Universitat de Lleida

Harmful and alternative masculinities in Victorian literature: The case of *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Marta Quellos i Olive

English Studies

Treball de Fi de Grau

Supervisor: M. Isabel Santaularia Capdevila

Abstract

The concept of masculinity has changed and evolved over time to a point where it may be difficult to fully grasp its whole complexity when situating it in a specific time period. Nevertheless, its objective stays fixed: guarantee men's domination and the preservation of patriarchy. This article explores how Victorian literature challenges hegemonic notions of masculinity and undermines patriarchal imperatives from the 19th century, serving us as a trust-worthy source of reference. Using the representation of male characters in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) as case studies, I analyse the way the authors articulate a critique of Victorian notions of masculinity and expose the ills of patriarchal men. However, the authors take a step further. Through characters like Heathcliff, Huntingdon, Hareton or Gilbert Markham they do not only provide examples of what they condemn but also alternatives to the patriarchal masculinity, literary archetypes, or the actual men in their lives. This article improves our understanding of Victorian masculinities and their relevance in contemporary discourse on gender and society.

Keywords: masculinities, Victorian literature, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, gender dynamics, hegemonic masculinity

Resum

El concepte de masculinitat ha canviat i evolucionat amb el pas del temps fins a arribar al punt on pot resultar difícil entendre del tot la seva complexitat al situar-lo en un punt específic de la historia. Tot i així, els seus objectius no canvien: assegurar el domini dels homes i la preservació del patriarcat. Aquest article explora com la literatura victoriana desafia les nocions hegemòniques de la masculinitat i mina els imperatius patriarcals del segle XIX, donant lloc a una Font de referencia fiable. Utilitzant la representació dels personatges masculins de *Cims Borrascosos* (1847) de Emily Brontë i de *La Llogatera de Wildfell Hall* (1848) de Anne Brontë com a casos pràctics, analitzo la manera en què els autors articulen una crítica a les nocions victorianes de la masculinitat i exposen les parts negatives dels homes patriarcals. Però les autores fan una passa més enllà. A través de personatges com Heathcliff, Huntingdon, Hareton o Gilbert Markham, no només ens donen exemples de què condemnen sinó també les alternatives a aquella masculinitat patriarcal, arquetips literaris o homes reals de les seves vides. Aquest article millora l'enteniment de

les masculinitats victorianes i la seva rellevància en el discurs contemporani sobre el gènere i la societat.

Paraules clau: masculinitats, literatura victoriana, *Cims Borrascosos*, *La Llogatera de Wildfell Hall*, dinàmiques de gènere, masculinitat hegemònica

Resumen

El concepto de masculinidad ha cambiado y evolucionado con el paso del tiempo hasta llegar al punto donde puede resultar difícil entender del todo su complejidad al situarlo en un punto específico de la historia. Sin embargo, sus objetivos no cambian: garantizar el dominio de los hombres y la preservación del patriarcado. Este artículo explora cómo la literatura victoriana desafía las nociones hegemónicas de la masculinidad y mina los imperativos patriarcales del siglo XIX, resultando en una fuente de referencia fiable. Utilizando la representación de los personajes masculinos en *Cumbres Borrascosas* (1847) de Emily Brontë y *La Inquilina de Wildfell Hall* (1848) de Anne Brontë como casos prácticos, analizo la manera en la que los autores articulan una crítica a las nociones victorianas de la masculinidad y exponen las partes negativas de los hombres patriarcales. Pero las autoras dan un paso más allá. A través de personajes como Heathcliff, Huntingdon, Hareton o Gilbert Markham, no solo nos dan ejemplos de qué condenan sino también las alternativas a esa masculinidad patriarcal, arquetipos literarios o hombres reales de sus vidas. Este artículo mejora el entendimiento de las masculinidades victorianas y su relevancia en el discurso contemporáneo sobre el género y la sociedad.

Palabras clave: masculinidades, literatura victoriana, *Cumbres Borrascosas*, *La Inquilina de Wildfell Hall*, dinámicas de género, masculinidad hegemónica

Acknowledgements

First of all I would like to, of course, thank my supervisor M. Isabel Santaularia Capdevila for guiding me and investing her precious time and energy into the success of this project. Your patience is unmatched and I owe you everything.

I also have to thank my partner, Álex, for his unconditional support when he had to hug me, wipe my tears, and tell me that everything would be alright when I could not see the light at the end of the tunnel. It has been hard but we've made it!

And, finally, I have to thank myself for not giving up even if I wanted to, for pushing until the end despite the struggles, and for never having doubted the fact that I would finish this.

I am actually just thankful it is over.

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Introduction

Throughout history, the world has been ruled by all sorts of countries and all sorts of civilizations, but almost always it has been ruled by men. We can attribute men's capacity to continue ruling to hegemonic masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is the way how men in positions of power legitimate and reproduce their social relationships in a way that grants them their dominance (Reeser, 2020). This means that they use their power given by social standards to maintain these standards in the way they are in order to obtain benefits and ensure their privileges. Nevertheless, the way this is done varies depending on the period of history. In the case of the Victorian era, which is the focus of this study, society was patriarchal and organised by the doctrine of the separate spheres. This means that women belonged to the private or domestic sphere, while men to the public one (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). This arrangement guaranteed that men had full access to the means of production and had control over home and women. It also meant that the type of masculinity that was hegemonic and promoted men's superior position relied on qualities such as dominance or authority disregarding sensitivity, emotionality or softness.

Even if one might resort to history books to learn about 19th-century England, there is an often overviewed considerable amount of information contained inside the literature produced during that time that can provide us with a perspective on gender issues, hegemonic masculinity, and men and women's behaviour. That is the case of Emily Brontë and Anne Brontë in their respective novels *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Not only do these novels offer an accurate portrayal of different types of masculinity, but they also show us the impact that they had and offer a proposal of more acceptable alternatives.

The purpose of this study is to find and analyse said information and relate it to the environment and time period in which it was written while also proving the extremely important role of literature as source material to find information about the times in which it was produced. In order to do so, I will study significant male characters from both books and identify the type of masculinity they represent and which aspect of Victorian society they are reflecting. Through these two types of characters, the authors expose the ills of patriarchal masculinity as well as giving the reader models of masculinity that are much more convenient for the heroines of the story.

The project will begin with a theoretical framework where I will explain the historical context of masculinities and the standard Victorian gender roles, then I will present a biographical background of the authors which will be linked to the extensive analysis and categorization of the characters, all to be summarized in the conclusions. An annex is provided with a basic story line of all the male characters featured in the study and a description of their actions and personality traits to ensure the reader has the necessary context to understand the analysis.

The Brontë sisters challenged the literary archetypes and undermined patriarchal arrangements by focusing on the ills that festered inside domestic scenarios, where those that were supposed to provide for women and protect them could be monsters. Once these men were out of scene, their female protagonists could explore alternatives who were kinder, more gentle and more pliable to their wishes. Emily and Anne Brontë's literary works are still relevant nowadays because they offered a sensible and reasoned criticism of the accepted Victorian gender roles and hegemonic masculinity and wrote female characters who dared to seek a better life for themselves, with better men as partners.

Theoretical framework

Understanding (hegemonic) masculinity

Masculinity and femininity, even if they are traditionally associated to innate qualities of our bodies, are actually culturally and historically conditioned. The Western notions of what gender is and how each member of society ought to express theirs may only trace back to the 17th or 18th century (Buchbinder, 2013). According to Reeser (2020), "the birth of the study of masculinity in the 1980s can be characterized as largely non-literary in nature, with the social sciences taking the most visible lead in what was then a new and sometimes controversial approach to gender" (12). Without a paradigm that helped society understand the male experience, such as the current Male Sex Role Identity (MSRI) theory[1], the most relevant proposition was the measurement of a man's traits along a continuum that portrayed male and female traits as polar opposites and that placed the individual on said continuum according to how appropriate his characteristics were for his sex.

[1] Theory that holds that for individuals to become psychologically mature as members of their sex, they must acquire male or female sex-role identity, manifested by having the sex-appropriate traits, attitudes, and interests that psychologically validate or affirm their biological sex.

This differentiation created a dichotomy between femininity and masculinity that placed men in a position of having to avoid anything that could make them any similar to the opposite sex. Thus, the most common expressions of masculinity still rely on men's typical physical traits or expected behaviours and positions inside the society, which simultaneously perpetuate the sex discrimination even further. Men hold and take for granted most positions of power and the standard model of masculinity has promoted among them a lack of emotion, a tendency towards aggressiveness, and a sense of superiority above other members of society which they consider on a lower level. The type of masculinity that functions as the ideal that men are expected to measure up to is known as hegemonic masculinity. Adhering to this ideal grants men positions of authority and legitimates their superior status.

Hegemonic masculinity is one of the most influential theoretical concepts in the history of masculinities. Authors of the subject agree that, as mentioned above, hegemonic masculinity could be defined as the way in which men in positions of power legitimate and reproduce their social relationships in a way that grants them their dominance (Reeser, 2020). Hegemonic masculinity is cisgender and heterosexual, abled-bodied and is always subjected to a specific historical and relational situation. It is usually promoted through the mass media, since all the newspapers, books, or films that we consume perpetuate the stereotypical representation of masculinity, but is also reinforced through daily interactions. Different kinds of masculinities, then, will be more or less accepted depending on how far or close they are to the hegemonic kind, the most desired one, and this may bring up some performance anxieties (Reeser, 2020). According to Connell (1993), the key relations in the model can be sketched out through four categories: hegemony, subordination, complicity, and marginalization. Hegemony guarantees that "a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life" (105). Subordination entails that positions of authority are sustained on "specific gender relations of dominance and subordination between groups of men" (106). Complicity implies that most men do not strictly fit the hegemonic pattern but still defend it because the subordination of women and others benefits them. Finally, marginalization stands for how "the interplay of gender with other structures such as class and race creates further relationships between masculinities" (108), meaning that the survival of hegemonic masculinity depends on rising as superior over the other ones.

Hegemonic masculinity, though, is not fixed and can change over time depending on the evolution of society. This evolution is affected by the incorporation of traits of subordinated minorities that guarantee the survival of hegemony since it adapts to new times but without

ever abdicating authority. Hegemonic masculinity may, then, present itself as hybrid and appropriate non-hegemonic traits in order to paradoxically further reinforce their status as hegemonic (Reeser, 2020). Even though hegemonic masculinity remains the ideal men are supposed to adhere to, it does not mean that all men feel comfortable with hegemonic notions of what being a man is like and throughout history we can find different models of masculinity that escape the parameters traditionally regarded as male, such as the courtier, the dandy, the gentleman or the metrosexual (Reeser, 2020).

