daughter appeases Hareton's fears that she'll be ashamed of him if they become friends to begin immediately to teach him to read. Despite the domesticity suggested by the reading lessons, it is important to note that Hareton teaches Catherine about nature in return. Nelly's comment to Lockwood that she "has to scold them every evening, for their late rambles" in the moors (306) leaves little doubt as to their common enjoyment of the landscape, and, presumably, of passion, for what else could be expected of two unchaperoned young people spending time alone every day? The values of civilisation and nature, companionship and eroticism, come thus together in their union.

Heathcliff realises that the rebellion of the younger generation is unstoppable in a scene that follows from their first joint act of disobedience. Hareton plants a flower garden for Catherine, mortally offending the main servant Joseph and enraging Heathcliff. Catherine taunts her particular domestic tyrant, telling him that she and Hareton have a right to the land, which prompts a very violent reaction. The combination of Hareton's entreaties and Catherine's eyes –the only feature she shares with her mother– quenches Heathcliff's rage for the moment:

"You must learn to avoid putting me in a passion, or I shall really murder you some time! Go with Mrs. Dean, and keep with her; and confine your insolence to her ears. As to Hareton Earnshaw, if I see him listen to you, I'll send him seeking his bread where he can get it! Your love will make him an outcast and a beggar. Nelly, take her; and leave me, all of you! Leave me!" (316)

This is the crucial moment when the triangle Cathy-Heathcliff-Hindley is transformed into the new triangle Catherine-Hareton-Heathcliff. If Heathcliff fulfils his threat and casts Hareton out, he will make a second Heathcliff of the young man and the cycle of violence will never stop. Suddenly, the idea that there is enjoyment in torturing Hareton goes sour, as Heathcliff begins to realise that he is hurting himself by hurting the person who most resembles (and loves) him. Even more than Cathy.

Potentially, Hareton is a second Heathcliff but no son is ever identical to his father. What most distinguishes the young man from his mock father is his immense capacity for loyalty. The fact that he loves Heathcliff and is loyal to him despite his constant humiliation proves that abuse needn't result in hatred. If Heathcliff grows up to be an evil man, it is not only because Hindley abused him as a child but because his

nature is sadistic. Hareton, in contrast, is simply made of better materials. Emily Brontë, Charlotte wrote, “held that mercy and forgiveness are the divinest attributes of the Great Being who made both man and woman, and that what clothes the Godhead in glory, can disgrace no form of feeble humanity” (2000: xlv). No other character exemplifies compassion like Hareton. Even Catherine is won over when, still resisting her entreaties to reject Heathcliff, Hareton explains that he will not consent her to criticise Heathcliff in the same way he should not criticise her father, Edgar. “That she learns to accommodate Hareton's filial affection for his monstrous ‘father’ indicates the scope and range of her new maturity,” Oates writes, “... For suddenly it becomes possible at *Wuthering Heights*, as if for the first time in human history, that one generation will not be doomed to repeat the tragic errors of its parents.” (1982)

This chance to change the future is sealed in a scene of great beauty, one of the best in the whole novel. Nelly enjoys a moment of bliss, watching the young couple read together. Significantly, she highlights the pleasure she takes in Hareton's evolution: “You know,” she tells Lockwood “they both appeared in a measure my children: I had long been proud of one; and now, I was sure, the other would be a source of equal satisfaction. His honest, warm, and intelligent nature shook off rapidly the clouds of ignorance and degradation in which it had been bred; and Catherine's sincere commendations acted as a spur to his industry” (318). Heathcliff unexpectedly comes in and watches them unnoticed until they both lift their eyes –both pairs so much like Cathy's– to him. What shatters Heathcliff's self-possession is Hareton's “singular” resemblance to Cathy, “particularly striking” in this moment “because his senses were alert, and his mental faculties wakened to unwonted activity” (318). Innocently (or not), Nelly tells us “I suppose this resemblance disarmed Mr. Heathcliff.” (318)

After some minutes of silent, deep emotion, Heathcliff announces that his struggle to “demolish the two houses” is over; he could hurt his enemies now more than ever but, as he says, “where is the use?” (319). This, he points out, is not magnanimity; it is, rather, the depletion of “the faculty of enjoying their destruction” (319). Heathcliff tells Nelly next that “there is a strange change approaching” by which he means a disinterest in life so massive that it will eventually carry him to his grave, after what would be described today as a period of lethal anorexia. About Catherine he says that “I earnestly wish she were invisible: her presence invokes only maddening sensations.” Hareton's presence, though, moves Heathcliff far more; so much, in fact, that he wishes he could “without seeming insane” never see the young man again. As he tells Nelly,

“Five minutes ago Hareton seemed a personification of my youth, not a human being; I felt to him in such a variety of ways, that it would have been impossible to have accosted him rationally...

