

# Woman's struggle for autonomy

A reading of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss*

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# Abstract

Even though the larger feminist movement did not occur until later in the century, changes in the view of women's place in society began in the mid-nineteenth century: women's submissive appreciation of their situation was questioned and a wish for change was introduced. Arguably, the radical and sometimes disturbing new heroines introduced at this time can be interpreted as signs of an early form of feminism. Traditionally early female writers, in order to be published, were restricted to writing romantic novels where they portrayed women as the ideal, charming 'angel' of the house. The heroines of these early novels were not to concern themselves with controversial issues of the day, in other words, they were not to express their intellect and not to challenge men's superiority.

This thesis looks at how *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) establish unconventional dimensions of women's situation and their want for autonomy. Although none of the authors in this thesis can be considered 'feminists' in the later sense of the word, they offer a basis for later feminism in that their contributions might have been both that of voicing the current situation for women, as well as and demonstrating new potentialities of womanhood.



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# Introduction

Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. (*Jane Eyre*)<sup>1</sup>

This quotation from *Jane Eyre* expresses something close to a demand that society change its view on gender and the roles of women. Through the voice of her heroine, Charlotte Brontë is unconventionally honest when she argues for the need for equality between men and women and a removal of the suffocating situation in which women were forced to live. Published in 1847, Jane's thoughts, in these matters, may safely be considered rebellious. Not only does she threaten men's superiority by expressing her intellect, she further demands equality between men and women. Women too, were shocked by Jane's outspoken statements in this novel. They feared her, Hazel T. Martin argues, not because she stated their inner desires, but because she might be cutting off 'their retreat into the safety of tradition', namely the submissive angel of the house.<sup>2</sup>

Even though the larger feminist movement did not occur until later in the century, changes in the view of women began in the mid-nineteenth century: women's submissive appreciation of their situation was questioned and a wish for change was presented. Arguably, the radical and sometimes disturbing new heroines introduced at this time can be interpreted as signs of early feminism. However, I find it fascinating that some of the new heroines of the mid-nineteenth century novel could be representatives of an early representation of a change in women's role. I have therefore chosen to do a close reading of *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* and *The Mill on the Floss* in light of their historical contexts, in order to establish some of the key aspects of these female characters' situation and their desire for autonomy. In addition to this, this thesis will briefly touch upon the significance of these novels in relation

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, ed. Margaret Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 109. Future page references are to this edition and are included in parenthesis in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Hazel T. Martin, *Petticoat Rebels: A Study of the Novels of Social Protest of George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Helios Books, 1968), p. 86.

to the development of female agency. There are several reasons why I have chosen to focus on these texts. First, all the novels are written by women, who after all can be considered experts on womanhood when contrasted to male authors. Second, the novels were published fairly close to each other, implying that they may be concerned with the same contemporary issues concerning women's situation in society. Third, in their portraits of their heroines, the novels go against the traditional genre that female authors were restricted to, namely the romantic novel. And finally, all the authors are well known and read as they are included within the literary canon.

### **Women's situation in the Victorian period**

It is necessary to briefly establish some of the historical context in order to understand why these authors could be considered radical in their own time. In the early nineteenth century, women were still (as they had been in the eighteenth century) considered man's property; first her father's and then her husband's, while unmarried women were taken care of by their brothers. In every regard, women were considered to be inferior to men; physically, mentally and morally.<sup>3</sup> Marriage was considered the only respectable way to settle down in life, and was therefore the goal for the average Victorian woman.<sup>4</sup> Women had no legal rights, not even of their own children, their education was 'poor and oriented towards marriage', they could 'neither own nor inherit property', and had no opportunity to divorce their husbands, no matter how cruel or violent these were.<sup>5</sup> In the eighteenth century Mary Wollstonecraft had been among the first to direct attention to women's situation in her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman, With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1791-1792).<sup>6</sup> This book was the first to demand equality between the sexes in matters such as education and social treatment.<sup>7</sup> Although it did not achieve much other than 'applause and obloquy', it *did* set in motion 'tendencies which have eddied down the years, gradually shaping opinion in England'.<sup>8</sup> That

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Rubinow Gorsky, *Femininity to Feminism: Women and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman* (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1953), p. 17 and p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Martin, pp. 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> There is some uncertainty about the year of publishing. Henry Roshier James, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Sketch* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1932)

<[http://books.google.com/books?id=OMUCSSRy3x0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=mary+wollstonecraft&hl=en&ei=kDqqTuOWDqL54QS\\_r\\_zSDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CEkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=OMUCSSRy3x0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=mary+wollstonecraft&hl=en&ei=kDqqTuOWDqL54QS_r_zSDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CEkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false)> [Accessed 1 November 2011], p.1.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, p. 26.

the book failed to reform British society is not strange, considering how established Britain was as a patriarchal society. The social, political and economical changes that Britain experienced during the next century, made it gradually easier for women to revolt and reform society.

Early female writers, in order to be published, were restricted to writing romantic novels where they portrayed women as the ideal, charming ‘angel’ of the house that society claimed she was. The heroines of these early novels ‘were not to concern themselves with controversial issues of the day’, in other words, they were not to express their intellect and not to challenge men’s superiority.<sup>9</sup> Since women were restricted to the domestic sphere, their range of knowledge were often limited, and hence inferior to men’s. This again, exacerbated their limitation when writing, and forced them to write romantic novels.<sup>10</sup> In general, literature both influences and reflects the time in which it is written, the novel of the nineteenth-century being no exception. The rise of the realist novel early in the nineteenth century introduced real life into fiction. Such novels should, Gorsky argues, ‘display an unusual degree of social consciousness [because] if art did not imitate life, it could not hope to influence it’.<sup>11</sup> However, as Gorsky argues, the real life that was portrayed was not to criticize society, only to imitate it. This changed with writers from the mid-nineteenth-century.<sup>12</sup> Arguably, the aim of mid-Victorian literature can be seen to influence people by not only demonstrating society’s values, but by criticizing them as well. Because of this, the novels of the Brontë sisters and George Eliot can be seen as reliable representations when studying Victorian women’s confined role and changes within this situation, during the mid-Victorian era.

Some of her contemporaries were startled when Charlotte Brontë published the story about her free-spoken and independent heroine, Jane Eyre, who declared intellectual and emotional equality between the sexes. Elizabeth Rigby, in *Quarterly Review* in December 1848, stated that ‘almost every word she [Jane] utters offends us [...] in either her pedantry, stupidity, or gross vulgarity’. She continued by saying that ‘Jane Eyre is pre-eminently an

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Henry Roshier James, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Sketch* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1932) <[http://books.google.com/books?id=OMUCSsRy3x0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=mary+wollstonecraft&hl=en&ei=kDqgTuOWDqL54QS\\_r\\_zSDg&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CEkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=OMUCSsRy3x0C&printsec=frontcover&dq=mary+wollstonecraft&hl=en&ei=kDqgTuOWDqL54QS_r_zSDg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CEkQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q&f=false)> [Accessed 28 October 2011], p. 59.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Martin, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> Kelly J. Mays, ‘The Publishing World’ in *A Companion to The Victorian Novel*, ed. Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), pp. 11-30 (p. 21).

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Gorsky, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Gorsky, pp. 4 and 7.

anti-Christian composition. There is throughout it a murmuring against the comforts of the rich and against the privations of the poor'.<sup>13</sup> As a heroine, Jane's personality was radically different from previous ones, in addition to the fact that her criticism of society and her view of religion were considered alarming. The exposure of a truth that had previously been 'kept well hidden by respectable authors' was one of the initial shocks, but when society discovered that the author was a woman, this shock was reinforced.<sup>14</sup> Even though the novel was both loved and hated by contemporary readers, it introduced new dimensions of womanhood in fiction, and it helped change the view of the governess. Jane's strong and independent mind gave governesses an identity first as women, and then as governesses.<sup>15</sup> The novel was Charlotte Brontë's breakthrough as a novelist, and it has been characterized, both during the nineteenth century and in modern times, as the best and most successful of her novels.<sup>16</sup> It represents new sides of being a woman and challenges established conventions, and is in that sense interesting as an expression of early feminism.

If *Jane Eyre* had been characterized as rebellious, Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* was, when published a couple of months later, an even greater shock. It was not the feminine voice that was the most alarming thing in this novel, but the violence, the rudeness and the hatred presented throughout.<sup>17</sup> However, it was inconceivable that a woman had written so freely and portrayed a world so cruel. In contrast to her sister, this was the only novel Emily wrote, but the originality of the story, the different genres the novel incorporates, and the strong influence of Romanticism have made this novel one of the most read and written about world-wide.<sup>18</sup> The life of Catherine Earnshaw Linton represents society's destruction of female nature as she is forced to behave as a lady and refuse her wish (and need) for freedom. Her story not only expresses a woman's natural emotions and need of autonomy, there is also emphasis on the strong hold society has on women through its rules. An example of this hold is seen in how both Catherines and Isabella are considered their husbands' (and fathers-in-law's) property.

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Rigby's reception of *Jane Eyre*, in *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre and Villette*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 67-73 (pp. 69 and 71).

<sup>14</sup> Dunbar, p. 130.

<sup>15</sup> Susan Siefert, *The Dilemma of the Talented Heroine: A Study in Nineteenth Century fiction* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1978), p.100.

<sup>16</sup> Miriam Allott, *Charlotte Brontë: Jane Eyre and Villette* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 13.

<sup>17</sup> Dunbar, p. 131.

<sup>18</sup> Pauline Nestor, 'Preface' and 'Introduction' *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. xxi-xxii.

*The Mill on the Floss* was published in 1860, and in a society more experienced with and adjusted to renovations.<sup>19</sup> Women's situation had begun to improve but despite of this, Eliot was less interested in women's vote and equality between men and women, rather, she was primarily concerned with the issue of education.<sup>20</sup> For this reason, it is perhaps not surprising that her novel is less direct and outspoken than those of the Brontë sisters'. Though Eliot did not support women's suffrage she did portray women's situations and the restricted role they were forced to live in. This is exemplified in the portrayal of Maggie Tulliver, whose attempt to change this role is a challenging and painful experience. Eliot emphasizes the power of society and hence women's difficulties in trying to live a life as an individual. This novel illustrates the lack of acceptance of new and unconventional ideas and behavior, especially concerning women's situation.

From the mid-Victorian period to the end of this century, emancipation became a heated issue. Different female philanthropic organizations were established, the Marriage and Divorce Act was passed in 1857, John Stuart Mill published *The Subjection of Women* in 1869, and the first Married Women's Property Act was passed in 1870.<sup>21</sup> By the 1880's and 1890's the discussion of what became The Woman Question was firmly established and the idea of 'The New Woman' had been introduced.<sup>22</sup> This 'new' woman was someone who had 'either won or [was] fighting for, a degree of equality and personal freedom'.<sup>23</sup> By the end of the Victorian period women's role in society had changed from being a dependent and submissive 'angel of the house', to becoming more independent and freed from 'the bondage of unjust laws and stultifying lives'.<sup>24</sup>

Although none of the authors in this thesis can be considered 'feminists' in the later sense of the word, they offer a basis. According to Elaine Showalter, these authors and their literary works have contributed to 'the wider evolution of women's self-awareness and to the ways in which any minority group finds its direction of self-expression relative to a dominant

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<sup>19</sup> Changes such as industrial development: coal and cotton textile industries, the expansion of railway networks and scientific changes by Darwin's newly published *The Origin of Species* (1859).

<sup>20</sup> Kate Flint, 'George Eliot and Gender' in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 159-180 (p. 162).

<sup>21</sup> Nicola Diane Thompson, *Victorian Women Writers and The Woman Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979), pp. 53-54.

<sup>23</sup> Stubbs, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> Gorsky, p. 80.

society'.<sup>25</sup> Their contributions might have been both that of voicing the current situation for middle class women, and further demonstrating new sides of womanhood. The portrayal of these new dimensions raised awareness and gave inspiration to change women's situation.

The nineteenth century was arguably the period in history where most changes in the role of women occurred. In the early decades of that century, women were forced to either marry or be labeled as unnatural, their role was to be the domestic angel who kept 'the family true, refined, affectionate [and] faithful'.<sup>26</sup> A woman was owned by and dependent on a man. In the mid-nineteenth century, partly because of the rise of the realist novel, society's hold on women was criticized. Female authors such as those discussed in this thesis, Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and John Stuart Mill's petition for granting women equal rights challenged the core of society. The result was a new awareness of humans role and importance in the world in general, women specifically, and the novel. In general, the typical novel reader was female,<sup>27</sup> and as the novels introduced female heroines who sought to change society's conventions, these attitudes had so strong an influence that they were sometimes taken into consideration in real life. From the 1850's and to the end of the century, Victorian society experienced females that wanted to change the male ideology of women. They showed a courage that seemed to grow every time a new Act or a new law was passed. Organizations, movements, a new role and claims to change women's right to education, vote and work were demanded. Much of this was even achieved before the end of the century, as Stubbs argues, the greatest visible change for women during this century occurred in 'family life, education, and jobs'.<sup>28</sup>

## Structure

This thesis is divided into three chapters, one for each of the female protagonists. The first chapter looks at *Jane Eyre* and how she becomes independent and masters her own life. Chapter two looks at Maggie Tulliver and how society restricts her actions and her chances of achieving autonomy. Chapter three is concerned with Catherine Earnshaw Linton, and, in

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<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Elaine Showalter, 'A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing' in *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), ed. Mary Eagleton (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996) <[http://books.google.com/books?id=MO9xIC7umwwC&pg=PA14&dq=a+literature+of+their+own,+showalter&hl=en&ei=CMyvTvLLOe314QSNn8GjAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=a%20literature%20of%20their%20own%2C%20showalter&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=MO9xIC7umwwC&pg=PA14&dq=a+literature+of+their+own,+showalter&hl=en&ei=CMyvTvLLOe314QSNn8GjAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CC8Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=a%20literature%20of%20their%20own%2C%20showalter&f=false)> [Accessed 1 November 2011] pp. 14-18 (p. 14).

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Stubbs, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Gorsky, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Stubbs, p. 1.



ways similar to Maggie Tulliver, the analysis of Catherine's life shows how she too is restricted by society. All three chapters stress how these women, despite their restrictions, nevertheless, albeit in various ways, struggle for some degree of independence and control over their own lives. At the same time, there is a focus on the aspects of society which restrict them: family, conventions, laws, class distinctions and so on. Each chapter ends with concluding remarks about that heroine's development. A short concluding chapter looks at the similarities as well as the differences between the three heroines.

## Chapter 1: Jane Eyre – the plain heroine

Before *Jane Eyre* governesses were generally represented as creatures without identity.<sup>29</sup>

However, the strong-minded, educated and freely spoken Jane changed showed a new kind of governess. As mentioned Jane shows how she is first a woman, and then an employee as a governess, a change of focus that naturally gives the governess an identity. In this chapter, I have chosen to look at Jane's struggle and search for independence by following the various places in Jane's life. My argument is that each place represents a further development of Jane as a woman.