Given the different types of masculinity that exist, scholars started treating masculinity as plural and the MSRI paradigm met its alternative version, the Sex Role Strain (SRS) paradigm, which stated that sex roles are problematic "in the sense that traits or qualities taken to define that role are based on shared ideas about what a man is or ought to be" (Reeser, 2020, 14). The simplification of the male sex role was finally questioned and substituted by the idea of masculinities existing as a plural concept and the male experiences varying depending on their social-historical-cultural contexts. Scholars finally realised that masculinity had to be considered an individual object of study and not the standard from which other options such as femininity or homosexuality derived from; it had actually been this mentality the reason why masculinities maintained its power and men stayed far from critique (Reeser, 2020).

This new mentality helped create a relationship between feminism and masculinity that, however, was not instantly peaceful. Additionally, there are other social causes that have challenged the hegemonic ideals, such as sexual liberation movements, civil rights, pacifism, the anti-gender movement etc. In the same way as with feminism, men have displayed two different types of reactions to all these oppositional movements: they either enter a state of crisis and try to protect their privileges under the pretension that these are threatening for them and the social order or, in other cases, attempt to change and to consider other realities besides theirs as valid. Actually, men's studies during the 1990s were defined by the suspiciousness of mythopoetic and Jungian-influenced attempts of repositioning masculinity as essential or natural. The mythopoetic men movement, defined as a series of therapeutic group activities that used myths and fairy tales as a way of interpreting challenges that men face in society, though, had the objective of constructing a new form of hegemonic masculinity that pretended to be less self-destructive and reconstruct men's emotional bonds with each other while further promoting the concept of plural masculinities (Reeser, 2020).

Even though society is much more attuned to new forms of masculinity, it does not mean that hegemonic masculinity has disappeared. Men's masculinist behaviour has led to a toxic reality where male hegemony is deemed as unquestionable and any social progress that might suppose a menace to it is rejected by a significant part of the population. Toxic masculinity, then, can be described as the traditional and cultural norms associated with hegemonic masculinity that are harmful to themselves and others. In our Western society, those would be male dominance, misogyny, chauvinism, female infantilization and subordination, emotional repression, aggressiveness, and all the concepts that shape the "macho man" (Siddique, 2023, 4). Even though there have been changes in the conception of masculinity, there are toxic forms of behaviour in a society that still guarantee that men occupy positions of authority.

Gender in Victorian times

The doctrine of the separate spheres in Victorian society

Society has always been patriarchal, at least in the West, but what we often tend to forget is that the traditional gender roles and behavioural norms that some men take for granted are actually rooted back in Victorian standards, which still have an impact on current domestic environments.

Victorian society was conditioned by the doctrine of the separate spheres. Women belonged to the private or domestic sphere, while men to the public one (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). This distinction was based on the scientifically supported concepts that men and women were naturally different and, therefore, they had to act according to their gender characteristics, reinforcing social expectations. Additionally, these differences were regarded as complementary: their happiness depended on giving and receiving what they or the other lacked (Ruskin, 1865 as cited in Dominguez, 2019).

This segregation by sex was applied to and affected every aspect of men and women's life. For example, women were considered victims of their own hormonal cycle and seen as pure, weak, and passionless beings whose priority was their reproductive function (deprived of any form of desire, surely) and did not have any self-control (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014; Cordea, 2013). Husbands did even mutilate their wives' sexual organs under the precept of "correcting them" and for the public it was totally justified to do so (Dominguez, 2019). For the Victorians, law, mental health, medical violence, etc. everything interacted in gendered ways (Dominguez, 2019).

Women in the Victorian era

Women had to stay at home, raise the children, take care of the husband, run the household, and, most importantly, become their husband's source of comfort and advice (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014; McDonell, 2018). They belonged to this quiet and monotonous place, the only space where they could be fully safe (Cordea, 2013). Even if the household was labelled as their area, women's role was still reduced to being men's supporters, a concept reinforced by religion in the way that it imposed on them purity and exemplary behaviour if they wanted to avoid going to hell. The home also was a key space in relation to a man's masculinity because it was there where they were educated and disciplined, and it was there where they acquired full adult status as householders (Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017). Thus, the wife had to comply with all her husband's petitions and choices, even if they disapproved of them, and be willing to become an excellent observer to constantly keep men happy (Cordea, 2013; Dominguez, 2019).

Women did participate in their husbands' careers by giving them occasional advice and helping them reach their goals, and could experiment some degree of accomplishment in doing so, but they never received any credit for their contributions (Lewis, 1991). Women's voices were silenced, but they were clever enough to use their role to their advantage by, for example, participating in local elections or serving in local government. They used their knowledge of the domestic sphere to demonstrate that, thanks to it, they did belong in the public one, too, by possessing a kind of knowledge that men did not (Lewis, 1991). On the other hand, "not only were these separate spheres keeping women from many careers and public activities, but they were also used by many anti-suffragists as support for why women should not gain the right to vote" (McDonell, 2018, 17), as well as pointing it as an indicator that husbands could represent their marriage in the public sphere well enough so that the wife did not have the need to do so (McDonell, 2018).

Even if unmarried women had their rights to property, the indicator of a woman's value and virtue was her body, so in order to comply with these social expectations of purity and innocence, she did not have full authority over it and most of the times she had to follow rules over her own will or desires. In other words, the body of the Victorian female can be considered an almost political space in the way in which all parts of society seemed to have a formed opinion on them out of which all were more important than women's (Dominguez, 2019). Even if they were regarded as physically weaker, women had the duty of being morally superior to men and help them maintain and instil the moral integrity of everyone in

the household, including their children (Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017; McDonell, 2018). Moreover, in the eyes of the law a married couple was regarded as a single person: it was taken for granted that the husband would fulfil his role as the protector and the wife would comply with her duties at home (Cordea, 2013). Actually, unmarried women could have control over their property and inheritance, they could receive a trust, act as executors of a will, and act as administrators, which they could not do after marriage. Once they got married, a woman's property was considered her husband's. This and the fact that some men would marry a woman for the land she possessed is the reason why wealthy families made sure their daughters would be able to keep their inheritance and fortune once they were married, and insisted on them marrying a good man, which the mother of the family usually took charge of ensuring (McDonell, 2018).

Victorian women did have a romanticized idea of what they wanted their future husband to be like: gentle and considerate, their friend, even someone who could be their "master" and teach them about the world and offer them an equal partnership in marriage at the same time (McDonell, 2018). After the Enlightenment, love matches gained popularity and some of them even considered romance to be an essential element before marrying someone and started worrying about marrying the wrong man, but more often rather than not women ended in abusive and loveless marriages that offered them no possible escape, while men could be promiscuous and violent without social or legal punishment (McDonell, 2018; Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). Women ended up "fearing the idea of entering into the institution [of marriage] while also fearing the possibility of not getting married" (McDonell, 2018, 20). Even if towards the end of the Victorian era, women had more job opportunities opening up for them in areas such as nursing or clerical jobs, for most of the 1800s women's lives revolved around their household, since they were mainly not allowed to get education outside of their homes that focused on something other than becoming good wives[2] (Cordea, 2013; Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017). Even in the case of nursing, a "woman's" job that could help them make the transition from private to public sphere, doctors had the tendency to select lower-class women instead of gentlewomen to avoid the risk of insubordination (Lewis, 1991).

[2] This mainly applies to upper and middle-class women, since working-class women had to work.

The role of men in the Victorian era

Men were expected to work for long hours in order to provide the commodities their family needed; he represented power, defence, creation, intellect, adventure and conquest, so their duty was to protect their wives from danger and temptation (Cordea, 2013). Men, tough, also had to experience their sexuality in a “self-policing” and “self-regulating” way (Friedman, 2010, 3). This means that they needed to, at least towards society, appear to be modest and restrained, even if they actually were not. However, even when a man was known to be promiscuous, the consequences for their actions almost never equalled those for women, especially in cases like adultery, which for women involved their absolute social downfall but for men it was seen as normal and unrelated to the love for their wife (Dominguez, 2019). However, they could condemn themselves and their family to poverty if they spent too much time in the domestic sphere (Fitzpatrick, 2015). This gender differentiation can be linked to the concept of men being considered intellectual beings: they were capable of reason, independence, rationality, self-interest, etc. (Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017). Women, on the other hand, were regarded as unable to regulate their emotions and as non-libidinous beings, so adultery for women automatically meant being in love with another man. All these pernicious rules allowed men a certain freedom and independence that women, trapped at home, did not have (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). Women were considered, and actually almost always were, fully dependent on men, while men and masculinity revolved around being proud and protective of their wives from their position of power over them (Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017). Men were infused with a sense of pride and protectiveness, supported by their culture and society, that led them to feeling superior over the women around them. Moreover, masculinity granted men certain privileges and saved them from social exclusion, while women could not go anywhere alone and were excluded from certain spaces (Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017).

All these gender roles were learnt through gender socialization, the transmission of the cultural values associated to masculinity and femininity that begins shortly after birth. A life-long social pressure of conforming to those gender roles will, then, guarantee that most members of society will stick to them. In other words, men in Victorian times were socialised into gender roles conditioned by the historical era, social arrangements, and the assumptions about men’s superiority. Those who dared to defy them could only expect social exclusion (Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017). Emotional tenderness, for example, started off by being seen compatible with masculinity, but it was not any more towards the end of

the 19th century. Some variants to standard Victorian masculinity have been unveiled with the passing of time, which make us take into consideration effeminacy and homosexuality in Victorian men (Karajgi, Senior & Nagi, 2017). The fact that alternative masculinities were circulating does not mean, though, that they were hegemonic but scholars argue that, in general, gender roles in the 19th century should be re-examined in search of homoeroticism between men among the mainstream ideologies of masculinity, and that different kinds of masculinities (hegemonic and non-hegemonic) interacted with each other on a more regular basis than apparent (Friedman, 2015).

The separation of the domestic and public spheres ended up leading to an idealisation of the image of the home, thus increasing and further invisibilizing domestic violence. The home represented women's safe space, so possible physical and sexual violence that could happen inside those walls was easily dismissed (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). The public sphere, and further on the law, condemned said violence but also "valued the privacy of the domestic sphere" and trusted the male authority and the women's obedience (Surridge, 2005 (14) as cited on Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014).