Well, Hareton's aspect was the ghost of my immortal love; of my wild endeavours to hold my right; my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish –

But it is frenzy to repeat these thoughts to you: only it will let you know why, with a reluctance to be always alone, his society is no benefit; rather an aggravation of the constant torment I suffer –and it partly contributes to render me regardless how he and his cousin go on together. I can give them no attention any more.” (320)

Heathcliff's monomania about his departed love –his longing for Catherine's ghost to take him away with her is a manifestation of self-defeat. What kills Heathcliff is both



Cathy's refusal to love him, which haunts him for life, *and* the realisation that, while truly being his son more than Linton, Hareton's presence cannot make up for Cathy's absence. Quite the opposite: the young man's happiness requires Heathcliff's death, for without this Hareton cannot be empowered to become Catherine's husband. Heathcliff, in short, must be sacrificed to ensure the continuity of the generations and of patriarchal masculinity; his 'children' (or Nelly's) cannot become adults in his blighting, constricting shadow.

When Heathcliff dies, Hareton suffers alone, disregarding how much he benefits from his death as a man and as an Earnshaw. In Nelly's words:

"He sat by the corpse all night, weeping in bitter earnest. He pressed its hand, and kissed the sarcastic, savage face that every one else shrank from contemplating; and bemoaned him with that strong grief which springs naturally from a generous heart, though it be as tough as tempered steel." (332)

Only he and Nelly accompany Heathcliff to his grave –the former in genuine mourning; the latter, somehow to make sure the villain stays in it. Having buried his 'bad' father, Hareton is ready to become Catherine's good man, leaving Wuthering Heights to the ghosts of Cathy and Heathcliff in order to move to the Grange, her home. Lockwood's sight of the graves of Edgar, Catherine and Heathcliff closes the novel, as he wonders "how any one could ever imagine unquiet slumbers for the sleepers in that quiet earth" (333). Many readers have found a final irony in Lockwood's elegiac mood in view of the sightings of Heathcliff's and Cathy's ghosts. It is, perhaps, time to believe Nelly's avowal that the dead are at peace and vindicate the final image of the living couple. In Lockwood's jealous words: "*They* are afraid of nothing... Together, they would brave Satan and all his legions." (333; original emphasis)

### **Conclusions: Correcting the Romantic misreading**

In conclusion, we misread *Wuthering Heights* by focusing on the Romantic love between Heathcliff and Cathy, as most literary criticism and film adaptations do. No doubt, the twin themes of identity and otherness are crucial issues to interpret this overrich novel. The identification between mother and daughter seemingly connects the two generations and, from this point of view, we could affirm that the second Catherine, who withstands the patriarchal tyrant's rage and gives Hareton back his dignity, is a true feminist heroine within the tight limits of early 19<sup>th</sup> century patriarchy. What I propose here, though, is that masculinity and not femininity is the central concern in Brontë's novel, and that the most complete identification to be found in the text is that between Heathcliff and Hareton.

Heathcliff's attempt to reduce Hareton's life to a parody of his own misfires when he realises he is destroying the only person he loves and loves him after Cathy's death. The fact that Hareton never ceases loving Heathcliff agrees with my interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* as an elegy for the passing of Romantic love personified in the character of this Gothic villain in love. The question that remains to be answered is to what extent young Catherine's 'new man' will be different from his patriarchal predecessors, though, given the emphasis on the plural *they* and the use of the word 'together' in Lockwood's last words about them –and Nelly's motherly presence near them– it is to be believed that Hareton and Catherine will enjoy a far

more complete union of body and soul: the passionate love that Cathy and Heathcliff can never articulate.

Arguably, this is just an alternative misreading and the novel is at heart a fantasy for women about how to control male aggression by breaking the chain of abuse that links monstrous patriarchal fathers like Heathcliff (or Hindley) with loving sons like Hareton (but not less patriarchal). The young man's redemption through Heathcliff's death and Catherine's love points, after all, towards an uncertain future, which is, let's not forget it, our own time post-Romantic time.

## NOTES

1. Branwell was employed as a tutor by the Robinsons, in the same household that employed his sister Anne as a governess. He fell in love with his wife's employer, Lydia Robinson, who reciprocated him but disowned Branwell as soon as she became a widow and had the chance to make a better marriage. Branwell and Anne had to return to their home as soon as the scandal broke out. Branwell's decline, which lasted for three years (1845-1848) coincides with the period in which Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* and Anne, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, which has a main character, Arthur Huntingdon, based on Branwell. Mrs. Robinson, incidentally, once transformed into an important London hostess by her second marriage, forced Gaskell to withdraw her account of the affair with Branwell for the second edition of the biography.

2. I'm quoting from the edition of *Wuthering Heights* by Pauline Nestor for Penguin (Harmondsworth, 1995 (2000)). All subsequent page numbers in the quotations from Brontë's novel refer to this edition.

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