### Gateshead

Jane's ten year long stay at Gateshead had been loveless, threatening, careless and lonely. Every day Jane had been reminded of how different she was from her aunt and her cousins, of her inferiority to them and that she should be grateful of what they offered her: 'you are a dependant, mama says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not to live here with gentlemen's children like us'(11). Years with such treatment has made Jane escape into books and the world they offer. She reads, goes for walks and seeks comfort and company with Bessie and her stories. Most of the time, this has been enough for Jane, but when Bessie is occupied and the books are out of reach, Jane is lonely and in need of love:

To this crib I always took my doll: human beings must love something, and, in the dearth of worthier objects of affection, I contrived to find a pleasure in loving and cherishing a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow. It puzzles me now to remember with what absurd sincerity I doated on this little toy; half-fancying it alive and capable of sensation [...] when it lay there safe and warm, I was comparatively happy, believing it to be happy likewise. (28)

It is difficult to overlook Jane's loneliness in reading this. Out of a lack of any real humans to love, she creates a fantasy image of her doll being alive. It is as she says herself: 'human beings must love something' and this shabby doll is the only thing Jane has. This quote not only underlines her loneliness in this house but also that she is alone in the world, that she is an orphan. Even if Jane is having a rough time at Gateshead, she would rather stay there than live in poorer conditions. Jane is also uncertain whether she has any other relatives. Her aunt

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<sup>29</sup> Susan Siefert, *The Dilemma of the Talented Heroine. A study in Nineteenth Century fiction* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1978), p. 100.

told her once that she might have ‘some poor, low relations called Eyre’ (24), *if* she has anyone at all. She is therefore convinced that it is better to stay at Gateshead:

I reflected. Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children [...] poverty for me was synonymous with degradation. [...] no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste. (24)

When examining Jane’s search for independence and wish for a different life, three episodes during Jane’s stay at Gateshead are of particular significance. The first is the episode where John Reed hits Jane, which is one of the first moments in this novel where Brontë expresses her political views. The second episode worth noticing is the scene in the red room. The trauma of this episode follows Jane throughout the novel, and it changes not only Jane but also her location. The third episode is Jane’s speech to her aunt Reed after Mr. Brocklehurst has visited Gateshead. For the first and only time Jane tells her aunt exactly what she feels about her aunt’s unjust behavior.

John Reed, the only man and the master of the house after his father died, is spoiled by his mother and acts as a tyrant towards his cousin, bullying and punishing her. He is ‘large and stout for his age, with a dingy and unwholesome skin [and] heavy limbs and large extremities’(9). John has no respect for his mother, his sisters or anything else living, as he ‘twisted the necks of the pigeons, killed the little pea-chicks [and] set the dogs at the sheep’(15). He calls his mother names, and no one, his mother, his sisters or Jane, dare correct his faults and his violent behavior. John Reed functions as a representative of a patriarchal society (one of several such representatives in this novel). He is, as he is well aware of, the master of this house which contains only John and females: his mother, his sisters, Jane, the lady’s maid Miss Abbott and Bessie. There is a marked similarity between the hierarchy of this house and that of a patriarchal society. As the reader is told, ‘the servants did not like to offend their young master by taking my part against him’(10). The truth is that no one dares to speak to him because he is the master. ‘Accustomed to John Reed’s abuse, I never had an idea of replying to it; my care was how to endure the blow which would certainly follow the insult’(10). Although Jane has not dared to reply to John’s offences, she has drawn parallels between his behavior towards her and the Roman emperors’ behavior towards their slaves. Even though she never meant her reflections to be spoken out loud, the stroke John gives her on this chilly winter day in the beginning of the novel is the last straw: Jane explodes and responds to John’s ten year long torment and violent behavior towards her. Her sharp and

quick tongue confuses John for a second, until he realizes that his only means of revenge is to use his physical advantage of being so much bigger and stronger than Jane.

Jane's courage to respond to John's behavior is very interesting. To go against social conventions and, as a female, retaliating against a man of higher social status is a radical move. Her response with reference to literature and not muscles, not only implies, but states very clearly that women are just as, and in some situations even more intellectual than men are. This girl is radical in that she is not afraid to demonstrate her intellect. Clearly, this episode of empowerment represents Jane's first action towards independence and another life. However, John is only a small and inexperienced example of patriarchal society. Mr. Brocklehurst of Lowood School is by contrast a much more conservative representative that will challenge Jane's courage and strength.

In this analysis of Jane's development into a woman, the next significant episode at Gateshead is the scene in the red room. Many critics have analyzed and interpreted the significance and the symbolism of this scene. Gilbert and Gubar argue that it 'represents her [Jane's] vision of the society in which she is trapped, an uneasy and elfin dependent', and that this scene is 'a paradigm of the larger drama' in the novel: the name of the room and Jane's passion, Jane's imprisonment and Bertha Mason's imprisonment. Jane's pilgrimage towards independence 'consists of a series of experiences which are, in one way or another, variations on the central, red-room motif of enclosure and escape.'<sup>30</sup> The red room is Jane's punishment after her attack on John. Locked up in this room, left only with her thoughts, the reader is given more information of how Jane has been treated by her aunt and cousins and how she herself has behaved. Jane asks herself why she is always so ill-treated: 'Why was I always suffering, always brow-beaten, always accused, for ever condemned? Why could I never please?'(15). Being psychologically strong, Jane does not blame herself for these unhappy years at Gateshead, for, as she says to herself, she 'dared commit no fault: I strove to fulfil every duty; and I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night'(15). Jane knows that she is not the one to blame, but that her aunt is, which is shown later in Jane's speech to her aunt. These thoughts that occur in Jane during the time in the red room are again, in addition to her behavior towards John, examples of her intellect; she does not blame herself as a victim, but instead blames others for performing an unjust and criminal action. Nevertheless, these thoughts are also an example of

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<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 340-341.

her passion: i.e., her physical attack on John and her wild behavior when carried up to the red room.

‘Hold her arms, Miss Abbott; she’s like a mad cat.’ [...] ‘If you don’t sit still, you must be tied down,’ said Bessie. ‘Miss Abbott, lend me your garters; she would break mine directly’. (12)

The episode in the red room, although it causes Jane much pain, is, as it turns out later, Jane’s way out of Gateshead and indirectly a step closer to freedom.

The last episode, Jane’s speech to her aunt, occurs after Mr. Brocklehurst has been visiting and Mrs. Reed has deliberately portrayed Jane as a deceitful, wicked child. ‘*Speak I must: I had been trodden on severely and must turn*’(36). Jane’s sense of justice and her strong belief in the truth makes it impossible for her to hold back. Just as the violent behavior by John had reached its limit and made Jane act, so has Mrs. Reed’s unjust portrayal of Jane to Mr. Brocklehurst. ‘I dislike you the worst of anybody in the world except John Reed [...] People think you a good woman, but you are bad; hardhearted. *You are deceitful!*’(36-37). According to Harriet Björk, Jane’s rebellious behavior, in both this scene and in the two others, represent the early movements of the Rights of Women in France and in England.<sup>31</sup> It is easy to see the connections between Jane’s liberating speech -- ‘Ere I had finished this reply, my soul began to expand, to exult, with the strangest sense of freedom, of triumph, I ever felt’(37), and Björk’s argument. Jane’s conclusion after her speech: ‘I was left there alone – winner of the field. It was the hardest battle I had fought, and the first victory I had gained’(37), seems therefore to be an optimistic view of women’s development within society. Brontë’s heroine is right in that this speech is the hardest battle she has fought. She has broken all conventions being a child and not only argued against, but insulted an adult as well. Jane knows that she has behaved badly -- ‘A child cannot quarrel with its elders, as I had done’(37), but at the same time, she has allowed herself to speak her mind. Her behavior has been unconventional and Jane cannot resist feeling a little satisfied with this victory.

In order to gain independence, Jane has, quite literally, a long way to go. Jane enters new places and develops new sides of herself, but as each place has some restrictions on this heroine’s development into a free and independent woman, Jane is removed and placed somewhere else. Although a couple of battles have been fought and won at Gateshead, there are too many limitations in order for Jane to succeed. The environment is narrow and

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<sup>31</sup> Harriet Björk, *The Language of Truth. Charlotte Brontë, the Woman Question, and the Novel* (Lund: AB Skånska Centraltryckeriet, 1974), p. 91.

poisonous, and she would never be able to learn anything more; to develop an independent mind, to control her fiery temper and to let go of the past and avoid bitterness. In order for Jane to achieve this, she is moved on to Lowood School.

## **Lowood Institution**

As Jane enters Lowood School, Brontë introduces another miniature of a patriarchal society. The owner is Mr. Brocklehurst, who, arguably, is an archetype of a patriarch. The school is run by female teachers who all, including Miss Temple, have to obey Mr. Brocklehurst's rules and demands. The similarities between Lowood and Gateshead are clear. Again Jane is restricted by conservatism, but unlike at Gateshead, she is now surrendered by fellow-sisters. Jane experiences that she is not alone, as Helen Burns tells her:

‘Jane, you are mistaken: probably not one in the school either despises or dislikes you: many, I am sure, pity you much.’ ‘How can they pity me after what Mr. Brocklehurst said?’ ‘Mr. Brocklehurst is not a god; nor is he even a great and admired man.’ (69)

At this school there is especially Jane's friendship with Helen Burns, but also Miss Temple, that is important when looking at Jane's growth towards becoming a woman. Helen teaches this orphan to control her temper and endure sufferings instead of resisting. When Jane first sees Helen being punished, she asks herself: ‘How can she bear it so quietly -- so firmly?’ (52). Another time, Helen receives strokes for not paying attention in class, Jane is amazed by Helen's conduct, and at the same time she feels anger for this violent treatment of her friend:

Not a tear rose to Burns's eye; and, while I paused from my sewing, because my fingers quivered at this spectacle with a sentiment of unavailing and impotent anger, not a feature of her pensive face altered its ordinary expression. (54)

This behavior is very different from how Jane would have behaved, but as Helen later tells her:

It is far better to endure patiently a smart which nobody feels but yourself, than to commit a hasty action whose evil consequences will extend to all connected with you – and besides, the Bible bids us return good for evil. (55)

It is impossible to overlook the religious aspect of Helen's attitude and conduct. Like a saint, she would rather endure anything and believe God has a meaning with it, than react passionately as Jane has previously done at Gateshead. Jane admires Helen's attitude, but could never passively agree to every word Helen utters and change her person into the same

passivity Helen has. If she did, she would be just as submissive as other, more conventional women have been. Instead Jane is to *learn* from Helen, to copy parts of her doctrine and incorporate them with her own thoughts and feelings. Already within the same dialogue the reader perceives more of Jane's independent mind when she says:

But I feel this, Helen: I must dislike those who, whatever I do to please them, persist in liking me; I must resist those who punish me unjustly. It is as natural as that I should love those who show me affection, or submit to punishment when I feel it deserved. (57-58)

*Natural* is one of the key words in Jane's life; she would never go against her natural instincts (something I will come back to later). That Jane has learned from Helen is shown when she is to tell Miss Temple of her ten years at Gateshead. Instead of letting her passions and bitterness towards her aunt take control, she tells the story of her past in a simple and truthful way:

resolved in the depth of [her] heart that [she] would be most moderate [...] and mindful of Helen's warnings against the indulgence of resentment, [she] infused into the narrative far less of gall and wormwood than ordinary. Thus restrained and simplified, it sounded more credible. (71)

This friendship with Helen has changed Jane, has made her adapt to society's expectations as she behaves 'restrained'. The other person Jane learns much from, and who contributes in shaping Jane into a better person, is Miss Temple. She is not as religious as Helen, but just as good. In her, Jane has a solid role model:

to her instruction I owed the best part of my acquirements; her friendship and society had been my continual solace; she had stood me in the stead of mother, governess, and latterly, companion. (84)

This quotation shows how important Miss Temple has been to Jane. For the first time in her life this little girl has had a mother-figure, someone to teach her right from wrong, to love her and take care of her. But Jane is still vulnerable and can easily return to her old self:

I walked about the chamber most of the time. I imagined myself only to be regretting my loss, and thinking how to repair it [then] another discovery dawned on me: namely, that in the interval I had undergone a transforming process; that my mind had put off all it had borrowed of Miss Temple. (84)

Without her role model, Jane is like air – ready to disappear into another place:

From the day she left I was no longer the same: with her was gone every settled feeling [...] now I was left in my natural element; and beginning to feel the stirring of old emotions. (84)

Gilbert and Gubar point out that Jane's two surrogate mothers, Helen and Miss Temple, can never be enough for Jane in order for her to develop: 'not Miss Temple's way of ladylike repression, not Helen Burns' way of saintly renunciation'.<sup>32</sup> I agree with Gilbert and Gubar in this because it seems unlikely that Jane, with all her passion, with all her anger towards her aunt ('I shall remember how you thrust me back' (36)), should forgive and forget such unjust behavior. As noted above, it is not in Jane's *nature* to do so. Therefore, when both her models are gone and Jane is again sensing her 'old emotions', she has to remove herself and find a new place to grow, before Lowood suffocates her. '[She] was not free to resume the interrupted chain of [her] reflections' (85). Jane is convinced that she needs to use her accomplishments constructively, and therefore seek other work, and not settle with a marriage as Miss Temple had done. In Brontë's own letters she states that 'self-respecting poor and plain women should turn to the labour market instead of degrading themselves on the overstocked marriage-market.'<sup>33</sup> Jane is such a poor and plain woman, and she advertises for a job as a governess. As a representative of single, lower middle class women in Victorian-Britain, Jane's work-options are few. A post as a governess is the best option due to her education and her previous work as a teacher.

## **Thornfield Hall**

Entering Thornfield, there are several interesting aspects to consider regarding Jane's progress towards independence and maturity: Her relationship with Mr. Rochester before the proposal, Jane and Blanche Ingram, Mr. Rochester and Jane's shopping after the proposal, Jane the day before the wedding, and Mr. Rochester's suggestion to take Jane away to a house in France.

When meeting Mr. Edward Rochester, Jane, for the first time in her life, meets a man who is less patriarchal than her cousin John and Mr. Brocklehurst. Many critics have commented on how Jane and Rochester's relationship is not equal, as Jane claims, that Jane thinks she is active, but in reality is only passively receiving all the knowledge and stories

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<sup>32</sup> Gilbert and Gubar. p. 347.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Björk, p. 25.



Rochester wishes to tell.<sup>34</sup> I can understand this interpretation of their relationship since Jane says that she likes to listen to his stories:

[Rochester] liked to open to a mind unacquainted with the world, glimpses of its scenes and ways [...] and I had a keen delight in receiving the new ideas he offered, in imaging the new pictures he portrayed, and following him in thought through the new regions he disclosed. (146)

However, it seems to me that Jane, in listening to Rochester, not only learns about the world, but has found herself a replacement for the books she used to read at Gateshead, and with which she nourished her imaginative mind. There is no doubt that Jane is inferior to Rochester, both in social position (he is her master, she is a governess) and in experience, but in their dialogues, they discuss topics as if they were equals. Furthermore, Rochester is interested in knowing what Jane feels and thinks about a topic, and Jane, on her part, is not afraid to speak her opinions. At the same time, there are episodes, especially in the beginning, where the reader senses a pride and a condescending behavior from Rochester's side; that he asks Jane a question only because he finds it amusing to know what this little girl with no experience of the world thinks. I would like to argue that when discussing equality between them, it is worth looking deeper into their first meeting. This is fascinating because, although he is a man with much experience, even riding on his large horse symbolizing his power and greatness compared to Jane where she stands in her 'quite simple' outfit(114), Rochester falls off his horse and is therefore forced to meet Jane as an equal on the ground. Nevertheless, in this first meeting they are not equal; Jane helps Rochester, who has no other choice than to seek help from her. From a feminist point of view, this represents a new time where men and women can be equal and have the same rights to education and independence. 'My help had been needed and claimed; I had given it: I was pleased to have done something; trivial, transitory though the deed was, it was yet an active thing'(115). The satisfaction Jane feels after this is similar to the freedom she felt after her speech to Mrs. Reed. This episode had 'marked with change one single hour of a monotonous life'(115). Jane's action and her sense of freedom and satisfaction afterwards put emphasis on her brave speech earlier in the novel:

It is in vain to say human beings ought to be satisfied with tranquility: they must have action; and they will make it if they cannot find it [...] Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer. (109)

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<sup>34</sup> Laura Morgan Green, *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), pp. 35-36.