Queen Victoria's influence in gender roles

All these ideals were actively promoted by Queen Victoria herself, who was considered a role model and an ideal among the middle-class society in the 19th century. She re-examined the power dynamics between men and women and insisted on the separation of the two spheres. Men were not superior per se, but each gender had a clear role and nature that separated it from the other (McDonell, 2018). Queen Victoria insisted on this gender differentiation, thus highlighting women's heightened moral duty (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). Queen Victoria, at least for her people, was devoted to her husband and children and was modest, religious, and self-sacrificing (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). In other words, she made sure to project and promote the image of the perfect Victorian wife, even in her paintings, and made sure people knew that married women had more freedom than unmarried ones, at least in the sense that they could move more freely than single women, who did not have a role to play in society (Dominguez, 2019; McDonell, 2018). She was right in the way that married women could navigate and function in society much easily, but this does not mean that being married to the wrong man could not make you more enslaved than being single. The public viewed royalty as the example of proper behaviour and as the middle-class feminine ideal for women, even if some aspects of reality were hidden or distorted such as the fact that Queen Victoria did not like children (McDonell, 2018). In a way or another, these

strict moral rules and classifications, added to the influence of religion, granted the Queen more power and popularity over the population (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014).

Nevertheless, influenced by women's new ideas of romance and their desire for loving considerate men, Queen Victoria also promoted a new and more benevolent ideal of masculinity (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014; McDonell, 2018), so the Victorian Era also gave birth to a number of changes related to women's safety and wellbeing, such as legislation regulating marriage, domestic violence or divorce, or the normalisation of the use of anaesthesia during childbirth, although not without certain social resistance (McDonell, 2018). For example, the 1853 *Act for the Better Prevention and Punishment of Aggravated Assaults on Women and Children* improved the women's legal protection and, despite not fully banning domestic violence, it limited what men were allowed to do to women (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). The 1857 *Divorce Bill* recognised violence as grounds for divorce, as well as protecting the wife's property, which up to then fully belonged to her husband (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). And then, the 1878 *Matrimonial Causes Act* finally allowed women to obtain their children's custody after divorcing on grounds of cruelty and significantly reduced the price of the proceeding (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014; McDonell, 2018). If the situation was not bad enough to be granted a divorce, women could be granted a "divorce *a mensa et thoro*", which was a legal separation (McDonell, 2018, 39). However, all these laws failed to consider emotional abuse as violence and women were expected to withstand the situation and control their feelings (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). Additionally, women needed more than one offense to prove the abusive relationship in order to get the divorce, always risking their social status in the process as well as their children and properties, so the divorce laws ended up mainly benefitting men (Dominguez, 2019; McDonell, 2018). For this reason, most of the times, the victims opted for silence, were forced into it or the law took too much time to carry out any legal action to protect them, sometimes because it was in their interest to preserve the perpetrator's reputation (Dominguez, 2019). There were further problems that complicated the situation: "In addition, the divorce court was based in London, a geographical restriction that prevented many working-class persons outside of the city from filing a petition with the court" (Dominguez, 2019, 18).

The Angel in the House, the Fallen Woman, and the Mad Woman

The standardization of the two spheres in the Victorian society, added to women's increased moral expectations led to the conceptualization of "the Angel in the House". The phrase finds its origin in a poem by Coventry Patmore written in 1854 in which he describes his wife as

the perfect example of what a Victorian wife should be like (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). Since women's virtue was tightly associated with their role in the household, how they performed those duties defined their whole value and existence (Dominguez, 2019). Women were supposed to maintain the moral purity of the household by being morally superior, innocent, domestic, and asexual (McDonell, 2018). Additionally, the motivation behind their angelic actions was not supposed to be self-interest or ambition, but always love towards their husband and family while being happy and grateful to do so (Fitzpatrick, 2015). The following quote illustrates the perception of women at the times:

> Women were supposed to be innocent, asexual creatures, who did not experience lust and only had sexual intercourse because it was her duty as a wife and because according to the social mores of the time she needed to produce children to complete the picture of domestic tranquillity. (McDonell, 2018, 24)

Women had to be so pure and were so isolated from their sexuality that they were not always informed about what would happen on their wedding night, resulting in life-long traumatic experiences, and were told to keep their pregnancies and childbirths carefully hidden (McDonell, 2018).

In contrast to the Angel in the House, the category "the Fallen Woman" was used to depict those women who were ostracized from society for daring to contradict the status quo, especially in relation to sex and sexuality. No matter if these women had had sex outside of marriage under their own will or if they had been assaulted or raped, their body was already linked to temptation (Dominguez, 2019). Divorced women also belonged to this category (McDonell, 2018). Fallen Women were the opposite of the Angel in the House: not chaste, nor innocent, submissive or self-sacrificing (Dominguez, 2019). Despite the laws that were being approved and that attempted to shelter women more, violence was still prominent both inside and outside marriages, and that is because women's sinning did not socially equal men's sinning in terms of wickedness and the laws only protected them to a certain point (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014; Dominguez, 2019). Consequently, "[i]t was extremely difficult for a married woman of good character/ repute to take a case and nearly impossible if the woman was single or a prostitute – even if the accused admitted the crime" (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014, 12). There were some cases in which the rapist did receive punishment for his actions but the voices of the victims were silenced and they were considered Fallen Women for the rest of their lives, meaning they would probably continue being abused in the future (Dominguez,

2019). Even if a woman was successful in obtaining her divorce sentence and her husband was proved to be an abuser, women had very limited job opportunities, had to face daily social scorn and had scarce financial security without their husband's support unless they were aristocratic women (McDonell, 2018).

It is for this reason that, even if the divorce rates increased in the Victorian era, the majority of women in situations of violence opted for staying married instead of risking social repudiation and the challenges of having to earn a living for themselves (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014; McDonell, 2018). Daring to request a divorce meant risking a woman's social and economic status, her safety, and her reputation, especially since the husband could accuse her of adultery for revenge, for which the consequences were extremely gendered in the 19th century (Dominguez, 2019). Additionally, it was the man of the household who had the last say in whether someone was allowed inside of the house or not, which led a number of fathers to kick out their daughters if they suspected them of being Fallen Women (Dominguez, 2019). Being a widow did not make it easier either, since they depended on the inheritance that their husband had left for them, which could be none at all. Trying to remarry would subject them to severe public scorn, and attempting to find a job was not an easy task and even then they were barely paid enough to survive (McDonell, 2018).

There was a debate regarding the possibility of Fallen Women redeeming themselves, but the "Contagious Diseases Acts" made evident how the Parliament contributed to their criminalisation. These were four laws passed between 1864 and 1869 that attempted to prevent the spread of contagious venereal diseases, although they were only applied to women and examined their bodies exclusively, to the point of even forcing them into prisons and hospitals (Dominguez, 2019). These acts had social consequences, though: women protested that they went against their rights because they were forced gynaecological procedures, while men claimed it went against their authority as fathers or husbands (Dominguez, 2019).

A third category worth mentioning that can help us understand the situation of women is the Mad Woman. These were women who had gone "mad", normally after being victims to marital abuse, and were locked into mental institutions or inside the house, for no one to see. Most of the times, of course, their madness was not literal but the expression of their discomfort with society and the audacity to voice their nonconformity. If they could not follow the rules, they would be made to disappear. Female mental stability was already regarded

as weaker since it was thought to be connected to her reproductive organs, so it was easier to label them as mad if they showed signs of promiscuity or immoral behaviour or if they were more affected by their hormonal cycle (Dominguez, 2019). There were regulations, of course (such as the “Lunacy Act” of 1845), but they were manipulated in order to harm women (Dominguez, 2019).

Literature as a source of historical information

Sometimes, literature can reveal aspects of gender and masculinity that might not be fully visible in daily life or in other kinds of cultural records. What happens in a literary text might not just be the character’s own crisis, but a larger cultural one that results from changes in what masculinity actually means in that specific moment in time (Reeser, 2020). In a culture with such an extraordinary focus on marriage and domesticity like the Victorian one, it does not go unnoticed how a great number of novelists chose the days leading up to marriage and the early days of it as a space of self-revision, personal growth, and conflict (Richardson, 2016). So it is through literature that us, as readers, can fully grasp the real conditions and implications of living in the Victorian Era, especially as a woman; not only because of the portrayal of the different kinds of abuse, but also because all of the nonconformity and protests that the authors were transmitting with them. The Victorians’ mental, moral, and social status depended on their home, so they reached a point where the frustration and disillusionment reached a historical peak (Richardson, 2016). We can be familiar with the models of conduct of the Victorian era, but through the analysis of documents and literary pieces we can notice how these models varied depending on gender and socioeconomic status and how all these separations were perpetuated by law (Dominguez, 2019). The symbolism that the Victorian authors placed on the house itself (doors creaking and slamming, hushed conversations, muffled sobs etc.) proves that telling the stories through the characters was not enough to portray everything they needed to say, but that they needed all the elements in their novels to provide their perspective (Richardson, 2016). While Victorian authors presented images of ideal femininity and domesticity, they also exposed marital discontentment and abuse.

Taking into account the importance of 19th-century classics to understand the Victorian period, I will now proceed to analyse what two emblematic works by the Brontë Sisters – Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*– reveal about traditional Victorian masculinity and gender roles and how the authors responded to what they perceived as unfair or wrong by presenting alternative, better husbands for their

female characters. In the section that follows, after introducing the novels, the authors and masculinity, I will provide an analysis that will reveal how both authors challenged Victorian mores in their rendition of what could be regarded as bad (toxic) and good masculinity.

Analysis

Wuthering Heights and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Focusing on the two novels under study, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, respectively, we can clearly observe in each of them how their authors were defying the Victorian standards and raising awareness of the unspoken cruel realities that society refused to openly condemn. Not only did they expose and denounce harmful variants of masculinity but they also implicitly promoted new forms of it.

Wuthering Heights tells the story of Catherine Earnshaw and her soulmate Heathcliff, a gipsy orphan whom her father adopted into the family after a trip to Liverpool. Growing up together, they form a deep and unbreakable bond that will lead them to fall in love with each other. However, Heathcliff's lower class ends up being an obstacle that results in Catherine marrying Edgar Linton. This betrayal will fully condition Heathcliff into planning a cold-blooded revenge that will unequivocally change both families' fates forever.

As this summary of the plot suggests, *Wuthering Heights* is a novel that revolves around Heathcliff's violent, obsessive, and jealous revenge and was perceived by the public as highly controversial due to the blunt descriptions of physical and emotional violence, as well as for its objection to the Victorian standards for religion, morality, social class, and gender (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). The tumultuous relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine, Catherine's marriage to Edgar, Heathcliff's marriage to Isabella, Cathy's marriage to Linton and Hareton etc. all of them illustrate in detail certain realities of the Victorian era that give us a clear image of their social expectations and how people's non-compliance with these standards was perceived. For Victorian readers, especially the female ones, *Wuthering Heights* was one of the first novels that showed a wife leaving a violent marriage, since Heathcliff's cruelty towards Isabella would not warrant her a separation in the eyes of the law (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). By allowing her to successfully escape, Emily Brontë was opening a world full of new possibilities to explore and an introduction to the new literary movement called "New Woman" fiction (Nicholl-Stimpson, 2014). This "New Woman" is someone who refuses to be a victim of the Victorian double moral standards and paves the way towards redefining the relation between sexes and the concept of marriage (Nicholl-

Stimpson, 2014), which shows that the Victorians did start to question the male authority and the real delimitations of abuse.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall includes the transcript of Helen Graham's diary, a mysterious widow who moves to Wildfell Hall with her son and becomes the neighbour (and love interest) of Gilbert Markham. He will uncover her past by reading her diary, which will reveal Helen's abusive marriage to Arthur Huntingdon, the alcoholic husband from whom she fled. The book follows Helen's struggle for independence and for protecting her son and herself from Huntingdon while trying to keep her pure morals and avoiding Markham's romantic advances.

One of this novel's main focus, and the element that probably has a major impact on the reader is Arthur Huntingdon's violence and abuse, physical, verbal, and sexual, towards Helen. Despite their union starting off as a love match, he is an alcoholic who cheats on Helen and mistreats both his wife and his child, and the novel portrays how love can turn into poison and how you never fully know someone until you are living with them; both Victorian husband and wife were set for deception (Richardson, 2016). Nevertheless, Victorian law did not consider marital rape a possibility, given that the woman became the husband's property after marriage along with her consent (Dominguez, 2019). It also uses the element of the household as the place where husband and wife's spheres and power overlap and thus as the main point of conflict (Richardson, 2016). Through this novel, Anne Brontë is capable of showing her public that marital rape should not be overlooked and that a woman can be perfectly trapped in a harmful relationship and still feel the social pressure of adhering to the ideal type and pleasing her husband and not wanting to divorce him, just like it happened to Helen (Dominguez, 2019). Not even in her personal diary is she openly capable of fully describing how much her marriage differs from the Victorian expectations, but instead she uses a subtle tone until towards her final entry she is capable of adding more crude details to her descriptions (Dominguez, 2019). Another complication to Helen's situation is her devotion to faith and religion, also typical from the Victorian era, which makes her unable to contemplate breaking the conditions of her marriage.

The world of Emily and Anne Brontë

We are a product of our environment, that's part of the human condition, and Emily and Anne Brontë were definitely no exception. In both *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* we can clearly observe the traits of what their lives were like, of who they were,

and how they heavily influenced their literary productions, especially the men of their lives and the literary archetypes that circulated at the times and that they were familiar with, which I will further develop in the following sub-section.

Outlining in the first place the general situation of the Brontë family, they were daughters of a North Irish teacher who graduated from Cambridge and a woman who belonged to an intellectual family from Cornwall, in the south-west of England. This couple decided to move to Yorkshire after their first daughter was born, without knowing that the gloomy landscape of those moors would shape their daughters' spirit, especially Emily's (Teodorescu, 2007).

Maria Branwell, their mother, died in 1821, leaving the five sisters and one brother under the charge of their father and their aunt Elizabeth Branwell. According to Teodorescu, "Anne and her aunt were particularly close, and this loving adult role model may have strongly influenced Anne's personality and religious beliefs" (2007, 1), as we can see manifested in the character of Helen Graham. The fact that their father was also a clergyman increased their exposure to religious topics and contexts. Religion became such a sensitive topic for Anne Brontë that a religious crisis made her physically ill during her stay in Roe Head and had to be sent back to Yorkshire (Teodorescu, 2007).[3] However, we could say that it had the complete opposite effect on Emily. *Wuthering Heights* does offer us some religious characters, for example Joseph, but none of these characters are as strict and conservative as Anne's Helen. Joseph, a secondary character, is an elderly religious fanatic who has served the family for many generations and who does not hesitate to openly express his disgust with the characters' actions. He is full of hatred and uses the Bible and Christianity as a pretext for judging others while also contributing to their misfortunes. Thus, Emily is actively criticizing the hypocrisy of the Church and representing their values as obsolete and based on resentment. It is probably thanks to having been born in a religious environment that she is actually capable of demonstrating how not all devoted people are saintly. Moreover, she takes a step further and includes topics in her novel that completely defy all religious standards, for example Catherine's relationship with Heathcliff or Heathcliff's unholy behaviour and act of necrophilia when he attempts to unbury Catherine's body after her death so that he can hold her in his hands one last time.

[3] A Moravian minister, James LaTrobe, was called to see Anne several times during her illness. It is notable that a Moravian was called in, rather than a local Anglican minister. It supports the idea that the Dewsbury clerics, hard-line and censorious in comparison to Anne's more liberal father, were the source of her religious distress.

Throughout their education, the Brontë sisters hopped between different institutions from which they had to leave under, normally, tragic circumstances. This does not mean they were not educated as "[t]heir father and aunt gave them some formal teaching, but for the most part they studied, read, and learnt all that they wished" (Teodorescu, 2007, 2). These gave them the opportunity to wander around the countryside and expand their imagination to create their own worlds, which would shape their instinct of expressing themselves through literature and channelling their inner passions, sorrows, and struggles through their pieces. However, women did not have a spot in the world of published literature, so they decided to do so under a masculine pseudonym.

Emily, considered the author of the best Brontë literary production, had always manifested a deeper connection to the Yorkshire moors than her sisters, to the point of getting physically ill from homesickness when she spent long periods of time away from home. During her life, her only compromise was with nature: no husband, no secret crushes, and no interest in people in general. At most, she had a deep bond with her dog called Keeper, an element that is also present in her novel in both houses Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange (Teodorescu, 2007). It is probably because of Emily Brontë's connection to her environment that the author was able to portray to perfection the same intense fascination that she felt for the moors in her only novel *Wuthering Heights*.

An event that also had an impact on both Emily and Anne and their respective novels *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* is the death of their brother Branwell Brontë, "who showed some talent as a painter and poet, but later sank into drinking and drug use" (Teodorescu, 2007, 2).[4] Both of these novels have an alcoholic and abusive character: Hindley and Arthur respectively. Anne in particular takes her time while introducing Arthur Huntingdon to the reader, making sure that the reader can fully absorb how he turns more and more aggressive as any attractive aspect of him fades away. She makes sure, though, that the main character, Helen, is able to defy all social norms and leave him, maybe as she wished she should have done many times. It is highly likely, then, that both these characters were inspired by their brother and his degradation from being a talented artist to becoming a nightmare of anguish and worry for their family and finally dying.

Their father's personality, and the course of his life also had an impact on how the Brontë sisters lived their upbringing. Patrick Brontë was born to a poor and illiterate family in Ireland

[4] He consumed opium and laudanum.

who took charge of his own education and ended up studying Theology in Cambridge (Gaskell, 1857). After getting married and moving to Haworth, the villagers did describe his temper as unpredictable and they made reference to explosions of anger behind closed doors. He is described as a controlling husband and father, sometimes even abusive (Barker, 2016). By taking his personality traits into account, we can sense the influence that he may have had in the creation of certain characters such as Joseph; it can also explain the rather absent or negligent father figures in the novels. Additionally, the death of their mother Maria and how the Brontës were left in charge of their servant Tabitha Aykroyd can be linked to the lack of a mother figure in Wuthering Heights and how Nelly is the closest that the children have to one.

Emily found her death in 1848. The official record says that she caught a chill and died of tuberculosis, although Charlotte prefers to call it suicide since she refused any medical care from a doctor or her family, just like Catherine Linton did. Even if *Wuthering Heights* can be considered the less autobiographical out of the novels written by the Brontë sisters, it is highly ironical that the main character of the novel died in the same way as her author would end up doing just a year later.

Masculinity patterns in *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Through their literary works, Anne and Emily Brontë used their personal experiences with men to create male characters who embodied the different archetypes that were prevalent during the Victorian era in order to expose them as harmful while also offering more desirable alternative masculinities. The two authors, then, undermine the notion of women having to conform to the roles assigned to them by society and present powerful female characters who are independent and are able to make their own choices based on their desires and the eligibility of their men.

The most archetypal Victorian man, for instance, was one who could be a provider and protector. Nevertheless, the Brontës regard these two sole qualities as not enough for making a man eligible and draw some red lines that a man should never cross despite his good qualities. In the two novels, some of these red lines are abuse, violence, manipulation, and addiction, which probably come from the sisters' experience with their brother Bramwell. Therefore, these red lines do not only apply to romantic partners but also to fathers and brothers, and that's why Hindley can be considered a character who does cross these red lines besides Arthur Huntingdon.

On the other hand, another powerful archetype of the era was the Byronic Hero, which is mainly embodied by Heathcliff. The concept of the Byronic Hero finds its origin in the poem Lord Byron's Childe Harold's Pilgrimage published in 1812. Dujic (2023, 14) describes the Byronic hero as someone whose birth is surrounded by an aura of mystery which sets his status as an outsider and determines the tone of this life outside of the norm. He has a melancholic and captivating personality, a handsome appearance and is "not bound by the limitations that confine the rest of the society" (14). In general, his tormented personality and extraordinary abilities make everyone who encounters him become fascinated.

Moreover, the Byronic hero is obsessive and usually in love. His love interests are women who "mirror [his] own complex nature" and "his love is not ordinary affection but passionate and unreasoning, beyond human understanding, often portrayed as intense and all consuming, and it becomes a hero's driving force" (Dujic, 2023, 15). Nevertheless, his intense emotions usually lead to destructive behaviour and heartbreak, and that is what Emily Brontë uses to portray Heathcliff's true character, which invalidates him as a suitable partner. Byronic Heroes are, indeed, attractive as a concept but the author is capable of representing how their true nature is not desirable at all. They are destructive, manipulative, abusive and moved by vengeance, which ends up harming his love interest, too.