This speech is radical considering the historical time in which the novel is set. Notably, Jane does not only argue against idleness in general, but also the right for women to be active, to educate themselves under the same conditions as men. Accidentally, Rochester's accident has put Jane and Rochester on equal terms, and Rochester's teasing of Jane later seems to be his way to compensate for the loss of command in this relationship, the loss of power. But as their relationship grows, Rochester understands that there is something unique about Jane, and that it is not worth while trying to tease her. This protagonist has a strong mind and is not afraid of uttering her opinions: 'Your language is enigmatical, sir: but though I am bewildered, I am certainly not afraid [...] I have no wish to talk nonsense'(138). Unlike Blanche Ingram, who speaks only for the sake of it and in order to receive the natural attention a speaker gets from her audience, Jane is not interested in entertaining people with idle talk. Rochester asks Jane one evening to talk because he wants to be entertained, 'I leave both the choice of subject and the manner of treating it, entirely to yourself'(133), he says. With Blanche Ingram Rochester would not have had to ask, but Jane does not want to obey like a dog, like Pilot: 'Accordingly I sat and said nothing: "If he expects me to talk for the mere sake of talking and showing off, he will find he has addressed himself to the wrong person," I thought'(133). Being inferior, both because she is a woman and in terms of her social status, this is a brave and independent move from Jane -- and Brontë. Throughout the novel Brontë has placed Jane as the subject, and not as the traditional object. David Deirdre interprets this subjectification to include *all* Victorian women; that Jane Eyre functions as a role model placing the Victorian woman as a subject and not an object consisting of both 'the selflessness of Little Nell' and 'the complicated authority of the young Queen Victoria'; in other words as the ideal woman.<sup>35</sup>

Blanche Ingram's constant charade of politeness, charm and love functions as a contrast to Jane's pure heart, her self-awareness and independent mind. Physically they differ in that Blanche has a 'noble bust', 'sloping shoulders' and a 'graceful neck'(172), while Jane is little and plain with her 'usual Quaker trim [...] all being too close and plain'(129). Despite Blanche's beauty, Jane, through careful observation of Blanche, understands what kind of person she is, and becomes even more confident in her own nature and how she would not like to be. '[Blanche] was self-conscious -- remarkably self-conscious' and behaves badly towards one of the other guests by 'playing on her [Mrs. Dent's] ignorance'(173). Though

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<sup>35</sup> David Deirdre, *Rule Britannia, Women, Empire, and Victorian Writing* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 77.

these are faults in Blanche, Jane cannot help admiring her as well: ‘She played: her execution was brilliant; she sang: her voice was fine; she talked French apart to her mama; and she talked it well, with fluency and a good accent’(173). These accomplishments are to be expected in a woman belonging to the upper classes, but since Jane is jealous of the attention Blanche receives from Mr. Rochester, she cannot help comparing them to her own accomplishments. The charade Blanche plays, her need for attention and being the central point of the party:

Miss Ingram was a mark beneath jealousy: she was too inferior to excite the feeling [...] She was very showy, but she was not genuine [...] her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil [...] She was not good [...] she used to repeat sounding phrases from books; she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. (185-186)

Jane’s comment on Blanche has a rather opposite function than what she intends. The reader gets an impression that Jane actually is jealous of Blanche, despite her comment that she ‘was a mark beneath jealousy’. It is obvious that Jane understands Blanche to be a rival in her want of attention from Mr. Rochester, and because of this she cannot let a bitter remark as the one presented above be left out. At the same time as Blanche is a rival to her, she also represents women who had no other aim in life than to marry well and spend the rest of their lives being their husbands’ property. Jane, being poorer than Blanche and forced to work in order to manage, cannot respect such a woman. A woman who has no interest in making her own opinions, not interested in expanding her knowledge and receiving more education, is a woman who is acting against her natural feelings, a woman who seeks to submit to the objectification by men. And this is exactly why Brontë has included Blanche, in order to distinguish her independent heroine from the conventional and superficial women in society and to emphasize qualities such as ‘intellectual acuity, moral sensitivity and aspiration’.<sup>36</sup> Jane feels anger and frustration over Blanche’s ‘talents’ and jealous of the results these talents produce:

I saw he was going to marry her, for family, perhaps political reasons; because her rank and connexions suited him; I felt he had not given her his love, and that her qualifications were ill adapted to win from him that treasure [...] It surprised me when I first discovered that such [marrying for interest and connections] was his intention. (186-187)

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<sup>36</sup>Siefert, p. 9.

She herself could never enter a marriage based on social conventions and economic interest, it would go against her nature, and that is why she cannot accept the marriage between Rochester and Blanche. It is *unnatural* and without emotions.

I had thought him a man unlikely to be influenced by motives so commonplace in his choice of a wife; but the longer I considered the position, education, &c., of the parties, the less I felt justified in judging and blaming either him or Miss Ingram, for acting in conformity to ideas and principles instilled into them, doubtless, from their childhood. All their class held these principles. (187)

This reflection of Jane shows that she understands the necessity and expectations of such a marriage. Still, she is critical and strict in her judgment of the ‘principles’ that their class hold. She herself, belonging to another social class, is not brought up with such principles, and sees herself free to believe in a marriage based on love and not social rules. As such, her social inferiority gives her an advantage.

A third interesting episode from Thornfield Hall occurs after Rochester and Jane are engaged, when Rochester decides that he wants to buy new dresses for his future bride and takes her to Millcote. Being used to buying his way into the bosoms of his mistresses, Rochester wants Jane to pick out ‘half a dozen dresses’ (268) and jewelry. But as Jane is not one of his mistresses, and not interested in being bought, the whole experience feels ‘harassing’, and her cheeks burn ‘with a sense of annoyance and degradation’ (268). The word degradation is significant because it tells the reader how this woman feels; she is being degraded from being treated as an equal into the inferior and dependent status Celine Varens had. ‘I will not be your English Celine Varens’ she tells Rochester (270). Jane’s self-awareness tells her that she cannot and will not be bought. Her status as a governess is to be replaced with the role of the equally repressed ‘ornamental wife’ in Susan Siefert’s formulation.<sup>37</sup> Traditionally, marriage was considered the only respectable way to settle down in life for a Victorian woman, and as Janet Dunbar points out, they prepared themselves by reading books such as *The English Wife* and *The Women of England*.<sup>38</sup> This is not on the other hand the only thing Jane wants for her life. She finds it impossible to limit her definition of herself as a potential wife; she is so much more than that.<sup>39</sup> This heroine is concerned about her own being, her right to behave as an independent and free human. Being bought like a mistress, dressed like a doll and expected to forever repay this and be indebted to Rochester’s

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<sup>37</sup> Siefert, p. 107.

<sup>38</sup> Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman* (London: George G. Harrap & co, 1953), pp. 18-20.

<sup>39</sup> Siefert, p. 107.

generosity go against Jane's nature. She can see how Rochester's 'smile was such as a sultan might, in a blissful and fond moment, bestow on a slave his gold and gems had enriched' (269), and she answers, strong-minded and determined:

'You need not look in that way,' I said: 'if you do, I'll wear nothing but my old Lowood frocks to the end of the chapter. I'll be married in this lilac gingham – you may make a dressing-gown for yourself out of the pearl-grey silk'. (269).

A feminist side of Jane is revealed as the 'eastern allusion bit me again', and she says: 'I'll be preparing myself to go out as a missionary to preach liberty to them that are enslaved -- your Harem inmates amongst the rest' (269). Although this is only a fantasy Rochester and Jane play with, Jane's answer is made in honesty: she would not allow herself or other women to be enslaved and objectified in Rochester's or any other man's harem. This again underlines how Jane refuses to live with the established norms of society, and how she radically breaks with them by uttering her resistance against such oppression. An interesting point concerning this is the following episode where Rochester, although Jane has already told him how she feels, *again* tries to cover up his bride in expensive materials. Because of this, Jane's will and strength to hold back are *again* put to a test.

The next episode at Thornfield is the episode with the veil.

[...] the veil which, in your princely extravagance, you sent from London: *resolved*, I suppose, since I would not have jewels, to *cheat* me into accepting something as costly', says Jane to Rochester. (280, my emphasis)

The words 'resolved' and 'cheat' tell the reader that Jane feels that Rochester has tricked her into accepting this veil, which symbolizes a sultan's gift to his bought slave and an everlasting veil to cover up the true and natural Jane. But just as Rochester is resolved, Jane is also resolved not to give in to this. However, the problem is solved for Jane when Bertha Mason decides to save Jane from being forced to cover herself up. Bertha, a woman tricked into marriage for economical reasons, can be interpreted as an image of women who have been tricked into similar destructive and loveless kinds of marriages. The anger and the repressed feelings such a marriage has aroused in Bertha, makes her passion run wild, just like Jane let her passion run wild when she was carried away to the red room as a little girl. Unlike Bertha, Jane has learned to control her passion. Gilbert and Gubar see Bertha as Jane's 'darkest double', that Bertha performs Jane's inner wish when destroying the veil for her.<sup>40</sup> I agree that there are similarities between Jane and Bertha: Jane is in the beginning called a wild animal,

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<sup>40</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 360.

Bertha crawls around in the tower as ‘whether beast or human being’(293), Jane is passionate (but she has learned to control it), Bertha is passionate (but has not learned to control it), they are both in a relationship with Rochester. Although these, and more, similarities are recognized between Jane and Bertha, I would like to add a possible interpretation of Bertha’s role in the novel. In addition to representing Jane’s darkest side, Bertha can also be read in a more general way, representing those women who allowed themselves to be married as if marriage was a social contract motivated by cast and economy, and not a pact between two people in love. Blanche Ingram with her social status and her view on marriage is also a representation of such women. But as Blanche remains unmarried in this novel, it is Bertha’s life that functions as an example of how such a marriage can imprison women, leave them with no agency and become a reason for madness.

That it is necessary for this veil to be torn in two for Jane to be freed from the role of becoming another submissive wife, is made obvious two days before the wedding when Jane has difficulties accepting the new life that awaits her: ‘Mrs: Rochester! She did not exist [...] I shut the closet, to conceal the strange, wraith-like apparel it contained [the dresses given from Mr. Rochester] [...] a most ghostly shimmer’(275). Jane understands that she will be a completely different person after she is married. Her thoughts of losing herself and being forced to change into a new person is repeated on her wedding day when she puts on her dress and stands before the mirror: ‘I saw a robed and veiled *figure*, so unlike my usual self that it seemed almost the image of a *stranger*’(286, my emphasis). This figure is a stranger. It is not Jane as she knows herself, it is not the Jane the reader knows; this is the covered and submissive Jane Rochester. Jane must leave Thornfield in order to stay as Jane Eyre and to keep her true self and continue to mature so that she can reach her long-wished for independence, and as Gilbert and Gubar say, so that she can achieve true equality with Mr. Rochester.<sup>41</sup>

But before Jane leaves Mr. Rochester and Thornfield, she has yet one more temptation to resist. Jane is confused and alone after the discovery of Bertha on her wedding day:

[...] where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday? -- where was her life? -- where were her prospects? Jane Eyre, who had been an ardent, expectant woman -- almost a bride -- was a cold, solitary girl again. (295)

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<sup>41</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 358.

Positioned in a most vulnerable situation, Jane is confused about who she is and what she should do. Her reason and her emotions battle each other for an answer, but then:

a voice within me averred that I could do it [leave Mr. Rochester]; and foretold that I should do it. I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak that I might avoid the awful passage of further suffering I saw laid out for me. (297)

Jane's wish to be weak in order to avoid more pain is not what her natural instincts tell her to do: it is not in her destiny to be weak. This is a woman who knows what is right and must act accordingly. When Rochester visits her and wants her to live with him as his mistress in the south of France, Jane knows of two reasons why she should not: first, Rochester would one day, just as he has with his other mistresses, 'regard me with the same feeling which now in his mind desecrated their [his past mistresses] memory'(312), and second, and most importantly, because Jane knows that to live unmarried with an already married man, would mean that she would break both legal and religious laws, and that would oppose what Jane believes in; her religion and her natural instincts.<sup>42</sup> Rochester tries desperately to convince her and puts it to her that no one would be bothered if they lived a life in sin in France, 'Who in the world cares for *you*? Or who will be injured by what you do?'(317). The new dimension for women that Jane already has shown several times is yet again significant as Jane replies: 'I care for myself! The more solitary, the more friendless, the more unsustained I am, the more I will respect myself. I will keep the law given by God; sanctioned by man'(317). Once more, the emphasis is on her psychologically strong mind, how she is not the weaker sex giving in to temptations (if anything she implies that men are more likely to be sinful), but a moral being acting in accordance with both her own self-consciousness and the laws of society.

## **Moor House**

When Jane's pilgrimage towards independence has removed her from Thornfield, she is thrown out on the moors, forced to live like an outcast before she eventually is taken care of by the Rivers' at Moor House. The physical suffering that Jane has to go through (not only on the moors but in other places as well) is the price she has to pay in order to become a 'subject,' according to Deirdre.<sup>43</sup> Symbolically, Brontë shows through Jane's sufferings that in order to improve women's conditions and gain acceptance for the new features Jane has

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<sup>42</sup> Joan Bennett, 'A Moral Dilemma Unresolved' (1948) in Draper, R. P. *George Eliot The Mill on The Floss and Silas Marner, A Casebook* (London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 109-124 (p. 116).

<sup>43</sup> Deirdre, p. 115.

introduced, women will experience hardships. When entering Moor House, there are two episodes that I would like to look at in more detail. The first is when Jane actually receives her independence by inheriting from her uncle, and the second is St. John's proposal to Jane and her response. From the very introduction between the Rivers' and Jane, Jane decides to change her identity by changing her name, in order to secure that she is not recognized and hence be able to start over as a new person: Jane Elliott. This change of identity is different from the one forced upon Jane by Rochester: it is in accordance with Jane Eyre's nature because she herself has decided what the rules are; it is not a matter of a man imposing on her what he would want them to be. Although the name is slightly different, Jane has decided that she is to stay true to herself and work for a living. Within four days at Moor House she has expressed her wish to be independent of the Rivers and only asks help to find honest work.

She is offered work as a school mistress for farmer's daughters with a salary of thirty pounds a year. Although the job will not make her rich, it provides Jane with independence; an independence she has been longing for ever since her days at Gateshead. She is after all, as she tells St. John, 'not ambitious' (356), hence this is a situation that will suit her perfectly. However, the life of a school mistress is not glamorous: 'I felt degraded. I doubted I had taken a step which sank instead of raising me in the scale of social existence' (359). Jane has had to give up love as a sacrifice for her independence, and even though this hurts, she is still able to see that she made the right choice:

Whether it is better, I ask, to be a slave in a fool's paradise at Marseilles – fevered with delusive bliss one hour – suffocating with the bitterest tears of remorse and shame the next – or to be a village-schoolmistress, free and honest, in a breezy mountain nook in the healthy heart of England? Yes; I feel now that I was right when I adhered to principle and law, and scorned and crushed the insane promptings of a frenzied moment. (359-360)

Her choice has been in accordance with her religious belief and her instincts. She has refused the role as a 'slave' as she calls it, which means that she cannot have had great hopes of a happy and blissful affair with Rochester, but had realized that she would have allowed herself to become one of his mistresses in 'his harem.' A premarital relationship would have deprived Jane of any chance of gaining independence and respect in society.