Against these inadequate men, the authors offer renditions of what we could term "the good guy". In the case of *Wuthering Heights* we have Edgar Linton, and in the case of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* we have Mr. Boarham. One might think that they are written as the example of what a proper man should be like, but on the contrary they are discarded as options. Marrying these types of men seems the easiest and safest option: they are usually considerate providers who do have feelings for the woman they are interested in and do not show any violent tendencies. In fact, Catherine did marry Edgar Linton because he loved her and she was comfortable with him and Helen finds it hard to reject Mr. Boarham even if she is not actually interested in him. By showcasing these kinds of archetypical characters as also undesirable, the authors are strengthening the Victorian tendency of women who gave value to the feelings that a man could ignite in them and encourage them not to settle for the safest option.

On the other hand, it is also remarkable how even the characters who are described as eligible are also faced with their own red lines and must go through a path of transformation and personal improvement to become suitable for the female protagonists. Two examples are Hareton's illiteracy and how he only becomes a possible love interest for Cathy when he

learns how to write and read, or Gilbert Markham, who has to learn to respect Helen's boundaries to be with her. Through the different representations of masculinity, Emily and Anne Brontë create women who have their own standards and promote nonconformity.

Devil daddies: analysis of harmful masculinity traits

The different characteristics of hegemonic masculinity are represented to a greater or lesser extent through the male characters. The eight characters with the most harmful masculinity traits can be analysed and classified by listing them under categories which sometimes overlap, which are "alcoholic", "abusive", and "manipulative", leaving a fourth lesser category for "boring/foolish". This analysis will provide us with a perspective on these eight characters' actions and motives and leave us with a critique of hegemonic masculinity and the ills that were hidden from view in real life in the Victorian era, as well as the importance of literature for a full cultural understanding.

The alcoholic category is the easiest one to designate, being Huntingdon and Hindley its two strongest contenders, although they do differ in their triggers. Hattersley and Hargrave do show alcoholic traits too, being Huntingdon's friends, but their main abusive characteristics belong to another main category.

In the case of Huntingdon, he drinks with his friends for fun and is incredibly proud of his lifestyle, which gets worse as Helen's diary advances without him seeming to care or notice it. Drinking makes him violent and completely lose the little respect he has left for Helen: he insults and ridicules her, physically assaults her, and never regrets it. He never thinks there is a problem with his behaviour, and blames Helen for complaining or wanting him to change his habits. Some habits he successfully tries to force onto his son, too, as described by Helen:

> So the little fellow came down every evening in spite of his cross mamma, and learned to tipple wine like papa, to swear like Mr. Hattersley, and to have his own way like a man, and sent mamma to the devil when she tried to prevent him. (Brontë, 2007, 276)

On the other hand, even if it still is beyond excusable, Hindley's passion for alcohol and drugs is born after Frances' death. He is a clear example of a person who falls into the black hole of addiction because they are unable to overcome the loss of their lost ones, so he gives in to gambling and drinking, so he becomes a ticking bomb. We could say alcohol has an even more intense effect on Hindley than on Huntingdon, especially since the former seems to completely lose control and become a victim of his rage and emotions when he is

under the influence; contrarily, Huntingdon is still able to show a (twisted) thought process behind his raptures. Hindley even comes close to killing his own child, who is ultimately saved by Heathcliff. This is how Nelly describes this scene:

> I leant forward also, for the purpose of signing to Heathcliff, whose step I recognised, not to come further; and, at the instant when my eye quitted Hareton, he gave a sudden spring, delivered himself from the careless grasp that held him, and fell. There was scarcely time to experience a thrill of horror before we saw that the little wretch was safe. Heathcliff arrived underneath just at the critical moment; by a natural impulse he arrested his descent, and setting him on his feet, looked up to discover the author of the accident. (Brontë, 2008, 44)

Nevertheless, what makes him more human than Huntingdon is that, as mentioned, he is not in control of his brain and actions, which makes him more dangerous but capable of showing repentance like he did in this case.

As has already been mentioned, these two characters have a shared element beyond their personality as both could be said to be inspired by the Brontë sisters' brother, Branwell Brontë. Anne's version is thought to be closer to reality, but we could also consider that the variations between Hindley and Huntingdon result from the points of view of Emily and Anne, or how Branwell affected them. Both characters also show a degradation as opium, laudanum, and alcohol start ruining the person, turning them into the worst version of themselves and actually failing in their role as protectors (Fegan, 2008). Even if Hindley and Huntingdon do show some red flags from the beginning, they are not presented as the evil beast they end up becoming but just as questionable human beings. Especially Hindley, is a character who "could have been very different had circumstances been altered" (Fegan, 2008, 59).

Huntingdon also belongs to the "abusive" category, as well as Heathcliff and Ralph Hattersley. Hindley has been excluded, overviewing his initial abusive attitude towards Heathcliff due to his envy, because his main abusive actions are product of his alcoholism. In the case of the other three listed characters, they are not.

It has been established that Huntingdon becomes abusive when he is drunk, but he can be even more when he is not. Arthur Huntingdon's abuse comes in all shapes and forms. It starts showing when he meets Helen in London for the first time and already dares to forcefully take her hand and, in general, use violence to establish his power over her,

ignoring her complaints or resistance. On the other hand, he is able to use his charms and appeal to seduce Helen and get married to her, probably already knowing that perhaps she will not be the wife he is expecting to have: Helen is clear about her religious positions and strict monogamy, while Huntingdon wants to roam freely without any pressure to have to please his wife, and constantly tries to impose this thinking pattern onto Helen, even if she has been clear enough about what she wants. When he realizes that she indeed will not consent to those behaviours, he lies to her and spends full months away from her in London to still do it behind her back. Moreover, when she uncovers his infidelities and decides she wants to leave, he will not allow it and ruins all her opportunities to seek an independent life away from him by burning the art she was planning on living from.

> My painting materials were laid together on the corner table, ready for to-morrow's use, and only covered with a cloth. He soon spied them out, and putting down the candle, deliberately proceeded to cast them into the fire: palette, paints, bladders, pencils, brushes, varnish: I saw them all consumed: the palette-knives snapped in two, the oil and turpentine sent hissing and roaring up the chimney. (Brontë, 2007, 289)

Huntingdon is not only abusive towards Helen, he also abuses his son by teaching him to hate his mother and forcing him to drink alcohol with him until his behaviour is also corrupted. Even after she flees and is able to find a happy life and place for herself and her son, Arthur Huntingdon summons her and demands that she nurses him until he finally passes away.

If one might think that there cannot be anyone worse than Arthur Huntingdon, it is because they have not read about Hattersley. He is one of Huntingdon's friends and the most open one about the kind of person he is. He marries Milicent Hargrave, but does not do so out of love, but because of how submissive she is and because she basically does not know how to stand up for herself. She did not want to marry him in the first place and he only wanted her because he knew she would allow him to play around as much as he would like to, even if it only was out of her inability to complain. Moreover, he makes a game out of Milicent's softness and explicitly depicts how he physically and sexually assaults her. However, this character is offered the opportunity to redeem himself when Helen confronts him about how much he is hurting his wife and decides to make a full change of personality and become a better husband and father. Nevertheless, that can never be an excuse for what he did and how cold-blooded he was while doing it.

And, lastly, the most abusive character out of the two novels would be Heathcliff, although he also fits into the next category I will analyse: manipulation. Heathcliff is an abusive manipulator and a manipulative abuser. Even if his reasoning slightly resembles Hattersley's in the way that it occurs for a logical reason that results from personal interest, Heathcliff's strategy is outstanding in its scope, consequences, and intelligence. Heathcliff has a revenge plan and he does not care who he needs to take down in order to achieve every single one of his goals. His first victim is actually Catherine Earnshaw. Even if they are in love and Catherine is responsible for her actions and decisions, he comes back to Wuthering Heights after having become a rich man fully knowing that she is married and that his return will have a huge impact on her and her relationship with Linton. He knows what to say and what to do to manipulate her into doubting her feelings as well as distorting her peaceful relationship with her husband.

> I heard of your marriage, Cathy, not long since; and, while waiting in the yard below, I meditated this plan:—just to have one glimpse of your face, a stare of surprise, perhaps, and pretended pleasure; afterwards settle my score with Hindley; and then prevent the law by doing execution on myself. Your welcome has put these ideas out of my mind; but beware of meeting me with another aspect next time! Nay, you'll not drive me off again. You were really sorry for me, were you? Well, there was cause. I've fought through a bitter life since I last heard your voice and you must forgive me for I struggled only for you! (Brontë, 2008, 57)

At the same time that this is happening, Heathcliff designates his next victim: Linton's sister Isabella, an essential pawn in the game he plays. He takes advantage of her infatuation, isolates her from the rest of her family, and elopes with her. Shortly after their marriage, Isabella realizes that she was completely fooled and that Heathcliff had absolutely no romantic or even gentle interest in her. He only wanted to become the owner of Thrushcross Grange and would kill her without regret if Catherine were to choose him. Once married to her, he repeatedly hits her, abuses her, and degrades her in all ways possible:

> It was a marvellous effort of perspicacity to discover that I did not love her. I believed, at one time, no lessons could teach her that! […] The first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog; and when she pleaded for it, the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her, except one: possibly she took that exception for herself. But no brutality disgusted her: I suppose she has an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person

> were secure from injury! Now, was it not the depth of absurdity - of genuine idiocy, for that pitiful, slavish, mean-minded brach to dream that I could love her? (Brontë, 2008, 88)

Heathcliff even finds a way to use their son further on as another of the pieces of his Machiavellian plan. Fegan perfectly summarises Heathcliff's behaviour: "Heathcliff begins by rebelling against the forces that reject him, but ends by becoming the epitome of the authoritarian, patriarchal, capitalist society that he hates" (2008, 87).

Once little Cathy and Linton have grown up past twelve, they become Heathcliff's victims too. He makes them meet and start a correspondence, which is actually him pretending to be Linton, and he manipulates Cathy into falling in love with him and visiting Wuthering Heights so that he can kidnap her and force the two children to get married. Even after they get married, they are still victims of Heathcliff's abusive rules. When Linton dies due to his frail health, his possessions go to Heathcliff, leaving Cathy with absolutely nothing of what her late father could have left for her, including the property of Thrushcross Grange. In the end, the only thing that stops Heathcliff from fully executing his revenge is Cathy and Hareton's love, in which he sees him and Catherine's reflected. So it is not the huge amount of people that he has emotionally destroyed and the lives that he has ruined that make him revise his interests, but his nostalgia and his love for Catherine. He is selfish until the end.

Also in *Wuthering Heights* we find the character of Linton Heathcliff. He is described as "pale, delicate, effeminate boy, who might have been taken for [Edgar's] younger brother, so strong was the resemblance: but there was a sickly peevishness in his aspect that Edgar Linton never had" (Brontë, 2008, 115). However, he is an abusive manipulator who knows how to take advantage of people's compassion. Linton is "terrified of his father, but wishes to emulate his power and aggression" (Fegan, 2008, 109). He does so the most with Cathy, his wife. He uses his sickness to guilt trip her when she does not follow his desires:

> 'I can't speak to you,' he murmured; 'you've hurt me so that I shall lie awake all night choking with this cough. If you had it you'd know what it was; but YOU'LL be comfortably asleep while I'm in agony, and nobody near me. I wonder how you would like to pass those fearful nights!' And he began to wail aloud, for very pity of himself. (Brontë, 2008, 138)

Moreover, he also shows some psychopathic traits: "'Linton can play the little tyrant well. He'll undertake to torture any number of cats, if their teeth be drawn and their claws pared" (Brontë, 2008, 157).

The other expert manipulator can be found in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, although his style and motives are different from Heathcliff's. Walter Hargrave is a sexual predator and manipulator who seems to have a fixation on Helen. Of course, as the sly fox he is, he tries to hide his true intentions and pretends to be Helen's friend and confidante, so that she gets to trust him and realizes that he treats her better than her husband does; he is never kind to her out of mere kindness. Nevertheless, she never falls for his trap and learns to mistrust him from the beginning, even if, at first, she cannot openly reject his romantic advances because they are subtle enough. Hargrave is the one to inform Helen about Arthur's infidelity with Annabella and follows her into the library when she retreats to be alone. He considers it the perfect opportunity to express his love and get Helen to become his mistress, but she firmly rejects him and he attempts to rape her without minding how much she is resisting and begging him to stop: "trust me, and you shall be happy also, for if you are a woman I can make you so—and I will do it in spite of yourself!" (Brontë, 2007, 259)

Walter Hargrave probably felt entitled to have her, even if it was against her will, because in his mind he had acted nicely. He had tried to do the right thing by becoming her friend and waiting until Helen knew about Arthur's infidelity to confess his feelings. He felt he needed to be rewarded for his patience and respect and he was so convinced that he would get it, that he never really considered the option of being rejected and leaving the library with nothing. Consequently, he forces himself upon her and does not stop until Helen points a knife at him. Even then, he is furious at her.

Last but not least, we have three characters left who are not as villainous as the other ones, but that also had toxic traits in them that reigned over their good qualities and had a negative impact over them or their loved ones.

First on the list we have Mr. Boarham. His first problem is that, even though if he is nice to Helen, their age gap of around 20 years works against him when he asks Helen's uncle for her hand before he asks Helen. For Mr. Boarham, that is the adequate way to proceed, but for Helen it is not and it makes her reject him, even if she did not like him that much from the beginning. She qualifies him of boring, especially compared to Arthur Huntingdon, and for the first time we can see a shift in what women consider important to get married to

someone and how their opinion is a valuable aspect to take into consideration for that decision. In Helen's words: "I hope my uncle and you told him it was not in your power to give it. What right had he to ask any one before me?" (Brontë, 2007, 102)

For Helen, it is not enough that Mr. Boarham is a nice man who can offer her a comfortable life, she (and other women from the Victorian era) are already showing non-conformity and seeking an exciting love match rather than the safest option. This shift started to take place in the 20 years that separate Helen and Mr. Boarham, and that is why he cannot fully seduce her: because he is oblivious of what she is actually seeking and what she really needs. Certainly, Helen's life would have been better with Mr. Boarham rather than with Arthur Huntingdon, but she would not have been happy either. What Huntingdon and Heathcliff did have to offer and what makes them attractive to Helen and Catherine and to the public, even after we know how toxic they are, is the magnetism and chemistry between them and the female characters. Actually, we are still in a culture that is fixated on experiencing that feeling and valuing it over simple comfort.

On the other hand, Edgar Linton exists in between those two worlds. He is attractive and is a stronger opponent to Heathcliff than Mr. Boarham is to Arthur Huntingdon, but he has the same element of calmness. This aspect of him that does not fulfil the hegemonic standards is beneficial at first, since it is the perfect match for Catherine's overflowing emotions and thus is able to withstand her fits better than anyone else without adding fuel to the fire, but it ends up being damaging. His character and appearance are ultimately described to be "too feminine for a man" (Fegan, 2008, 62). First of all, we need to take into consideration that Catherine marries him for his social class. It is true that she does love Edgar and that to her everything feels so smooth and easy with him, but she knows that deep inside whom she loves is Heathcliff.

> I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven; and if the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because he's more myself than I am. (Brontë, 2008, 48)

Thus, she marries Edgar Linton because it is the right thing to do and she is capable of enjoying the peaceful bliss of their marriage, but when Heathcliff comes back she realizes

that she never wanted peace in the first place, she wanted passion and Edgar could never give her that.

Moreover, after Catherine dies and Edgar is left in charge of little Cathy, this trait of his is more obvious and he becomes less prone to action than he was before. It is likely that, under other circumstances, he could have fought Heathcliff back and brought Cathy back to Thrushcross Grange or find a way to declare Cathy's marriage invalid. His non-action could have been acceptable had he not been the only person that had an opportunity of stopping Heathcliff and did not.

The last character is Lockwood, and he would really need a whole category for himself. All the characters that have been analysed could be described as narcissists, but Lockwood is probably the most narcissist of them all. He arrives at Thrushcross Grange with the excuse of wanting to get away from civilisation and have no contact with people, but he is the first one to seek the company of the habitants of Wuthering Heights and Nelly and becomes fully immersed in the story she tells him. Additionally, he genuinely thinks that Cathy might fall for him and decides to give up on her fully believing that he is doing everyone a favour, when that was not even a real possibility. Moreover, he thinks he is above everyone else and dares to judge and comment on the stories of the characters as if he were a love expert, when the truth is that he actually fled the moment a girl approached him and has not really experienced romantic love in his life.

> While enjoying a month of fine weather at the sea-coast, I was thrown into the company of a most fascinating creature: a real goddess in my eyes, as long as she took no notice of me. I 'never told my love' vocally; still, if looks have language, the merest idiot might have guessed I was over head and ears: she understood me at last, and looked a return - the sweetest of all imaginable looks. And what did I do? I confess it with shame – shrunk icily into myself, like a snail; at every glance retired colder and farther; till finally the poor innocent was led to doubt her own senses, and, overwhelmed with confusion at her supposed mistake, persuaded her mamma to decamp. (Brontë, 2008, 7)

As Fegan explains "Lockwood's reaction and the language he uses to describe it mark him out as cold and unmanly – and extremely unlikely to understand the passionate characters whose story he is about to hear" (2008, 21). This egocentrism of his infiltrates in his

narrations and turns his narratives into something that the reader cannot fully trust, thus making readers reconsider what they are being told taking into account their own judgement.

It is by bringing to life all these characters that literature proves itself as a reliable representation of men and relationships in the Victorian era. This does not mean that all men were like Heathcliff or like Mr. Boarham, but the fact that the authors were able to create them means that these types of personality traits existed. Each of the characters that have been described show differences that make then distinctive, even if they have some elements in common with the others, showing that there is not only one or two prototypes of abusive men, but that they come in all shapes and forms. These elements that have been highlighted, in fact, offer us a general description of what the hegemonic masculinity of the Victorian era consisted on: men that always found their way to get what they wanted, even if it meant making women or other people (but especially women) suffer.

They could be attractive, sure, and Heathcliff, Edgar, Hindley, Lockwood, Huntingdon, Hattersley, Hargrave, and Mr. Boarham all have their personal charms that make them apparently look like romantic ideals or at least seem less dangerous than they actually are, but the truth is that men were not held accountable enough to make them realise that they actually needed to do better. Hindley and Hattersley are, in fact, openly abusive to a point it is concerning, but practically none of the characters has the nerve to question them. It is true that none of the characters is fully black or white and that they exist in a grey zone where we can understand their motives, in some cases, and even some of the worst characters get a redemption arc in the end. The authors, thus, acknowledge that people can change or be a victim of their own circumstances but that does not erase their previous actions or the consequences they had; the characters that get to change just move forward and do not dare to face their past.

On the other hand, as has already been mentioned, we can see which were the women's preferences, especially in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* where there are a lot of female characters who need to decide who they should marry. It is subtle, and it does not mean that in real life Victorian women had complete power of decision, but we can already see the birth of love matches being preferred over convenience marriages and that women wanted to make a choice for themselves instead of for the sake of their family. Additionally, they begin to be more demanding towards their husbands and expect a certain decent behaviour from them. Even if it is still uncommon and dangerous, women start to be aware of the possibility of leaving and making a life for themselves if the situation got too critical.

The question of Victorian laws is also addressed, mainly in *Wuthering Heights*, since it is actually thanks to the fact that a woman's properties became men's by law and that women were not offered enough protection from their husbands that Heathcliff actually becomes the owner of the two houses. He uses it in his favour with Linton and with Isabella, and it is actually a miracle that Isabella is able to make it out alive and can become independent.

Alternative masculinities

Even though Emily and Anne Brontë depicted abusive characters in their works, they did also create male characters that showed more acceptable masculinities. The three men I will analyse are far from being perfect, and they do have their toxic traits as well as the other ones do, but their character development and their behaviour throughout the novel make them better men and even a model of masculinity to strive for in the Victorian era. What is important about them are not their downsides or the mistakes that they make, but how they treat the women they love and how that can make them desirable or ideal for a woman from the Victorian era.

In *Wuthering Heights*, the only character that fits these characteristics is Hareton. He is probably the less problematic out of the three that will be presented in this subsection and one of the most underrated ones out of the whole list. Taking into consideration that he is the son of an alcoholic father who mistreated him and that was later on raised by Heathcliff and Joseph, it is no surprise that the first interventions of this character are rude and aggressive, because he is. Since he was born, he was mistreated and abused first by his own father, whom he calls Devil Daddy, and then by Heathcliff. At first, Heathcliff acts as a protector; in Hareton's words: "he pays Dad back what he gies to me – he curses Daddy for cursing me – He says I mun do as I will" (Brontë, 2008, 110). But once the father dies, Heathcliff replicates the abuse he received on Hareton: "Now, my bonny lad, you are mine! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" (Brontë, 2008, 187) Hareton is a clear product of his circumstances and his environment, and that is shown by the way he drastically changes after being offered the same affection. After scratching the tough surface that he has had to build, Hareton does show softness and "Heathcliff's attempt to make him grow crooked fails; Hareton emerges strong, tender and constant" (Fegan, 2008, 106).