Later in the novel when Jane's uncle dies, Jane is left with a fortune, which means that she truly becomes an independent woman. 'It was a grand boon doubtless; and independence would be glorious – yes, I felt that – *that* thought swelled my heart' (382). Even though Jane



has reached her independence upon inheriting her uncle's money, Jane would never be content with the life as an independent if she did not have anyone to love and someone to love her, as she told Helen Burns as a little girl: 'Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken, or to let a bull toss me' (69). The joy Jane feels when St. John tells her that she has not only inherited a fortune but a family as well, is therefore overwhelming:

Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed! – wealth for the heart! – a mine of pure, genial affections. This was a blessing, bright, vivid, and exhilarating! – not like the ponderous gift of gold: rich and welcome enough in its way, but sobering from its weight. (385)

The sisterly connection Jane had already established with Diana and Mary (before she learned that they were her cousins) will continue just as strong and help Jane 'free her from her angry memories of that wicked stepfamily the Reeds'.<sup>44</sup> Her cousin St. John on the other hand, 'the colder and sterner brother' (346), after knowing Jane's background and seeing how well she runs the village school, decides for himself that Jane with her strength and endurance is just what he needs to accompany him on his mission in India.

The way St. John's approaches Jane when educating her to become his missionary wife is not so different from Mr. Rochester's approach in the shopping expedition to Millcote. Just as Rochester wanted to decide what Jane should wear, St. John wants to decide what Jane should learn and how she is to learn it. "I want you to give up German, and learn Hindostanee." "You are not in earnest?" "In such earnest that *I must have it so*" (397, my emphasis). Although Jane does not understand the underlying reasons for St. John's command (why should she when he gives her a plausible reason?), her natural instincts to rebel against any attempt of suppression is roused later:

By degrees, he acquired a certain influence over me that took away my liberty of mind: his praise and notice were more restraining than his indifference. I could no longer talk or laugh freely when he was by. (397)

Jane is aware of what this does to her and her freedom, but since she is unaware of St. John's plans to make her his wife and is so thankful for what he has done for her, she does not rebel as she did against John Reed, her aunt or even Mr. Rochester. Already before St. John has proposed to her the similarities between Rochester's veil and the suffocating and restrained

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<sup>44</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 364.

behavior of St. John are obvious to the reader. None of these will in the end work with Jane Eyre. St. John's proposal to Jane is just as unemotional and cold as he himself is:

Jane, come with me to India: come as my help-meet and fellow-labourer [...] you are formed for labour, not for love [...] You shall be mine: I claim you – not for my pleasure, but for my Sovereign's service. (402)

His offer is a contract: 'I want a wife: the sole helpmeet I can influence efficiently in life, and retain absolutely till death' (406). This is a contract consisting of two unequal parts similar to the sultan and the slave; St. John is the master and Jane is the slave fulfilling his every command. Such a contract is impossible for Jane, however:

if I join St. John, I abandon half myself: if I go to India, I go to premature death [...] he asks me to be his wife, and has no more of a husband's heart for me than that frowning giant of a rock [...] Can I bear the consciousness that every endearment he bestows is a sacrifice made on principle? No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous. I will never undergo it. (404-405)

A marriage without love is not an option for her. Not only because she *has* been loved and knows how right it feels to be together with the person one loves, but also because it goes against her own beliefs. She condemned the social principles that Rochester and Blanche seemed to be accepting when she thought they were going to marry. The only option for Jane is therefore to go as a missionary to India with St. John, as brother and sister – as equals, and not as man and wife. As his wife in a loveless marriage she sees how she would be forced to be 'always restrained, and always checked – forced to keep the fire of my nature continually low, to compel it to burn inwardly and never utter a cry' (408). This offer is just as wrong and just as unequal a match as Rochester's offer to cover Jane in dresses and jewelry. The idea that 'enough of love would follow upon marriage to render the union right' (408), as St. John says, is such an unthinkable and unacceptable offer to Jane, that she in anger replies: 'I scorn your idea of love [...] I scorn the counterfeit sentiment you offer: yes, St. John, and I scorn you when you offer it' (408). Jane's principles tell her that she does not want to *hope* for a love to eventually arise between herself and her husband; she wants to enter into a marriage *because* of the already existing love. The social criticism Brontë wants to convey is that marriage should no longer be regarded as a social contract but as a match between two equals that love and respect each other. What St. John offers is an idea that belongs to the past, and Jane's reply not only shows how wrong it is of him to offer it, but emphasizes that he should feel ashamed of such an offer. Jane's view of equality between man and woman makes her defend her right to refuse a life as an object: 'God did not give me my life to throw away; and

to do as you wish me, would, I begin to think, be almost equivalent to committing suicide'(414). These are strong words, but Jane sees herself speaking with an equal (expressed when Rochester proposed to her that men and women are equal 'as we are!')(253)) and is therefore not afraid. As an equal, she tells him that she will not let him, St. John, turn her into an object, into another submissive wife. Just as she stood up against earlier attempts to suppress her, she stands up now by staying true to her own beliefs and her rights.

When refusing to give in to St. John's offer, Jane has conquered her last obstacle (John Reed, Mr. Brocklehurst, Mr. Rochester and St. John). Through all the stages she has been through, and because of the battles she has had to fight, both externally against a patriarchal society and internally with her own consciousness, this woman has grown to become 'increasingly independent and self-reliant in her judgements'<sup>45</sup>. Achieving this, Jane understands that she cannot live this lonely and loveless life, but that she has to listen to her own heart as well. She has to see Mr. Rochester. The result is her return to Thornfield, her visit at Ferndean and eventually her marriage to Mr. Rochester -- as his equal. Seen from a religious perspective, Rochester's injuries, which Chase terms as a 'symbolic castration', represent his amends for his sins and shows that he is now worthy of Jane.<sup>46</sup> The statement 'Reader, I married him'(448) is an independent woman's declaration. Jane has actively decided that she wants to marry him. This too shows how Brontë means that the society and the roles of the sexes are changing: decision-making does not automatically belong to men any more.<sup>47</sup> The role Jane has taken up, offers new possibilities, new freedoms that women of the Victorian society were not accustomed to having. Why, then, let her heroine end in marriage? Arguably, that Brontë lets Jane go back to her one true love and marry him implies that although the roles are changing and women are becoming more socially aware and independent, the closeness that private life offers, the intimate search of another self in a marriage consisting of love, respect and equality, is not to be dismissed.<sup>48</sup> Brontë is not so severe in her feminist point of view that she wants women to dismiss any relationship to men. On the contrary, with the ending of this novel she seems to celebrate the quality of a good marriage, a marriage where both parts are autonomous and where they freely have chosen each other as their lifelong partner. The novel does at the same time also introduce a new side

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<sup>45</sup> Ronald Carter and John McRae, *The Routledge History of Literature in English, Britain and Ireland* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)(London: Routledge, 2001), p. 268.

<sup>46</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 368.

<sup>47</sup> Carter and McRae, p. 267.

<sup>48</sup> Harry R. Garvin, *Bucknell Review: Women, Literature, Criticism* (London: Bucknell University Press, 1978), p. 90.

of womanhood: Jane rebels against traditional, conservative social norms and explores new sides of her role as a woman when she defends her right to speak and to disagree with John Reed, her aunt, Rochester and St. John. Her frank and honest reply to Rochester about his relationship with Blanche, his mistresses and his attempt to turn her into one, are radical in that she behaves as his equal, unafraid of showing that she has an opinion. Jane dares to disobey the rules of society and create her own rules. The rules of society are not agreeable for Jane, as shown in this quotation:

it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures [men] to say that they [women] ought to confine themselves making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex. (109)

I would argue that this is a political speech that wishes to transform the roles of women in society, to allow them to educate themselves on equal terms with men. Although some contemporary readers were shocked by the honest and direct truth of the novel, as noted above, there were also those who felt it liberating, as the author of this review in a woman's magazine:

*Jane Eyre* is intensely real. It may seem hard and ungenial, but in its main points it is sternly true to nature...it breaks new ground, is fresh and vigorous, the language is full of pith and nerve.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to being so honest, the heroine of this novel is not at all the stereotype of a heroine. It is plain, little orphan Jane who declares these strong opinions. Her critical eye towards the upper classes and the liberty she takes by talking freely, are other aspects that emphasize Jane as rebellious. Not only is she demonstrating new sides of women's roles, but she, a middle class woman, is challenging the boundaries between classes as well.

Although faults within the patriarchal and marital system are shown, and Jane removes herself from them by being strong-minded and independent, she does not criticize these systems in the way later feminists did.<sup>50</sup> There are also aspects about her that are conservative. She allows her passionate behavior to be subdued by society (because it is what society expects) -- unlike Bertha. She agrees to the options society has made for a poor and plain woman, namely to choose honest work as a governess. At Moor House she allows

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<sup>49</sup> Dunbar, p. 130.

<sup>50</sup> Patricia Stubbs, *Women and Fiction: Feminism and the Novel 1880-1920* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1979), p. 28.

herself to be inferior to St. John although they do not live in a master-servant situation, as Jane did with Rochester. This division in Jane's character, that she is radical and conservative at the same time, presents her as a new type of woman, but still not as new and radical as feminists and the New Woman introduced later on in the nineteenth-century. Jane does not desire to destroy and tear up the sanctified family,<sup>51</sup> but she wants to demonstrate that women are humans, equal to men, and should therefore be allowed the same rights to think, act and feel.

With this novel, Brontë establishes herself as one of the earliest pioneers for the new woman. As Gail Cunningham states in her book about the new woman, 'the novel [*Jane Eyre*] feeds the fantasies of all women who have ever felt less than complete confidence in their own value.'<sup>52</sup> In a time where Charlotte Brontë herself had to write under a male pseudonym in order to receive serious reviews, a brave, independent and strong-minded heroine as Jane Eyre was both a shocking and a liberating reading to the novel's readership. Not only Charlotte, but all the Brontë sisters' novels, may be seen to have had an influence when improving women's situation, by 'demonstrating new social, psychological and emotional possibilities for women.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (United States of America: Praeger Publishers, 2007) <<http://books.google.com/books?id=vNEv5tw-fjsC&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>> [Accessed 14.10.2011], p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Gail Cunningham, *The New Woman and the Victorian Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978), p. 41.

<sup>53</sup> Carter and McRae, p. 267.

## Chapter 2: Maggie Tulliver – a life of renunciation

In contrast to the orphan Jane Eyre, who had no one to interfere with her actions, Maggie Tulliver has a family. This family is a rather strong-minded one with members who are not afraid of interfering in everything. Notably, George Eliot does not focus so much on feminine independence as Charlotte Brontë in her novel. Similar to *Middlemarch*, *The Mill on the Floss* centers more on provincial life than on offering a political statement about women's situation. However, the portrait of Maggie Tulliver shows a girl that wishes to free herself, and the reader is invited to follow her struggle towards independence. In this chapter I have decided to analyze the character of Maggie in relation to her interactions with other people, since this, regardless of where Maggie is situated and what her age is, is what shapes and determines her life. These relationships are the reason why she is who she is, and why she, in contrast to Jane Eyre, does not gain her independence after all.

### Maggie and her family

Maggie's family consists of her father, mother, brother (Tom's relationship to Maggie will be discussed individually), uncles and aunts. Everyone has their opinion about everyone else, and especially about the upbringing of Maggie and Tom. In this little society, the Dodson standard is what matters, at least according to the Dodson sisters. 'There were particular ways of doing everything in that family'.<sup>54</sup> Those who fail to follow their example are criticized and taught how to do it in the Dodson way. Maggie is from the beginning different from the Dodson standard: her looks differ from those of the other girls in that she has brown skin as a result of all the time she has spent outdoors 'as makes her look like a mulatter', and her hair is dark and untamable, to her mother's great frustration:

her hair won't curl all I can do with it and she's so frenzy about having it put i' paper [...] It seems hard as my sister Deane should have that pretty child [Lucy]; I'm sure Lucy takes more after me nor my own child does. (15-16)

Bessy Tulliver is constantly complaining about the way Maggie behaves. She wants Maggie to be a doll that she, as her mother, and the rest of the family can be proud of, but Maggie is not in possession of doll-like qualities. In addition to lacking hair that curls, she loves being outdoors exploring and walking, and cannot help but dislike the traditional activities expected

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<sup>54</sup> George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* ed. A. S. Byatt (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 47. Future page references are to this edition and are included in parenthesis in the text.

of a girl. "It's foolish work," said Maggie, with a toss of her mane, -- "tearing pieces to sew 'em together again" (16). For this reason, she does not seem to appreciate the qualities and the activities that her family supports.

Since the Dodson family has particular ways of doing everything, Bessy is always afraid that her children will disgrace her in front of her sisters. If Mrs. Tulliver's sisters see anything that is not done in the Dodson way, or anything they dislike, they do not hesitate to speak their mind. The Dodson resemblance in Tom is a comfort to Mrs. Tulliver. The aspects that link Tom to the Dodsons (liking salt and eating beans) may be trivial, but they are still a consolation to Bessy in her desperation for approval from her sisters. This is significant because it shows how much she is controlled by the opinions of others: she does not have the independent mind that her husband has to refuse her sisters' decisions. As I will come back to later, both Mrs. Tulliver and Maggie are therefore examples of how society (here represented by family) controls their decisions.

Maggie's aunts and uncles are just as critical as her mother and constantly utter comments about how different Maggie is and how this is a disadvantage for her. Being different is generally not a good thing, being a girl and different is even worse.

"I think the gell has too much hair. I'd have it thinned and cut shorter, sister, if I was you: it isn't good for her health. It's that as makes her skin so brown", comments aunt Pullet. (67)

These comments on her looks and behavior (first from her mother and then her aunts), indicate how little tolerance there is for change and how hard it must be for Maggie to differ from the Dodson standard. There is no room for her to be as she is. As a result Maggie becomes angry and hurt, and in order to avoid this pain in the future, she decides to cut her hair off:

she took out a large pair of scissors. "What are they for, Maggie?" said Tom, feeling curiosity awakened. Maggie answered by seizing her front locks and cutting them straight across the middle of her forehead. (69)

This is a rebellious act as well as an act representing Maggie's wish to conform to society's standards. Understanding that she cannot continue to be who she is if she wants to be accepted, she decides to do something about it. Unfortunately, she understands that her behavior was wrong.

She had thought beforehand chiefly of her own deliverance from her teasing hair and teasing remarks about it, and something also of the triumph she should have over her mother and her aunts by this decided course of action: she didn't want her hair to look pretty -- that was out of the question -- she only wanted people to think her a clever little girl and not to find fault with her. (69-70)

This quotation not only shows how Maggie regrets her action but also how she, a nine-year old girl, struggles with the fact that her family does not accept her as she is. Instead of focusing on her hair, she wants her family to see her qualities: how good she is at reading, how imaginative she is, how well she draws, and not 'find fault with her'. Maggie's actions tell the reader that she feels strongly; she feels misunderstood, little taken care of and loved, and this contributes in making her rebel against her mother and aunts. Instead of doing patchwork, she chooses to crawl into a fantasy world with books, take walks in the surrounding nature of the mill and, later, to find solace in religion. As a contrast to Jane Eyre who, because of her 'self-assertion and a sense of self-esteem', as Susan Siefert calls it, is able to reject the negative opinions of others, Maggie lacks this self-assertion and self-esteem.<sup>55</sup> Since she believes in what the others call her, she acquires a negative self-image.<sup>56</sup> The matter is made worse as she re-enters the room and faces the family's critical judgment after her spontaneous haircut:

Mrs Tulliver gave a little scream as she saw her [...] "Fie, for shame!" said aunt Glegg, in her loudest, severest tone of reproof. "Little gells as cut their own hair should be whipped and fed on bread and water -- not come and sit down with their aunts and uncles." [...] "She's more like a gypsy nor ever," said aunt Pullet, in a pitying tone, "it's very bad luck, sister, as the gell should be so brown -- the boy's fair enough. I doubt it'll stand in her way i' life, to be so brown." "She's a naughty child, as 'll break her mother's heart," said Mrs Tulliver, with tears in her eyes. (73)

The judgment is severe and too much for a nine-year old. Fortunately for Maggie, she has a devoted father whom she knows will comfort her; she is after all more like him and his family than she is her mother's side. 'You was i' the right to cut it off if it plagued you. Give over crying: father'll take your part'(74). In addition to Tom and his approval, it is her father's love and comfort that nourish and help Maggie to survive the tough judgments from the others. Her father is not interested in judging her, but praising her good qualities and accomplishments: 'she can read almost as well as the parson'(15), and as he tells Mr. Riley, Maggie can read 'straight off, as if she knowed it all beforehand'(20). But despite her father's

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Susan Siefert, *The Dilemma of the Talented Heroine: A Study in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (Montreal: Eden Press, 1978), p. 40.