This character is so appealing for the general public, particularly the Victorian one, because of the tenderness that Cathy arises in him. He does show a little bit of initial reluctance, not

surprisingly, but does not oppose much resistance either. What makes him more endearing is that this first approach is not only because he may feel attracted to Cathy and wants to initiate contact with her, but because of the introduction to knowledge that she offers him, and their romance is a consequence of that. In the 19th century, women constantly battled against men presenting themselves as attractive and devoted with the sole purpose of seducing them. Once the couple was married, men did not feel any need to pretend and women could not complain or go against their husbands. It comes as no surprise that a female author of the Victorian era wanted to express the opposite as desirable: Hareton does not have a secret agenda nor does he pretend to be a kind of man he is not.

Hareton and Cathy fall in love organically and spontaneously, and thanks to this love he can find a will and a way to start leaving behind the toxic characteristics that his background and lack of knowledge had made of him. He does not become a saint either, which is relevant because we have already stated that men who lack spirit, despite not being bad, are also questionable in the novels. Nevertheless, he shows signs of civility from the start by offering Lockwood tea or never responding violently to Cathy and Linton's initial mockery. The love that he feels for her helps him enhance these hidden qualities, find himself and find the courage to admit that he does actually want the education he was deprived of from childhood.

Moreover, having Cathy by his side and wanting to defend her gives him the courage to confront Heathcliff, the man he recognises as his father. This piece of information is crucial not only because of the context of the novel, but because Victorian society was highly hierarchical and sons did not dare to contradict their fathers and the decisions they made for them. The fact that Hareton is able to stand up against Heathcliff in order to protect Cathy is a way of defiance against the whole systematic abuse and opens up an opportunity for readers to dare to do the same.

The two other characters belong to *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Anne Brontë's two characters are far from perfect, but their character development throughout the novel and their other positive aspects make them belong to the set of alternative masculinities that are exalted in contrast to the harming ones.

First of all, we have Gilbert Markham, one of the main characters of the novel and the female protagonist's final love interest. We can say that Mr. Markham is not depicted as ideal from the very beginning: the interest he feels in Helen is likely to come from a level of attraction, he becomes obsessed with her, disobeys her and crosses her boundaries, and even fist

fights with Frederic Lawrence because Gilbert suspects he has an affair with Helen. Nevertheless, in the process, he learns how valuable her company is to him and to accept her conditions.

> And if you think you have wronged me by giving me your friendship, and occasionally admitting me to the enjoyment of your company and conversation, when all hopes of closer intimacy were vain --as indeed you always gave me to understand-- if you think you have wronged me by this, you are mistaken; for such favours, in themselves alone, are not only delightful to my heart, but purifying, exalting, ennobling to my soul; and I would rather have your friendship than the love of any other woman in the world! (Brontë, 2007, 75)

One of the main differences between Gilbert and Hareton is, likely, their educational background. We need to take into consideration how the former is a wealthy man who has received an education that Hareton has not. Nevertheless, when we first meet him, he is a character who needs a considerable amount of development. Just like Hareton, Gilbert Markham accepts his romantic interest's conditions and transforms into a better version of himself that suits Helen much more than initially. This contrast between the two men exposes how an upper-class background does not make a man better and that they will still have to work on themselves for the sake of the women they love.

Gilbert's most valuable trait is probably how he is willing to side with Helen and believe in her, no matter who dares to criticize her. When Helen arrives in town, everyone sees her as a widow who does not fully belong there and she becomes the centre of all gossip. However, even if he does not know practically anything about her, Gilbert Markham sides with her and defends her even when she is not present. This leads us to another positive aspect of Mr. Markham: his profound respect towards Helen's son and their past. After she decides to share her diary and with it their backstory with him, he never states or thinks that Helen is to blame for anything that happened to her and does not question her choices. In a society where women were the root of all evil, daring to side with a "fallen" one and defending her from your own family is an act of courage.

Gilbert Markham's best characteristic is, thus, his blind trust in the woman that he loves: he is sure of who she is and he does not need anyone else's opinion to sustain his own. He might have room to improve when it comes to dealing with his emotions, but we even get to see this improvement after Helen comes back and finds a much calmer and reasonable man

that has learnt from his mistakes and is willing to respect her boundaries to the fullest. This, then, brings a couple of problems of miscommunication, but nothing major in comparison to other characters in the novel.

Finally, I focus on Lord Lowborough. Even though Lord Lowborough is not described too positively, he stands out from other Arthur Huntingdon's friends for being much more moderate and considerate. At the beginning of the novel, he is a character that has hit rock bottom: he lost all his fortune gambling, which caused him a severe depression that ended up in developing alcoholic tendencies. All these circumstances made his wife leave him, and is found looking for some woman who can maintain him financially. In fact, Mr. Huntingdon makes sure to describe his situation to Helen when she implies that he is a good man: "Lord Lowborough is a desperate man. He has dissipated his fortune in gambling and other things, and is now seeking an heiress to retrieve it" (Brontë, 2007, 129).

In this context he meets Annabella and unexpectedly falls madly in love with her. His love for Annabella is not entirely healthy because he shows signs of obsession and delusion, to a point of almost considering her his angel; Huntingdon tells Helen about this when he introduces her to Mr. Lowborough's past: "But, meantime, Lowborough became acquainted with our charming friend, Miss Wilmot—through the intervention of his good angel, no doubt he would tell you" (Brontë, 2007, 143). Everyone knows that she is taking advantage of him, but he is convinced that she just loves him for whom he is and that he is good enough for her.

From the beginning Lord Lowborough is convinced that she is the light that will guide him and save him and, despite the validity of wanting to rely on others to get better during our dark times, it is not fair for Annabella that he decided to put that weight on her.

> She knows all the folly and all the wickedness of my former life, and is not afraid to trust me--and my rank and title are no allurements to her; for them, she utterly disregards. She is the most generous, high minded being that can be conceived of. She will save me, body and soul, from destruction. (Brontë, 2007, 145)

Nevertheless, as I have stated before, no character can be fully perfect if they want to appear merely human, and the positive aspects of Lord Lowborough beat the negative ones. First and foremost, he is fully conscious of his addiction with gambling and alcohol and actively tries to overcome them, which none of his counterparts ever consider attempting. Even

worse, they sometimes ruin all his progress by enabling him to give up momentarily and sending him back to the same old vicious circle.

Additionally, his capacity of loving Annabella with his full heart and being able to trust her so blindly, ignoring for a moment that he should have not, is admirable taking into consideration how he was abandoned by his previous wife before. Even if he deserved it, abandonment will always leave a wound of some kind. He has the capacity of moving on, of trusting again, of falling in love twice or thrice more if necessary. Lord Lowborough is always willing to do whatever it takes to make sure she is alright in a period of history when being warm and considerate and faithful towards your wife was not expected because it went beyond the established role of husbands as providers. It is for this last reason that this character, despite his flaws, was probably written as an example of what a woman may desire, what the author considered to be a positive example of masculinity. By giving importance to his poverty, old habits, and depression, Anne Brontë is starting to shape the idea that you can accept the person you love in spite of their personal status or wealth: what actually matters is how he loves and how he should never display his toxic traits towards those who treat him the way he deserves.

> Lord and Lady Lowborough have now been married above eight months; and I will do the lady the credit to say that her husband is quite an altered man: his looks, his spirits, and his temper are all perceptibly changed for the better since I last saw him. But there is room for improvement still. He is not always cheerful nor always contented, and she often complains of his ill humour, which, however, of all persons, she ought to be the last to accuse him of, as he never displays it against her. (Brontë, 2007, 168)

It is also important how the three characters that have been listed change as the novels develop. They do not start off as perfect but go through a personal development driven by the women they love, which ends up being essential before finding their happy ending. This concept simultaneously gives women more power and reminds men that they need to be willing to change in order to be loved.

Conclusions

The main purpose of this study has been to outline and describe the way men and masculinities are portrayed in the two novels *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* by Anne Brontë. In order to do so, I have first delved into masculinities

studies to understand how masculinity works and to establish some basic ground concepts that are fundamental in the field, especially: how hegemonic masculinity works to guarantee men's superior status in a patriarchal society where men have most of the power. Even though times have changed and there are forces that challenge traditional masculinity and the power of men, hegemonic masculinity remains quite stable and serves the purpose of promoting male power. This hegemonic ideal that still operates nowadays has its roots in Victorian times, which is what I concentrate next in the project since it is fundamental to understand Emily and Anne Brontë's challenge to Victorian masculinity.

I therefore describe the patriarchal Victorian context and the way marriage was viewed at that time, which turns out to be further from perfect in opposition to the image that was projected to the world. The promoted model positioned men and women in two opposite spheres and assigned them rigid roles that they needed to follow: men were protectors and providers and women were pure and obedient wives. The context of the authors has also been deemed as highly relevant and has been investigated with the purpose of matching their personal experiences and circumstances to the characters and masculinity patterns they represented.

In both the two novels that have been analysed, we can find bad patriarchs whose masculinity affects both themselves and the people that surround them negatively. Nevertheless, each representation of masculinity differs from the rest and allows us to further determine which types of men populated the Victorian era and which were their flaws. Emily and Anne Brontë present characters with characteristics that do align with the contemporary views of toxic masculinity and which even nowadays can be seen as attractive as romantic interests. For example, they present Byronic heroes who are at first the object of the female character's affections, but this initial infatuation does not mean that these men are good. The authors make sure to take a deeper insight into these men and allow us to see them for who they actually are and what they do to others, transforming them into undesirable partners. Then, they are either removed from the narrative like Heathcliff or Huntingdon or are forced to improve like Hareton and Gilbert. These characters who project prominent characteristics associated to hegemonic masculinity ultimately fail to fulfil their basic roles of providers and protectors.

On the other hand, the authors make sure to include examples of other expressions of masculinity that are more desirable, not exclusively in the romantic sense. After

deconstructing harmful masculinity types, they make sure to construct other types that can be classified as desirable, even if they still need to be polished.

Those characters that have been listed as examples of abusive masculinity traits are Heathcliff, Edgar Linton, Hindley Earnshaw, and Mr. Lockwood from *Wuthering Heights* and Arthur Huntingdon, Ralph Hattersley, Walter Hargrave, and Mr. Boarham from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*. Taking into consideration that, despite their differences, some of these characters present some common traits, they have been classified as “alcoholics”, “abusive”, “manipulators”, and “bland”. Hindley and Huntingdon belong to the first category; Huntingdon, Heathcliff, and Hattersley belong to the second one; Heathcliff and Hargrave belong to the third one; and Boarham, Lockwood and Linton belong to the fourth one. On the contrary, the other three that have been considered exemplary of alternative masculinities are Hareton from *Wuthering Heights*, and Gilbert Markham and Lord Lowborough from *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

My analysis attempts to exemplify how literature, especially literature written by women, can be extremely useful to obtain a better image of the actual life and marriage from the Victorian era and the changes that these authors were trying to vindicate. Emily and Anne Brontë undermined Victorian standards and exposed their predominant hegemonic patriarchal masculinity to then propose less harmful and restraining alternatives to it. It is clear enough that two books are far from representing a whole period of history, but the Brontë sisters are a fair starting point to the literary investigation of how there always have been narratives that questioned hegemonic masculinities and attempted to introduce healthier alternatives.

Regardless of the abovementioned limitation, this study pretends to be the trigger to a series of more insightful literary interpretations that can help us form a more accurate and more feminist-oriented perception of the Victorian era in England sustained by women’s real impressions and experiences instead of fully relying on official records. History has always been told by the winners, which means that it has always only been told by men. Even if we are already familiar with the downsides of female oppression throughout the centuries, there is much more to know about it from the victims themselves if we dare to dig deeper, and literature is a more than legitimate parting base.

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Appendix

Wuthering Heights

Heathcliff is an orphan who arrives in Wuthering Heights brought by Mr. Earnshaw from a trip to Liverpool. During Mr. Earnshaw's last years of life, Heathcliff is able to live as one of his children and therefore get an education and be able to create a bond with his daughter: Catherine. However, after Mr. Earnshaw's death, his other son Hindley becomes the master of the house and begins physically and mentally abusing Heathcliff and treating him like any other servant. Heathcliff's nightmare of a life reaches its peak when Catherine, with whom he is in love, decides to marry their neighbour, Edgar Linton, instead of him for fear of losing her status. Heathcliff decides to leave and come back to the Heights with a perfectly orchestrated plan that will allow him to take revenge on everyone who has hurt him and with the ultimate intention of becoming the owner of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, the Lintons' house: he provokes Hindley's downfall, marries Edgar Linton's sister and abuses her, prompts Catherine to destroying her own marriage, kidnaps Catherine's daughter and forces her to marry his son… The list can go on.

Edgar Linton is the Earnshaws' neighbour, and he could be well considered their complete opposite. His sister and him are much more well-mannered, restrained, considerate, and coward. He meets Catherine after she is accidentally injured by their dog. From then on, he forms a bond with her as well an antagonistic resentment towards Heathcliff. After certain ups and downs product of Catherine's temperament and doubts, he ends up marrying her. They live peacefully for six months, until Heathcliff decides to come back and Catherine's feelings are re-awoken. Subsequently, she falls irremediably ill and dies after giving birth to a daughter named like her. Parallel to this plotline, Isabella has fled and married Heathcliff, an item of news Edgar takes as a betrayal and that will hinder his relationship with his sister.

Edgar ignores little Cathy for the very first months of her life, although he ends up sincerely loving her, maybe because she resembles her mother a considerable amount. She grows up isolated in Thrushcross Grange, until oversight from her father leads to her meeting Heathcliff and little Linton. Heathcliff's revenge plan is still on going and masterfully takes advantage of the occasion to seduce little Cathy and ends up kidnapping her and forcing her to marry Linton. Maybe due to Edgar Linton's failing health or due to his lack of initiative, he does not take much action in order to save her, and soon after he dies. Leave the details for your analysis

Hindley Earnshaw is Catherine's brother and Mr. Earnshaw's heir. He grows up being envious of Heathcliff due to the attention he received from his father, so he does not hesitate to unleash all his anger on him after their Mr. Earnshaw has passed away. He abuses Heathcliff both physically and psychologically. Hindley gets to happily marry Frances, with whom he has a child, but she dies during childbirth and that sinks Hindley into the darkest abyss, where only alcohol can comfort him. He becomes addicted to both drinking and gambling, which Heathcliff takes advantage of while carrying out his revenge when he comes back. Heathcliff starts lending money to Hindley, who is not able to pay him back, so he has to mortgage Wuthering Heights and Heathcliff becomes its owner. In the end, Hindley dies from alcohol-induced suicide, after having fought with Heathcliff.

Lockwood is the visitor from London who triggers Nelly's narration of the events of the Earnshaw and Linton family and one of the narrators. This character in general is highly contradictory, which makes the reader suspect his narrations might be unreliable or biased. He states he wants to keep his distance from all society, yet is immersed in Nelly's tale. He feels entitled to judge the families and their love stories, yet he does not know any of them deeply and also admits he failed act on his own romantic feelings. He does not change or evolve much throughout the course of the novel.

Hareton Earnshaw is Frances and Hindley's son, who is first brought up by Nelly Dean due to the absence of his father, who is long gone consumed by alcohol. After Nelly moves out to Thrushcross Grange after Catherine's marriage and his father dies, Hareton falls in the hands of Heathcliff, who treats him as poorly as Hindley treated him. He denies him an education, abuses him, and treats him like a servant. At 16, because of Heathcliff and Joseph's influences, Hareton has become mean, aggressive, and uneducated, although he still considers Heathcliff his father and appreciates him. However, when little Cathy starts inhabiting Wuthering Heights, he grows a soft spot for her, even if she is constantly belittling him. Their relationship takes a turn when she finds an interest in secretly teaching him how to read, write, and talk properly, which leads them to falling in love. Heathcliff's death is a devastating event for Hareton, the character who ends up having suffered the most throughout the whole story. Nevertheless, he ends up marrying Cathy, thus providing a bittersweet end to the series of traumatic events that have had to happen in order to bring them together.

Linton Heathcliff is Isabella and Heathcliff's son. He is described as thin, weak, and sickly. He spends his first years living with Isabella in London, but after her health worsens he is

sent to Thrushcross Grange, where Edgar shelters him. Nevertheless, Heathcliff claims his right as the father and takes him to Wuthering Heights. After three years, when he turns sixteen, Heathcliff initiates a plan that will result in Linton getting married to Cathy, who is held prisoner in Wuthering Heights. Linton shows selfish and cruel qualities throughout the novel, although he does help Cathy escape so she can be at Edgar's deathbed. In the end, shortly after their wedding, Linton's heath declines rapidly and passes away.

Joseph is one of the servants of Wuthering Heights. He is old, a religious fanatic, and has been living in the house for practically all his life. He does not have a plotline per se but we can get to know his character throughout the novel: he is extremely superstitious and moralist, although he does also show certain hypocritical behaviours. His main role in the novel, besides cursing, is to attempt to impose his values on the rest of the character. This often enrages Heathcliff and adds fuel to this character's bad temperament.

The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

Arthur Huntingdon is introduced to the reader through Helen's diary excerpts, where she describes how she fell in and out of love with him. Helen becomes infatuated with Arthur from the very first moment they meet: he is handsome, charming, and carefree. Despite her aunt's warnings, Helen and Arthur become engaged and get married. However, the qualities that at first resulted irresistible for Helen turn out to be Arthur's worst traits. He is an alcoholic who only cares about drinking and having fun with his friends and adopts the worst attitude when Helen expects him to do something else. He turns out to be cruel and physically and mentally abusive with her and their son, to the point of leaving her alone for long periods of time in order to go to London and be able to drink, play, and cheat on. Moreover, he expects Helen to be comfortable with his actions and refuses to let her leave him by destroying all her paintings. Even if Helen manages to leave, she still comes back when Arthur gets sick and nurses him until he dies in agony.

Gilbert Markham is the main narrator of the novel. He is a farmer who shows a tender curiosity towards Helen when she first moves into town, actively refusing to believe the poisonous rumours that circulate about her. Although she tries to keep the distances with him, Gilbert cannot take "no" for an answer and keeps insisting until he is able to make a spot for himself in her life as a friend, even if that is not the role that he actually wants. His feelings for Helen make him impulsive and jealous, to the point of fist fighting Frederick Lawrence after suspecting a possible romantic relationship between the two. When Helen

comes back after Arthur's death, Gilbert assumes Helen will consider herself too good for him and almost misses his opportunity. Nevertheless, they still get their happy ending.

Lord Lowborough is one of Arthur Huntingdon's friends and he is married to a woman called Annabella. Like his friends, he also used to be a gambler, drug-addict, and alcoholic but his economic demise forced him to leave all his old habits behind. His personality could be described as rather depressive, but he loves Annabella deeply and is severely affected when he discovers that she has been having an affair with Arthur Huntingdon for years. He is saved by his religious faith. In the end, he divorces her and marries another woman who becomes the wife and mother he deserves.

Ralph Hattersley is another of Arthur's friends. This character stands out for marrying Milicent Hargrave just because she allows him to act freely without bothering to complain. If that were not enough, he admits he physically mistreats her until she finally cries. Surprisingly enough, his personality takes a turn and ends up wanting to become a loving husband worthy of Milicent and a good father.

Walter Hargrave is a friend of Arthur's who openly flirts with Helen during the years she lives with her husband: he condemns her husband's attitude, gives the impression of the most sensible out of his friends, and shows a charming attitude towards Helen in an attempt to seduce her. However, this time she does notice the evil intent behind the wordiness and roundly refuses his proposal to elope with him. He ends up marrying a woman just for her money and abusing her and being hated by everyone around him.

Mr Boarham was one of Helen's suitors before she decided to get engaged to Arthur Huntingdon. She ends up despising this old friend of her uncles due to his insistence and boring personality (hence her nickname for him: bore'em). Mr. Boarham's last and terrible mistake is to ask Helen's uncle for her hand before consulting her, which offends her and confirms her disgust towards the man. It is also remarkable to disclose that, at this point of the story, Helen has already met Arthur and has already started falling in love with him, whom she ironically likes because he's the opposite of Mr. Boarham.