<sup>56</sup> Siefert, p. 46.



praise, she is not encouraged to learn more. As he points out a couple of times, it is not a good thing for a woman to be too smart, 'it'll turn to trouble, I doubt'(20). 'It's a pity but what she'd been the lad -- she'd ha' been a match for the lawyers, *she* would'(22). Mr. Tulliver's conservative thoughts show society's view of women and their options. Maggie, although she is smart now, and smarter than Tom, will not gain anything from this as a grown woman. Brought up in the conservative society of St. Oggs, Maggie's opportunities to develop further, to read other books than those on the shelf at home, are minimal.

Maggie's family can be interpreted as a miniature of the society in which this novel is set. They set the rules and standards, they comment and they judge. St. Oggs 'is one of those old, old owns [...] a town which carries the traces of its long growth and history'(123). From the description of the town it appears to be very conventional, which strengthens any comparison between the town and the traditional Dodson family. According to the Dodsons the only things that matter are social prestige and material values. Again, if one does not behave in accordance with the traditional Dodson way, one goes against the norm and is in danger of becoming an outcast. Maggie, being constantly told that she is different, tries very hard to adjust and achieve the approved family standard, and indirectly the standards of society, by cutting off her hair and trying to behave as well as she can. But, as Siefert writes, her efforts 'to subdue her aspirations, her intelligence and sensitivity are contrary to her own nature and these many failures in self-repression constantly reinforce her sense of alienation.'<sup>57</sup> Maggie is too much of a Tulliver. She is not concerned about objects and social prestige, but prefers the emotional warmth of the Tullivers. David Carroll argues that 'the Dodson theory of life is cautious, ritualized, and impersonal' while the Tullivers value generosity, emotions and human affection.<sup>58</sup> This is shown several times in Mr. Tulliver's behavior towards Maggie and especially towards his sister. The contrasting values between the two families are clearly shown when Mr. Tulliver becomes critically ill as a result of his bankruptcy. Mrs. Tulliver, being a Dodson, is concerned about losing her linen and her china and not about how her husband is doing. This makes Maggie react:

She burst out, at last, in an agitated, almost violent tone, 'Mother, how can you talk so? As if you cared only for things with your name on, and not for what has my father's name too. And to care about anything but dear father himself! – when he's

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<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Siefert, p. 47.

<sup>58</sup> Quoted in David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1992), p. 112.

lying there and may never speak to us again. Tom, you ought to say so too – you ought not to let any one find fault with my father.’ (215)

Maggie’s speech shows how different she is from her mother, brother and the rest of the Dodsons (and indirectly from society) as she is shocked by this obsession with material goods when there are more important things to be concerned about. Her identification with her father, calling him ‘my father’, is also important because it emphasizes how she is not a Dodson, but also, as Siefert notes, how she recognizes how she and Tom are different, how their values are ‘inexorably opposed and she has attained an insight into the superiority of her moral sensitivity to Tom’s harsh practicality.’<sup>59</sup> Their dissimilarity, then, reflects Maggie’s dissimilarity to society as Tom’s ‘harsh practicality’ is clearly an image of society’s conservatism.

## **Maggie and Lucy**

In both looks and behavior Maggie and Lucy are as different as night and day. This is what the narrator tells us when Maggie and Lucy are brought together in the same room as children: ‘the contrast between the cousins was conspicuous and to superficial eyes was very much to the disadvantage of Maggie’ (66). Lucy is the doll and any mother’s ideal little girl. Standing next to Lucy, Maggie looks like a ‘rough, dark, overgrown puppy’ (66). As a child, although Maggie is aware of the difference between them, she is nevertheless very happy to play with Lucy: ‘Maggie always looked at Lucy with delight. [...] “O Lucy,” she burst out, after kissing her, “you’ll stay with Tom and me, won’t you?”’ (66). But at the same time as Maggie enjoys spending time with Lucy, she cannot help feeling a little jealous. A natural response when she with her own eyes can see how pretty Lucy is, and through her mother’s comments knows how she ideally should behave more like Lucy does.

She [Maggie] was fond of fancying a world where the people never got any larger than children of their own age, and she made the queen of it just like Lucy with a little crown on her head and a little scepter in her hand ... only the queen was Maggie herself in Lucy’s form. (66)

Maggie’s fantasy to be Lucy, to be more like a Dodson, is connected with her wish to be accepted by her family. Lucy is pretty, does nothing wrong and is therefore accepted by Maggie’s aunts and uncles, and this is the status Maggie strives to achieve.

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<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Siefert, p. 84.

In addition to envy Lucy's acceptable looks, Maggie becomes jealous of Lucy whenever Tom pays more attention to her than to herself. Again, this is not Lucy's fault, but Maggie's struggle to be socially accepted and at the same time be who she wants to be makes dark and evil thoughts occur in Maggie:

As long as Tom seemed to prefer Lucy to her, Lucy made part of his unkindness. Maggie would have thought a little while ago that she could never be cross with pretty little Lucy [...] but then, Tom had always been quite indifferent to Lucy before [...] As it was, she was actually beginning to think that she should like to make Lucy cry. (106)

Maggie's anger towards Lucy shows the frustration she feels by being excluded in general and especially from this trinity. Tom's refusal of her is more hurtful than her aunts' comments, and calls for an immediate reaction: her resolution to make Lucy cry is, similar to her decision to cut off her hair, rebellious and wrong. Both of these actions illustrate Maggie's passionate nature. Her anger, frustration and rebellious behavior is similar to the young Jane Eyre's, and in St. Ogg's standard, this passions is necessary to control.

Although the child Maggie becomes something like a little demon compared to Lucy, she is the more interesting of the two as a grown woman. Lucy is like any ordinary young woman from St. Oggs, being small, fair, pretty and accomplished, and all kindness, whereas Maggie is unconventional. Maggie is markedly intelligent, tall, dark, and strikingly looking, or as Stephen thinks her: a 'dark-eyed nymph'(391).<sup>60</sup> Victorian women were supposed to be 'men's physical, moral, and mental inferiors', and therefore, in obedience to men, hide their intelligence.<sup>61</sup> For this reason, Maggie's marked intelligence and her unconventional social behavior mark her as an untraditional woman. In addition to this, the contrast between innocence and experience is illustrated as Maggie, compared to Lucy's rather sheltered life, has experienced what life can offer through her father's bankruptcy, his death and her education and work in a school. As Lucy says herself: 'I've always been so happy. I don't know whether I could bear much trouble -- I never had any but poor mamma's death. You *have* been tried, Maggie'(388). The following will show how this has made Maggie develop into a more complex person.

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<sup>60</sup> Joan Bennet, 'A Moral Dilemma Unresolved' (1948) in *George Eliot The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner: A Casebook*, ed. by R. P. Draper (London: Macmillan, 1977), pp. 109-124 (p 112).

<sup>61</sup> Susan Rubinow Gorsky, *Femininity to Feminism: Woman and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), p. 13.

In contrast to Lucy, Maggie is not interested in men and marriage, but in herself and her own life. Lucy has been educated a young lady; accomplished in embroidery, playing an instrument and is accordingly an eligible wife. Maggie on the other hand has had to work as a teacher due to her father's bankruptcy. That Maggie has ambitions to achieve something in her life is made clear when she tells Lucy of her plans to further educate herself. Her thoughts are concerned about finding a better situation and not settling with the conventional solution of marriage. This, I believe, illustrates her role as the heroine since her ambition reflects an independent mind. She is not, in other words, a representation of the 'average mid-Victorian woman'.

Although Maggie would never consciously hurt Lucy or anyone else, her lack of judgment, and perhaps her wish to do what she wants, makes her enter the boat with Stephen, and thereby hurt Lucy in the worst possible way. From Lucy's perspective it seems as if her cousin has consciously betrayed her and run off with her intended fiancé. In Maggie's view it is an opportunity to follow her emotions and her instincts. Though the act can be interpreted as rebellious, it shows Maggie's wish for freedom. Closed inside the restrictive environment of St. Oggs she has tried to find her role, but it does not exist. Maggie needs more room in order to be herself, and this trip with Stephen is not only an act against this restrictive environment, but also a way of trying to find a place within society that allows Maggie more space to be herself. The conventions of society and her different relations inside this society make Maggie regret her action:

I feel no excuse for myself -- none -- I should never have failed towards Lucy and Philip as I have done, if I had not been weak and selfish and hard -- able to think of their pain without a pain to myself that would have destroyed all temptation. O, what is Lucy feeling now? -- She believed in me -- she loved me -- she was so good to me -- think of her. (496)

Maggie realizes how her wish for freedom and of an opportunity to be herself always result in trouble of some kind, which makes her even more of an outsider. Similar to many of her past actions (cutting off her hair, pushing Lucy into the mud, and running off to the Gypsies) she sees that she is too dependent on others. Her decision is therefore to conform to society's claims instead of living excluded from it. She limits herself and tries to change by hiding her true self, as Catherine Earnshaw Linton also does.

## Maggie and Philip Wakem

Maggie first meets Philip when she is visiting Tom at Mr. Stelling. Philip, being ‘deformed’(186), is instantly thought by Maggie to be in need of a love based on sympathy. Her first impressions of him, although they initially may have been influenced by her ‘tenderness for deformed things’(186), are very rational:

‘I think Philip Wakem seems a nice boy, Tom,’ she said [...] ‘He couldn’t choose his father, you know; and I’ve read of very bad men who had good sons, as well as good parents who had bad children. And if Philip is good, I think we ought to be the more sorry for him because his father is not a good man’. (186-187)

Maggie, compared to both her father and brother, has a Christian and open mind towards Philip, although he is the son of Mr. Wakem, Mr. Tulliver’s enemy. Maggie’s way of expressing her thoughts (although she is only nine years old) shows more maturity and reflection than her father and brother when they later write the family oath in the Bible. As they learn to know each other more, Maggie sees Philip as her second brother and he as her sister. Grown up in an environment offering just as little love and affection as Maggie sometimes felt she received, Philip is in need of being loved: ‘if you had had a brother like me -- do you think you should have loved him as well as Tom?’(192). Maggie replies: “‘O yes, better,” she answered, immediately. “No, not better: because I don’t think I *could* love you better than Tom. But I should be sorry -- *so sorry* for you”’(193). Maggie’s reply shows that she, although she likes Philip, cannot help thinking of him as something more than a person in need of sympathy. The answer also shows her lack of social manners. Both of these aspects are significant, because throughout her relationship with Philip, she keeps expressing them in various ways. In this situation it is a natural mistake to speak before one thinks, but as the narrator tells us: ‘Maggie, young as she was, felt her mistake’(193).

Maggie’s friendship with Philip gives her the love and affection that she wants but never receives from Tom. Philip, as a second brother, nourishes Maggie’s need for stories, books, creativity and confidence. He affords her with the ‘opportunity and encouragement to develop a sense of herself as a unique person with individual tastes, aspirations and opinions.’<sup>62</sup> In contrast to Mr. Tulliver, Tom and society’s view of clever women, Philip enjoys helping Maggie develop her mind and knowledge by teaching her what he knows. As grown-ups, although Maggie has not changed her sisterly affection for Philip, it is obvious that Philip’s feelings for her are different: ‘You are very much more beautiful than I thought

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Siefert, p. 85.

you would be'(312). As they talk Philip tells her that he has drawn a water-color sketch of her and that he thinks of her. The feud between their fathers is not their fault, as he tells her, and he insists that it is wrong of them to part because of it.

I would give up a great deal for my father; but I would not give up a friendship or -- or an attachment of any sort, in obedience to any wish of his that I didn't recognize as right. (313)

Although Philip's underlying message is obvious to the reader, it goes unnoticed by Maggie. The idea of marriage has never entered her mind, and that she has never considered Philip as anything other than a friend is underlined by her surprise at his proposal:

[...] as he went on speaking, a great change came over her face -- a flush and slight spasm of the features such as we see in people who hear some news that will require them to readjust their conceptions of the past. (347)

Maggie, although she loves him, has not in her child-like world considered the thought of her having any lover at all. Despite her thoughts and feelings telling her that she should not accept Philip's offer, Maggie sees it as her duty to accept because it will make *him* happy. She thinks to herself that 'if there were sacrifice in this love -- it was all the richer and more satisfying'(350). Her idea that a marriage of sacrifice is better and more satisfying than a marriage for love, makes Maggie appear more traditional because she dismisses her wish to be independent. The kind of marriage this would be is close to the traditional Victorian marriage, when marriage was considered a contract, and, to many women a self-sacrificing act. Although Maggie would have a happy marriage with Philip, she will lack the emotional aspect, the passion, that she later experiences with Stephen, and that Jane Eyre finds with Mr. Rochester.

Maggie must be aware of the difficulties in accepting Philip, both because she is restricted by her family in even meeting him, and because she does not regard him as anything more than a brother. Still, she would 'choose to marry him' as she tells Lucy: because Philip 'loved me first. No one else could be quite what he is to me. But I can't divide myself from my brother for life'(457). Barbara Hardy argues that Maggie's words to Lucy show that 'the relation with Philip is made up of renunciation as well as indulgence'.<sup>63</sup> Again, it is her sympathy for him, her wish to please others, as well as her emotional ties to her past that control her actions. Just as she submits to Tom's demands in order to make him happy and keep his love for her, she accepts Philip's love as a sacrifice. The contrast between Tom

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<sup>63</sup> Barbara Hardy, *Particularities: Readings in George Eliot* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1982), p. 71.

and Philip is of course that the latter would encourage Maggie in her wishes and teach her everything she wants, something she longs for. She has a great respect for Philip's intellect: 'your mind is a sort of world to me – You can tell me all I want to know. I think I should never be tired of being with you'(349).

As Maggie is shown to be unconventional, naïve and socially inept, she is rarely aware of the effects her actions have until afterwards, and then it is too late. Just as Philip is pushing his father to accept Maggie as his future daughter-in-law, Maggie runs off with Stephen. Her boat trip with Stephen results in an amputated and almost broken relation to Philip. Their relationship ends with Philip's letter to Maggie where he forgives her and promises to be her friend forever.

### **Maggie and Stephen Guest**

Maggie has never thought of being able to have a lover until Philip tells her that he loves her. Sheltered from society Maggie has not seen or experienced any emotion similar to this passion she feels when she meets Stephen:

Maggie felt herself, for the first time in her life, receiving the tribute of a very deep blush and a very deep bow from a person towards whom she herself was conscious of timidity. This new experience was very agreeable to her -- so agreeable that it almost effaced her previous emotion about Philip. (391)

This first meeting makes Maggie experience new emotions; she, in many ways, becomes more of a woman as she experiences this deep blush and the sensual attraction that arises between them. As her thoughts reveal, this emotion is different from the one she has when she is together with Philip; Stephen introduces a 'new element of sexual attraction', as Carroll calls it.<sup>64</sup> Stephen himself is also speechless as he stands in front of 'this tall dark-eyed nymph with her jet-black coronet of hair'(391). They are both aware that their emotions are in conflict with their morals and obligations; Stephen being practically engaged to Lucy and Maggie to Philip. The passion and deep attraction they feel for each other are, however, difficult to subdue: 'he only wished he dared to look at Maggie, and that she would look at him, – let him have one long look into those deep strange eyes of hers and then he would be satisfied' (422). Their boat trip illustrates Stephen's strong emotions for Maggie, how his

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<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Carroll, p. 126.

passion for her has taken control of his actions. As it turns out that they are to go alone, just the two of them, he plans to elope with Maggie in order to secure her as ‘his’:

But at last Stephen, who had been rowing more and more idly, ceased to row [...] ‘Maggie,’ he said, in a deep tone of slow decision, ‘let us never go home again – till no one can part us – till we are married’. (484-485)

In doing this, although it shows his desperation to be with Maggie, it reflects a behavior that is similar to Tom’s demands on Maggie. By willingly sailing away with her, he has, as she says too, deprived her of any choice. In the eyes of society Maggie is now considered to have intentionally eloped with Stephen, and has therefore no other choice than to marry him if she wants to regain any respect in St. Oggs.

If Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs. Stephen Guest [...] St. Oggs [...] would have judged in strict consistency with those results. [But] Maggie had returned without a trousseau, without a husband -- in that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead; and the world’s wife [St. Oggs public opinion] saw at once that Miss Tulliver’s conduct had been of the most aggravated kind. Could anything be more detestable? (509-510)

Stephen was well aware of the harsh judgment that would await Maggie if she did not consent to him, and was therefore not prepared for her refusal. Maggie becomes aware of how much pain this trip must have inflicted on those she loves: Tom, Lucy and Philip. Out of duty to them, she refuses to marry Stephen. “I will not begin a future, even for you,” said Maggie, tremulously, “with a deliberate consent to what ought not to have been” [...] “If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie?” (495-496). Just as she out of duty for Tom deprived herself of the joy of meeting Philip in the Red Deeps, she is now depriving herself of the possibility of a happy life with Stephen. She cannot be so selfish as to consciously hurt others in order to gain her own happiness. Maggie believes that she has acted in accordance with society’s rules as well as her own consciousness, but as she will soon experience, society does not accept her behavior. By refusing Stephen she has ‘failed to live out the stereotyped progression of social roles.’<sup>65</sup> Being identified as an outcast has been Maggie’s fear throughout her life, and her reason to avoid her natural instincts and submit to conventions. However, she is considered more unconventional and radical every time she tries to act conventionally. This underlines the lack of room Maggie has in this society. St. Oggs is too restricted for her to manage to find her role in it. She has therefore no other choice than to forever submit and strive to be accepted by society or remove herself from it completely. Maggie’s decision to return to St.

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<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Siefert, p. 89.



Oggs, as well as her other decisions in the novel, shows that her choices are based on her emotions and not her logic. Consequently, this, in my view, is what stops her from becoming independent.<sup>66</sup>

### **Maggie and Thomas à Kempis**

When the real world becomes either too difficult or too restricting for Maggie, she escapes into the world of books. At one point she relates to her reading as she does to real people, as shown when she reads Thomas à Kempis' book, the *Imitation*. After her father's bankruptcy, and his subsequent illness, Maggie wants 'some explanation of this hard, real life' (298), a 'key that would enable her to understand and, in understanding, endure' (298). Her 'key' is Thomas à Kempis. She misinterprets the book, however, and believes she has to renounce everything that gives her pleasure: music, books and love.<sup>67</sup> In doing that, she suppresses her nature.<sup>68</sup> According to Susan Siefert, Maggie's renunciation is a superficial asceticism, which is 'immature because it does not diminish her self-absorption but simply re-directs it'.<sup>69</sup>

Maggie is only acting the role as a renounced, as the narrator tells us:

From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and willfulness, some pride and impetuosity even into her self-renunciation. Her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. (305)

Although Maggie does not consciously act this part, her acting underlines how she has misinterpreted the book. Similar to Maggie's day-dream of her becoming the Gypsies' teacher, she imagines herself to be in total control of her life and situation. Her hesitation when Philip tempts her with his book, underlines how she has fooled herself, that she in fact has not been transformed and that her asceticism has been superficial. Her meeting with Philip shows that she cannot force herself to renounce her true self, her natural way of being. Although she continues to try (but not in the same extreme manner), she keeps finding it difficult to suppress her nature.

Maggie's relation to Thomas à Kempis is important because her interpretation of this book is her way of trying to find guidance for her autonomy. In her view, religion offers a

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<sup>66</sup> Josephine McDonough, 'The early novels', in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. by George Levin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 38-56 (p. 54).

<sup>67</sup> Siefert, p. 59.

<sup>68</sup> Carroll, p. 125.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Siefert, p. 59.

space for her to be her own, true self. Through Maggie's interpretation of this book, Eliot 'insists that renunciation does not make you feel noble and striking and secure, but empties life, depresses the spirit, and disrupts a sense of meaning'.<sup>70</sup> Maggie's life stagnates and she disappears into a state of depression and indifference.

## Maggie and Tom

I would argue that the relationship that has the strongest influence on Maggie's life is her relationship with her brother. Next to her father, Maggie's whole life and happiness depend on Tom. Maggie's interest in her older brother is expressed, even before he is introduced to the reader: 'There were few sounds that roused Maggie when she was dreaming over her book, but Tom's name served as well as the shrillest whistle'(18). Her first memory in life, as she tells Philip, is 'standing with Tom by the side of the Floss while he held my hand'(319). Maggie's love for Tom has made her certain of what she wants for the future: 'When he grows up, I shall keep his house, and we shall always live together'(34). Already at the age of nine Maggie's dependence on Tom and his goodwill is shown when she has forgotten to look after his rabbits and they are all dead:

'You're a naughty girl,' said Tom, severely, 'and I'm sorry I bought you the fish-line. I don't love you.' 'O Tom, it's very cruel,' sobbed Maggie. 'I'd forgive you, if *you* forgot anything – I wouldn't mind what you did – I'd forgive you and love you.' 'Yes, you're a silly. But I never *do* forget things, *I* don't.' 'O, please forgive me, Tom; my heart will break,' said Maggie, shaking with sobs. (39)

That Maggie says she would always forgive Tom, and Tom says he would not forget, are significant because this foreshadows the end of the novel. When Maggie returns from her boat trip with Stephen, she wants Tom to forgive her, but Tom cannot forgive her actions; he remembers them too well, and consequently dismisses her, an episode I will come back to. The quotation shows how desperate Maggie is in need of Tom's affection. Without his forgiveness her world will fall apart and her 'heart will break'. Despite of this she manages to resist the temptation to beg Tom for forgiveness, and has a moment in the attic where she is strong-minded and determined not to crawl for Tom's demands: 'No, she would never go down if Tom didn't come to fetch her'(41). But she is not able to stay determined for long:

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Hardy, p. 66.

This resolution lasted in great intensity for five dark minutes behind the tub; but then the need of being loved, the strongest need in poor Maggie's nature, began to wrestle with her pride and soon threw it. (41)

Maggie's need of being loved is part of her being a Tulliver. Unfortunately for Maggie's further development, this need and acceptance by Tom is what, time and time again, stops her from doing what she wants with her life. In contrast to Maggie, Tom is understood to be a Dodson. However, this is not the only difference between Tom and Maggie. As we are told early by Mr. Tulliver himself, Tom is 'slow with his tongue', 'reads but poorly, and can't abide the books, and spells all wrong' (23). Intellectually, Maggie is much more accomplished. She is an excellent reader, and in contrast to Tom, is eager to learn, as shown when she visits Tom at Mr. Stelling's house: "O what books!" she exclaimed, as she saw the bookcases in the study. "How I should like to have as many books as that!" (153). But Mr. Tulliver's words of how unfortunate and a waste it is that Maggie should be so smart, are again repeated as Maggie expresses her wish to become a clever woman and Tom answers: "O, I dare say, and a nasty conceited thing. Everybody'll hate you" (154). Tom's reply is both an expression of his jealousy of Maggie's ambition to learn and her cleverness, and an expression of society's view of clever women; they are considered troublesome and 'nasty'. He does not want a sister that society will consider troublesome, and threatens her to learn more by saying that he will hate her if she becomes 'a nasty disagreeable thing' (154). These are the conditions Maggie must live with. This condescending view of women's intellect is reinforced when Mr. Stelling says: 'They [girls] can pick up a little of everything, I daresay [...] They've got a great deal of superficial cleverness: but they couldn't go far into anything. They're quick and shallow' (158). This opinion, which is based on the fact that she is a female, and not her intellect, is not acceptable to Maggie, and as she corrects Tom in his pronunciation of Latin, she shows that she has more than just 'superficial cleverness':

I can say that as well as you can. And you don't mind your stops. For you ought to stop twice as long at a semicolon as you do at a comma, and you make the longest stops where there ought to be no stop at all. (157)

In addition to their intellectual differences and their interest in learning, Tom and Maggie are also emotionally very different. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar have an interesting interpretation of the siblings and the mill itself. According to them, Maggie's 'rapt, dreamy feelings' which constantly carry her 'away in floods of feeling' are similar to the rhythms of the river. Tom's feelings, on the other hand, are associated with the 'grinding, crushing process' of the mill that transforms 'primordial matter into civilized stuff fit for

consumption'.<sup>71</sup> The grinding and crushing process is easy to recognize in Tom as he seems to behave as a tyrant towards his little sister when he deliberately reacts in a way that he knows will hurt her the most. As a child his actions are most likely unconsciously done, resulting from emotions such as anger and jealousy. Tom envies and perhaps feels threatened by Maggie's imagination. Whenever her imagination becomes the centre of attention, he either answers rudely or reacts with violence: 'Tom had a profound contempt for this nonsense of Maggie's, smashing the earwig at once as a superfluous yet easy means of proving the entire unreality of such a story'(106). Maggie does not react to his rejection of her imaginative stories; she is much more hurt whenever he says he does not love her anymore, when he decides to leave her behind or deliberately ignore her. However, Tom's attempts at deliberately hurting her continue as they grow up. In order to force her to stop seeing Philip Wakem, he tells her how she is 'a disobedient, deceitful daughter, who throws away her own respectability by clandestine meetings with the son of a man that has helped to ruin her father'(356). By playing on Maggie's sense of duty towards her family, Tom knows that his demands will have an effect. Although Maggie wants to react and defend herself, she is too weak, just as she was in the attic as a nine year old:

she felt it was in vain to attempt anything but submission. Tom had his terrible clutch on her conscience and her deepest dread: she writhed under the demonstrable truth of the character he had given to her conduct, and yet her whole soul rebelled against it as unfair from its incompleteness. (357)

Her submission can be interpreted to be a result of both her childhood, where she was never accepted and therefore left with a negative self-image, and of her need of love from Tom. Maggie does not have the strength or the opportunities for her to defy society's conventions. In her fear of becoming an outcast again, she decides to conform to society's conventions rather than staying true to her own conscious and natural instincts.

At the same time as she wants to be accepted, Maggie, nevertheless, wants to be independent. 'I can't live in dependence -- I can't live with my brother -- though he is very good to me'(430). Tom represents the values of the Dodson family and society, and Maggie knows that to live with him would remove her from any chance of freedom. Society's view of women forces her to be dependent. The weakness Maggie shows when discussing with Tom is an illustration of women's role in society. They are forced to submit to men's opinions and

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<sup>71</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 492.

hence be dependent on them. In addition to this, Maggie's emotional bond to Tom, being his little sister, is too strong. Therefore, out of fear of losing Tom, she chooses to submit: 'the tie to my brother is one of the strongest. I can do nothing willingly that will divide me always from him'(463). Maggie's actions are not always accepted by Tom, however. She is constantly changing her mind, as he tells her:

I never feel certain about anything with *you*. At one time you take pleasure in a sort of perverse self-denial, and at another, you have not resolution to resist a thing that you know to be wrong. (409)

Maggie offers an instability that the conventional Tom and the conventional society of St. Oggs are not used to. She does not behave like a woman should when she allows herself to be an individual. Since society does not approve of unconventional women, Tom decides that he will not either. Maggie's behavior in going on this trip with Stephen is shocking and unconventional. Tom's thoughts when hearing about it are characteristic of the Dodson philosophy, and not what his father had wished of him: 'Tom's mind was set to the expectation of the worst that could happen -- not death, but disgrace'(502). What matters for Tom is disgrace in society; not his sister's health. He alone has managed to pay his father's debts and regained possession of the family house; he has been socially accepted and has re-established the good name of the family, and will not allow Maggie's action to take all this away from him. 'You will find no home with me [...] You have disgraced us all [...] I wash my hands of you for ever'(503).

Tom and Maggie's relationship can be seen to go constantly back and forth. They drift apart, then they reconcile.<sup>72</sup> The first time is when Tom is removed from Maggie and sent to school, then, they are harmonized when he is brought home by Maggie because of the bankruptcy. According to David Carroll, Tom and Maggie 'move further apart as they seek their own fulfillments -- each time it requires a more serious crisis to bring them together, until only the final catastrophe of the flood can achieve this'.<sup>73</sup> The flood, unexpected as it is, underlines Maggie's emotional need for love and her need to be with Tom. As she rows (an activity that illustrates her strength and her 'unwomanly' character) to the mill, her words from childhood of how she would always forgive Tom, no matter what he had done, are

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<sup>72</sup> David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations: A Reading of the Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 123.

<sup>73</sup> Quoted in Carroll, p. 123.

underlined as she forgives him his harsh words and judgment of her, and rescues him. The ending of this novel has been seen as the long-awaited punishment of Tom:

The brother who has oppressed her by taking first place in their parents' esteem, by sneering at her intellectual ambition, by curtailing her freedom to live or even imagine her own life, and by condemning her harshly in the light of his restrictive moral standards is finally punished when she goes to 'save' him from the rising tides only to drag him down into the dark deep in her 'embrace' of death.<sup>74</sup>

This flood is the last thing that reconciles them, despite their quarrels as children, their disagreements as adults, their different values and different personalities. Tom is down to earth and realistic in his view on society; he is 'in touch with reality, but the contact is unimaginative. He does not, like Maggie, have any sense of alternative values or ways of life,' and that is why he has not been able to accept his unconventional sister.<sup>75</sup>

It seems that in order to make this last reconciliation between them happen, without forcing Maggie to subdue completely to her brother (which through the narration of Maggie's renunciation based on Thomas à Kempis, Eliot has shown will depress the spirit of her heroine), the only solution is to let them die together: 'In their death they were not divided'(544). That they die together can be an image of the old society (represented by Tom) fading out as new impulses (represented by Maggie) try to enter. When Maggie rescues Tom she is represented as the stronger part: new impulses being stronger than the old, conservative society. These impulses could be the beginning of improvement in women's situation, in matters of education and marriage. Since both Maggie and Tom die, both the new and the old drowns, the ending can represent a new beginning, a society that incorporates aspects of both the old and the new. Interpreted like that, the ending poses hope and possibilities.

Maggie's need of approval is what, time and time again, stops her from doing what she wants to do. She says she will never submit to Tom, but then she returns to his world of values and willingly sacrifices her own needs. She is, as Gilbert and Gubar point out, 'nature's child', which means that her feelings and dreams are just as changeable, but also just as forceful as the river outside the mill.<sup>76</sup> It is possible of course to interpret the ending to mean that Maggie does not submit to the conventional life of society, but that she independently chooses to

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<sup>74</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, pp. 493-494.

<sup>75</sup> Ian Adam, *George Eliot* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 41.

<sup>76</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 492.

remove herself from that world by death. One problem with such an interpretation is Maggie's words to Tom when she re-enters St. Oggs: 'Whatever I have done -- I repent it bitterly -- I want to make amends -- I will endure anything -- I want to be kept from doing wrong again' (504). Her comment shows, I believe, her need of being accepted by Tom, and indirectly of society. Maggie is willing to submit under Tom's guidance, as long as he will take her back as his sister. She is under extreme pressure when returning to St. Oggs, and her need of Tom to support her, makes her agree to submission.

In contrast to Jane Eyre who distanced herself from any situation that threatened to objectify her, and who had the courage to be alone, Maggie is insecure of her own abilities and constantly indecisive. She needs other people, 'else I shall feel as if there were nothing firm beneath my feet'(499). Because of this, it is impossible, although she tries, for Maggie to find the strength to live alone: 'I will bear it, and bear it till death... But how long it will be before death comes! I am so young, so healthy. How shall I have patience and strength?'(536). The grown-up Maggie loses more and more of her childhood confidence and sees her only option, in order to be socially accepted, to be a renunciation of everything she enjoyed in her past. Her development and the novel's ending seem to be saying that such renunciation as hers is not an adequate answer to a happy life. Her decisions throughout the novel show very strongly that the emotional commitments to the past are much stronger than that to anything else.<sup>77</sup> Through Maggie's struggles Eliot shows how complex human beings are, and stresses the importance of the psychological aspect in our lives. Connection and emotions from the past influence, restrict and shape us, whether we want them to or not. In a society like St. Oggs, individuality is not approved and the space Maggie seeks to be herself in, does not exist. Because Maggie is so different, so at odds with the conventional norms, Eliot has established her as the novel's heroine. Maggie's nature, her unconventional behavior and looks are similar to Jane Eyre, and are not only new features of the female sex, but new in the novel as well. Previous heroines were not supposed to challenge 'the intellectual superiority of men in any way, nor were they to protest the role these men forced them to play'.<sup>78</sup> In contrast to *Jane Eyre* which demands a change, Eliot seems to illustrate how impossible it is to be different when society does neither adjust nor allow alterations.

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<sup>77</sup> McDonagh, p. 54.

<sup>78</sup> Hazel T. Martin, *Petticoat Rebels: A Study of the Novels of Social Protest of George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë* (New York: Helios Books, 1968), p. 37.

## Chapter 3: Catherine Earnshaw Linton - the ‘wild, hatless little savage’

Since *Wuthering Heights* overcame the first contemporary disapproval and was recognized as a masterpiece in the early twentieth century,<sup>79</sup> it has been one of the most frequently discussed novels in literary scholarship, and has several times been adapted to films. A simple search on the Internet will lead you even to Japanese versions of the famous love story in this novel. It is clear that *Wuthering Heights* has had a strong life in different cultures.

There are two Catherines in the novel, but this thesis focuses on the character of Catherine Earnshaw Linton. Although she is only physically present in the first half of the novel, the memory of her, and Heathcliff’s love for her, keeps her present and very much a part of the story throughout the novel. The relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is so powerful because it has no boundaries, physical or ethical. Interestingly, unlike the other heroines considered in this thesis, Catherine’s being and possible independence is intimately tied to, and dependent on, the character of Heathcliff. Her character is therefore complex, and because of this complexity she gains credibility: her emotions, actions and thoughts battle with her own instincts and society’s expectations. This Victorian heroine struggles to find a balance between these two poles and with how to live her life. This chapter will look at Catherine’s life and her struggle in finding a compromise between her own needs and the claims of society.

### Childhood

When looking at Catherine’s childhood, there are three particular aspects that are important: her relationship to Heathcliff, ‘an awful Sunday’ which is portrayed in her diary, and their first encounter with Thrushcross Grange. Her relationship to Heathcliff is naturally one of the most important aspects when looking at Catherine’s life, if not *the* most important. When they first meet, Catherine is sulky for not getting the present her father had promised her (a whip) and directs her anger at the person who she believes is responsible for this, namely Heathcliff, by ‘grinning and spitting at the stupid little thing’.<sup>80</sup> Although their relationship has a rough start, they become ‘very thick’ (38) as Nelly calls it, only a few days afterwards. In Heathcliff,

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<sup>79</sup> Pauline Nestor, ‘Introduction’ in *Wuthering Heights*, by Emily Brontë, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>80</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 37. Future page references are to this edition and are included in parenthesis in the text.



Catherine finds someone who is willing to play with her, to obey her demands, someone who follows her and worships her. However, Heathcliff is not just an obedient playmate. They become very close, so close that the severest punishment Catherine can receive is to be removed from Heathcliff and refused to play with him. As her diaries show, she feels so strongly with Heathcliff whenever he is punished by Hindley, as if it was her own pain. The importance of this closeness between them is something I will return to.

What Catherine calls ‘an awful Sunday’ in her diary is a representation of how important they are to each other. After Mr. Earnshaw’s death, Hindley, or the tyrant as Catherine calls him, returns as the master and continues to exercise his hatred for Heathcliff. The Sunday Catherine has called ‘An Awful Sunday’ describes not only how stern and emotionally cold the Heights has become, but also how she and Heathcliff turn even more to each other for comfort, love and support: ‘We made ourselves as snug as our means allowed in the arch of the dresser’ (21). Together they try to mentally escape from the tyranny Hindley and Joseph represent by fastening their pinafores together as a curtain hiding them from their oppressors. The violence the two oppressors introduce into this home is shown when Heathcliff’s hair is pulled heartily and Catherine’s ears boxed by Joseph. Pinafores tied together are not enough of a shelter, and Catherine and Heathcliff decide to rebel: ‘I took my dingy volume by the scroop, and hurled it into the dog-kennel, vowing I hated a good book. Heathcliff kicked his to the same place’ (21). They then escape from the Heights and regain their freedom by running on the moors. Her relationship to Heathcliff gives Catherine someone to explore her freedom with. The liberty (both when she speaks and in her actions) Catherine takes as a child is removed, however, once she grows older.

‘An Awful Sunday’ indicates how strong and solid their relationship is. They are as one against the rest of the inhabitants of the Heights. Catherine refuses to accept Hindley’s treatment of Heathcliff, and stays loyal to the latter. The reader understands how similar they are and how they are equally dependent on each other already as children, as twin souls. Their relationship is similar to that of siblings, but in contrast to Catherine and Hindley, who actually are siblings, Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship is not only closer in age but also emotionally stronger.

On this Sunday, as they run out on the moors, their attention is caught by the lights from Thrushcross Grange. They decide to run down and see if the Lintons ‘passed their Sunday evenings standing shivering in corners’ (48), the way Catherine and Heathcliff had

been forced to do. Unfortunately, this trip to the moors, which was their escape from tyranny into freedom, is the beginning of a change in their relationship and a new kind of tyranny. They gaze through a window and see the warmth and the beauty of the Grange, and 'would have thought [them]selves in heaven'(48) to live there. Their observation show the Linton siblings fighting over a puppy, which in Catherine and Heathcliff's eyes is ridiculous: 'We laughed outright at the petted things, we did despise them! When would you catch me wishing to have what Catherine wanted?'(48-49). Heathcliff's comment is important because it emphasizes that he and Catherine would never fight over something so trivial as holding a puppy, both because their environment at the Heights would never allow them to make any noise and because they care too much for each other to fight. Furthermore, this second comment also shows that their relationship is free from jealousy. The ill-treatment on the Heights could be the reason why Catherine and Heathcliff have this strong relationship, and a cause as to why they are not jealous of each other. If Hindley had not treated them badly, their relationship would not have been so strong.<sup>81</sup> It seems natural that Hindley and Joseph's behavior would make Catherine and Heathcliff cling even stronger to each other, but I would still argue that Catherine and Heathcliff's behavior before old Mr. Earnshaw dies shows how strong this relationship is.

Seeing how Edgar and Isabella fight and cry over a puppy makes Heathcliff change his mind about his first impression of the Grange as an Eden: 'I'd not exchange, for a thousand lives, my condition here, for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange'(49). Heathcliff understands that the glamour at the Grange is not that fantastic after all; he would rather continue his quarrel-free relationship with Catherine in the tyrannized home of the Heights than live at the Grange. Unfortunately, Catherine is not as clear-sighted as Heathcliff, and is seduced by the glamour.<sup>82</sup> When the Lintons discover the two runaways and Cathy is bitten by their dog, Catherine and Heathcliff's world changes. Society and class differences are introduced, and Heathcliff is characterized as a 'frightful thing' and 'a gypsy' who is not fit to be inside a 'decent house'(50). The Lintons separate the two by throwing Heathcliff out and 'rescuing' Catherine.

This episode at the Grange has been interpreted as representing Catherine's transition from being a child to becoming a woman. Especially Catherine's bleeding foot has been interpreted to represent 'sexual connotations, especially when it occurs in a pubescent girl'

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<sup>81</sup> Graham Holderness, *Wuthering Heights* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), p. 24.

<sup>82</sup> Holderness, p. 31.

and as a 'symbolic castration'.<sup>83</sup> The dog-bite can be seen as a metaphor of society taking a firm hold of Catherine and thus ending her days in freedom with Heathcliff. This is illustrated as he is thrown out of the civilized life at the Grange and forced to return to the wild, savage-like life at the Heights.

## **Early adulthood**

Catherine is kept at Thrushcross Grange for five weeks, and when she returns to the Heights, the change is obvious. Instead of returning as a 'wild, hatless little savage', Catherine has become 'a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver'(53). She holds up her long dress with both hands, kisses Nelly gently, displays her 'fingers wonderfully whitened' and acts reserved both towards the dogs and towards Heathcliff – out of fear that she should get dirty. Her behavior and values are changed. Catherine has been exposed to a civilized world and educated into a lady: she has been taught the distinctions between classes, and, as she belongs to the gentry, any kind of work is out of the question. She is now used to spending her days indoors and not roaming outdoors on the moors.<sup>84</sup> Although she has been civilized and cultivated, she is still affectionate towards Heathcliff as she 'bestowed seven or eight kisses on his cheek within the second', but being accustomed to another world, she would like Heathcliff to change as well in order for him to fit into this new world of hers: 'you looked odd -- If you wash your face, and brush your hair, it will be all right. But you are so dirty!'(55). Catherine's wish to change Heathcliff illustrates her wish to bring her childhood into her adulthood; in terms of her playmate, Heathcliff, and the freedom he represents for her. For the first time in the novel, the reader senses how Catherine is torn between nature (the free and uncultivated Heathcliff) and culture (values taught at the Grange). Heathcliff, however, does not approve of her transformation and does not like her comment about how dirty he is. He senses the difference between them and realizes that their former alliance as one against the rest is now gone, and that he is left alone to rebel. It is a betrayal of the one self that he and Catherine had tried to become.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1984) p. 272.

<sup>84</sup> Holderness, p. 33.

According to Graham Holderness, Catherine's change has made her fit for 'Grange-culture' and not for 'Heights-culture'.<sup>86</sup> This, he notes, is something she will regret later in life when her nature reminds her that she cannot live an idle life locked up inside the Grange. Another important aspect of Catherine's change, argues Lyn Pykett, is that it shows how 'female gentility is socially produced and reinforced' and not derived from the woman herself.<sup>87</sup> This is important when looking at independence and the wish for freedom in Catherine's case. It is not natural for Catherine to behave in a lady-like manner; she has been taught it by a male-dominated society who has decided how the characteristics of a lady should be. As such, the novel can be seen to criticize patriarchal society and its 'conceptualizations of the feminine gender'.<sup>88</sup> The firm grasp which the Lintons have over Catherine represents society taking hold of her and forcing her to adjust to social conventions. But as Holderness has pointed out, this submission to rules and conventions is unnatural for Catherine, which is shown later when her true nature again forces itself to the surface. The novel's focus on nature and human nature underlines how it is very much influenced by Romanticism.<sup>89</sup> Catherine's passion and her natural behavior are, together with the wildness of the moors, celebrated as authentic and life-giving. Nature is in this novel a representation of Catherine's inner life. Society and conventions, on the other hand, are unnatural and seen as the destructive forces in this world.

Catherine's transformation makes her busy with domestic affairs such as preparing the Heights for Christmas and for guests like Edgar and Isabella. In order to have any chance of being with her, Heathcliff decides to change: 'Nelly, make me decent, I'm going to be good' (56). This is one of several scenes in the novel that shows how strongly Heathcliff loves Catherine. She is the only person he is willing to change for. Unfortunately, the milieu of the

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<sup>85</sup> Leila Silvana May, "'And the Air Swarmed with Catherines': Identity and Desire in *Wuthering Heights*" in *Disorderly Sisters: Sibling Relations and Sororal Resistance in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*, (London: Associated University Press, 2001)

<[http://books.google.com/books?id=8FDVRz89tfkC&pg=PA68&dq=the+mill+on+the+floss&hl=en&ei=82CETpLGFc2k4ASa3I2cDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CFoQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=the%20mill%20on%20the%20floss&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=8FDVRz89tfkC&pg=PA68&dq=the+mill+on+the+floss&hl=en&ei=82CETpLGFc2k4ASa3I2cDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=10&ved=0CFoQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=the%20mill%20on%20the%20floss&f=false)> [Accessed 29 September 2011] (p. 184).

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in Holderness, p. 32.

<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Lyn Pykett, *Woman Writers: Emily Brontë* (Maryland: Barnes & Noble Books, 1989), p.89.

<sup>88</sup> Lyn Pykett, 'Women writing woman: nineteenth-century representations of gender and sexuality' in *Women and Literature in Britain 1800-1900*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 78-98 (p. 79).

<sup>89</sup> James C. McKusick, 'Nature' in *A Companion to European Romanticism*, ed. Michael Ferber (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp 413-433

<[http://books.google.com/books?id=3cTxbVewdGoC&printsec=frontcover&dq=nature++in+romanticism&hl=en&ei=DqeuTra3M62N4gSml4WXDw&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CDYQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=nature%20in%20romanticism&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=3cTxbVewdGoC&printsec=frontcover&dq=nature++in+romanticism&hl=en&ei=DqeuTra3M62N4gSml4WXDw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CDYQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=nature%20in%20romanticism&f=false)> [Accessed 31. October 2011], (pp. 413- 415).

Heights is such that it does not want him to change, but to remain as a gypsy and a vagabond. When Hindley and Edgar comment on Heathcliff's appearance, the result is that Heathcliff empties a tureen of hot apple-sauce over Edgar, which gives Hindley a reason to administer a 'rough remedy' on Heathcliff. This scene makes Catherine forget her role as the temperate 'angel', and she expresses her old, but hidden, emotions towards Heathcliff and shows her passionate temper to the Linton siblings: "You should not have spoken to him!" she expostulated with Master Linton [...] "he'll be flogged -- I hate him to be flogged! I can't eat my dinner" (59). Just like when they were children, Catherine feels Heathcliff's pain as if it was her own. She cannot enjoy her Christmas knowing that he suffers, but being civilized she cannot rebel as she did as a child, and has to sit patiently during dinner waiting for her chance to visit Heathcliff. This scene stresses how Catherine has been restricted by society to act freely, and how her behavior has changed from when she was a girl.

Another important episode in Catherine's teenage years is her choice of Edgar as husband. Gilbert and Gubar state that her education of 'lady-like self-denial' is the reason why she denies her own self and chooses Edgar and not Heathcliff.<sup>90</sup> Her dialogue with Nelly where she gives her reasons for marrying Edgar is important. Edgar is handsome and pleasant to be with, and 'he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood' (78). Her arguments are both reasonable and traditional for a lady and express 'Grange-culture' where social status and income are the important factors. A marriage based on this is a social contract, and was not unusual within the gentry in the early Victorian period. Her decision to act in accordance with society's conventional norms for a lady is not an easy one for Catherine, however: 'in my soul, and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong!' (80). Her soul and her dream of heaven tell her that a marriage with Edgar will be wrong:

heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the heath on the top of Wuthering Heights; where I woke sobbing for joy. (81)

Notably, heaven represents the Grange, and as she feels heaven was not her home, her instincts tell her that Thrushcross Grange is not her home either. The novel shows that a civilized world enclosed by fences, and offering a lifetime passed in idleness, is not a world where Catherine would feel at home. This dream is her recognition of how the social and

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<sup>90</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 276.

financial comfort at the Grange would destroy and suffocate her.<sup>91</sup> Seen by Catherine's new restricted behavior, the Grange is a place that tames nature.<sup>92</sup> The Grange's view of nature is contrasted with the Heights' view, where the wild nature of the moors is not shut out by fences and not forbidden to explore. At the Heights it is rather the opposite; there it is the natural element (both in human behavior and the outside nature) that is expressed, and the civilized world of the Grange reduced. I would claim that Catherine, deep down, is just as wild and untamable as the wild moors outside the Heights, and that it can almost be expected then that she will feel imprisoned when living at the Grange for the rest of her life.

After telling Nelly about her dream, Catherine continues by expressing how she is forced to refuse Heathcliff as her husband because of Hindley:

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. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same. (81)

This speech not only displays Catherine's love for Heathcliff (which, according to some critics, was only that of a sister's affection for a brother),<sup>93</sup> but also how she is restrained by society's conventions from accepting him. Heathcliff has now been degraded by Hindley into a servant. He has been refused a proper education; he has no money and is therefore not able to provide Catherine, who has become a lady, with a home. In addition to this, her speech demonstrates how intertwined they are; he knows her better than she knows herself and their souls are, as mentioned above, twin-souls. They belong together in order to work properly, and their connection is further emphasized as Catherine continues:

My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it. (82)

In order for Catherine to be true to herself, in order to live, she has to be connected with Heathcliff. Even though she loves Edgar with a love 'like the foliage in the woods', her love for Heathcliff is deeper: it is 'the eternal rocks beneath' (82). She seems very dramatic and

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<sup>91</sup> Barry V. Qualls, 'Victorian Border Crossings: Thinking about Gender in *Wuthering Heights*' in *Approaches to Teaching Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights*, ed. Sue Lonoff and Terri A. Hasseler (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2006), pp. 51-59 (p. 54).

<sup>92</sup> Keith Sagar, 'The Originality of *Wuthering Heights*' in *The Art of Emily Brontë* ed. Anne Smith (London: Vision, 1976), pp. 121-159 (p. 147).

<sup>93</sup> Sagar, p. 145.

passionate when she talks about her strong connection to Heathcliff, but then, Catherine is passionate by nature. The need for him in her life is demonstrated when he is gone. Catherine becomes self-destructive without Heathcliff, as shown when he runs away after the following dialogue with Nelly:

Catherine would not be persuaded into tranquility. She kept wandering to and fro, from the gate to the door [...] and the great drops that began to plash around her, she remained, calling at intervals, and then listening, and then crying outright. (85)

It is clear how miserable she is, how desperate she is to find out where he is and how her love for him makes her forget all about the lady-like manners of the Grange. The hours she spends outside in the rain results in a bad fever, which again is the cause of Edgar's parents' death. Without Heathcliff, Catherine becomes more inclined to accidents and her misfortune spreads to others as well. Nelly tells the reader how Catherine has changed and become 'saucier, and more passionate, and haughtier than ever'(88). Her behavior is similar to Heathcliff's when Catherine is dead. It is just as aggressive and passionate. Being twin souls, neither of them can be in balance when the other part of their soul is missing.

## **Married life**

Before Heathcliff disappears, Catherine has already decided to accept Edgar in marriage. A marriage to Heathcliff would degrade her socially, and by marrying Edgar she hopes to help Heathcliff rise socially. The first three years of marriage are spent silently and passively. Catherine is treated very carefully in 'fear of ruffling her humour' and she has 'seasons of gloom and silence'(92) that her husband concludes are a result of her illness. After all, 'she was never subject to depression of spirits before'(93). The change from the younger Catherine is clear. The passion, the joy and the saucy comments are gone, and left is a subdued wife enclosed within the walls of the cultivated Grange. N. M. Jacobs writes that Catherine is like somnolence and very un-Cathy-like in her way of hiding her true emotions.<sup>94</sup> Her change is perhaps not that strange seeing that she has left her childhood's innocence behind and entered married life. By entering married life, Catherine has also entered sexuality, and hence been transformed from an innocent girl to an experienced woman. The initial paradise and Eden-like images the Grange offered may therefore be interpreted to be anything but Eden.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> N. M. Jacobs, 'Gender and Layered Narrative in *Wuthering Heights*' in *Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë*, ed. Patsy Stoleman (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 74-85 (p. 81).

<sup>95</sup> Marjorie Burns, "'This Shattered Prison': Versions of Eden in *Wuthering Heights*' in *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), pp. 31-46 (pp. 38-39).

Nevertheless, the dual nature of Catherine's personality, that she is both herself and Heathcliff, makes it impossible for her to dismiss her passion, her natural instincts, which is shown as Heathcliff returns. By the reappearance of her other half, the lid Catherine has put on herself is underlined as unnatural and she is finally able to express her true self:

Catherine flew upstairs, breathless and wild, too excited to show gladness, the lady's [cheeks] glowed with another feeling when her friend appeared at the door; she sprang forward, took both his hands, and led him to Linton. (95-96).

Her behavior is similar to when she was a child. It is natural and wild, free from social restrictions and the acquired social identity as the lady of Thrushcross Grange. Such an impulsive and natural behavior is not the custom at the Grange, as Edgar reminds her when he asks her to 'be glad, without being absurd!' since the 'whole household need not witness the sight of your welcoming a runaway servant as a brother'(96). Again, Catherine is shown to be torn between nature and culture.

The return of Heathcliff makes Catherine regain her mental strength and her natural self with all the passion and sauciness this includes. Her husband has made it clear that he does not approve of Heathcliff, 'the gypsy -- the plough-boy [...] He never struck me as such a marvelous treasure'(95). But despite this, Catherine has gained some of her passion back and does not feel it improper to contradict Edgar, as she does when Heathcliff and Edgar quarrel: 'if you have not the courage to attack him, make an apology, or allow yourself to be beaten'(114). Even though Catherine defends her husband against Heathcliff when Edgar is not present, her reply to him in this situation is important. It is so because it underlines her independence of him. Unlike 'traditional' Victorian wives who were to keep silent, obedient and inferior to their husbands, Catherine does not hold back her opinion. Catherine shows her indifference to social conventions and etiquette constructed by a patriarchal society when she openly refuses her husband. Although this can be seen as a sign of independence, it can be interpreted as showing that Catherine's wildness and natural instincts cannot be completely tamed and cultivated, cannot be socialized, into Grange behavior and standards. That she responds to Edgar in this way has also been interpreted as Catherine defending *herself*, in that Edgar, whenever he verbally attacks Heathcliff, actually attacks a part of Catherine, since Heathcliff is a constant part of her own soul.<sup>96</sup> In Catherine's view, Heathcliff and freedom are two sides of the same thing. Heathcliff offers Catherine a chance to act out her natural self. Through him and their past as free children together, Catherine is reminded of her true

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<sup>96</sup> Gilbert and Gubar, p. 280.



nature and her past joy of being free. Therefore, whenever Edgar attacks Heathcliff, Catherine interprets it as an attack on her wish to be free and independent. Although society at the Grange has forced her to submit, the memory Heathcliff represents provides her with an opportunity to forget her duties as the lady of the Grange, and to be free as a child.

Unlike in their childhood together, Catherine and Heathcliff argue much as adults, which is not so strange when one considers how Catherine is torn between her two worlds. As time passes, she realizes that a compromise between the two worlds is unattainable. Society does not allow a lady to act as freely as Catherine did as a child. Heathcliff, as opposed to his childhood self, does not obey her every word. Not only does he kiss Isabella, he later runs off with her as well. ‘Why have you disregarded my request?’ Catherine asks him(111). Edgar, although he loves his wife, does not understand how important Heathcliff is to her and refuses to accept him. This refusal is based on two things: first, Heathcliff is considered to be a vagabond, a servant, and a nameless man, which places him, socially, in a lower class than Edgar. Second, Edgar is jealous of Heathcliff and Catherine’s close relationship, of Heathcliff’s special place in Catherine’s heart. As a result, he poses an ultimatum: ‘Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be *my* friend, and *his* at the same time; and I absolutely *require* to know which you choose’(117). After realizing that her two worlds cannot co-exist, Catherine, mistaken and desperate, interprets the situations to mean that neither Heathcliff nor Edgar truly care for her. Her conviction results in an illness, and like a spoilt child she wants everyone else to feel miserable too: “‘Oh, I will die,’ she exclaimed, “since no one cares anything about me [...] No, I’ll not die -- he’d be glad -- he does not love me at all -- he would never miss me!’”(120-121). The way she is forced to give up her old world is unacceptable to her, and she decides to rebel against this male-dominated culture. However, Catherine’s mind gets worse as she tears out the feathers of her pillow and has illusions of things that do not exist at the Grange, a behavior that can easily be linked to madness. This behavior is a result of Catherine having enough of the enclosed life at the Grange, literally by the surrounding fence and figuratively because of her submission of her own self. Catherine cannot exist in a world such as the one at the Grange; she does not feel made for an idle life, but a life with freedom to run out on the moors, the kind of life Heathcliff represents.

As her health becomes even worse, she longs for the Heights where she can find her ‘own bed in the old house’(124). Just like her dream of heaven predicted, she would not be

truly satisfied in heaven/ the Grange, but would cry to return to the Heights, as she does now. In her illness she can see clearly that she has made the wrong choice in marrying Edgar (as her past unease foreshadowed) and that the socialization of her (that began during her five weeks stay at the Grange as a twelve-year old) is the reason for her misery:

But, supposing at twelve years old, I had been wrenched from the Heights, and every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and been converted at a stroke into Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, and the wife of a stranger; an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world. (125)

Catherine understands how she freely offered herself to society, and hence became an outcast from the Heights. Educated into a lady, she was forced to withdraw from her own world and accept the conventional, socialized world the Grange represented. Catherine wishes to return to those childhood years when she and Heathcliff were as one, untainted by culture's restrictions:

we must pass by Gimmerton Kirk, to go that journey! We've braved its ghosts often together, and dared each other to stand among the graves and ask them to come... But Heathcliff, if I dare you now, will you venture? If you do, I'll keep you. I'll not lie there by myself; they may bury me twelve feet deep, and throw the church down over me; but I won't rest till you are with me...I never will!. (126)

My reading of this passage is that Catherine's speech shows her longing for her childhood innocence. Just like her longing for her bed in her room at the Heights, and her recollection of when she was twelve years old, could be expressions of her wish to return to her past. It is also significant that she says she will never rest without Heathcliff by her side, since Heathcliff, as he later tells Nelly, experiences Catherine's ghost and is tormented by the loss of her.

Catherine's death scene is the last significant episode. Her motivation to starve herself has been selfish and sadistic: 'Well, if I cannot keep Heathcliff for my friend -- if Edgar will be mean and jealous, I'll try to break their hearts by breaking my own'(116). The source of her calculating plan is her mentality that others should suffer if she suffers, which is both a childish way of responding and her only way (being a female) to gain some control and power in her world. By pushing herself to extremity, she wants to punish Heathcliff and Edgar appropriately. Just like when she was a child and forced people to treat her as a mistress, she now forces people to sympathize with her.

'You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff! And you both come to bewail the deed to me, as if you were the people to be pitied! I shall not pity you, not I. You have

killed me' [...] 'I wish I could hold you,' she continued, bitterly, 'till we were both dead! I shouldn't care what you suffered. I care nothing for your sufferings. Why shouldn't you suffer? I do!' (160)

She wants to inflict guilt on him. She could never force either Heathcliff or Edgar to accept each other, and she could never free herself from the prison the Grange has become for her.<sup>97</sup> Her choices are limited either to running away or die. She chooses the former. By starving herself she has tried to gain some independence, to gain some power over her own life.

If Catherine had not stayed at the Grange, if she had not married Edgar, she would have kept her sense of freedom in that she would not have been enclosed from her own nature, and free from society and its conventions. However, this would not have been independence in terms of an acceptable social status and financial security as Jane Eyre manages to achieve. Either she would have lived as an inferior to Hindley at the Heights, still being tormented by both him and Joseph, or she and Heathcliff would have escaped together, most likely as paupers elsewhere. She is therefore forced to be drawn in by society (here represented by the Lintons) and transformed to fit society's conventions. She has to learn how to control her passion (as Jane Eyre and Maggie Tulliver had to do) and let herself be subdued and controlled by others. As the novel shows, this is, in the end, impossible for Catherine to accept. Her speech of how she is Heathcliff and that he lives inside of her is connected to her refusal to be subdued and to the freedom Heathcliff as a man has. N. M. Jacobs looks at the male and female worlds of *Wuthering Heights*, and argues that the reason why Catherine identifies so strongly with Heathcliff is because he represents her 'male' traits.<sup>98</sup> These traits are the passion, anger and desire within Catherine, which she is able to express through her relationship with Heathcliff. From a psychoanalytical perspective, one can interpret these traits, and indirectly Heathcliff himself, to represent Catherine's id, i.e., her uncontrollable instinctual desires. Edgar Linton, being a representative of both society and patriarchal rule, restricts Catherine's freedom, and thus denies her a chance of being true to her own instincts. Therefore, when Edgar refuses Heathcliff, he refuses Catherine's dark and uncontrollable nature. Because of her marriage to him she is confined, almost suffocated from not being able to feel the wind across the moors:

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<sup>97</sup> Seeing that divorce was not an option as it was not allowed until 1857. Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman* (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1953), p. 25.

<sup>98</sup> Jacobs, p. 81.

‘Open the window again wide, fasten it open!’ ‘Quick, why don’t you move?’  
‘Because I won’t give you your death of cold’ [...] ‘You won’t give me a chance of  
life, you mean’ (126).

Her need for the moors and its wind represents her need for freedom, which neither Nelly nor Edgar is able to understand. Catherine’s lack of space at the Grange, results, just as it did with Maggie Tulliver, in an insufferable submission which can only be removed by death.

Catherine entered the conventional role as a wife willingly, but she was not fully aware of the implications it had. This led to her destruction.

## Conclusions:

The three female characters which I have studied in this thesis, Jane Eyre, Maggie Tulliver and Catherine Earnshaw Linton, have different backgrounds which naturally influence their wish for autonomy and which limit their choices in life. In short, Jane and Maggie have to work in order to survive, and Catherine has to become a lady. As we have seen, each novel represents a number of aspects that illustrate what it may have meant to be a woman in the first half of nineteenth century Britain. The texts thematise work, education and domestic roles. The emotional challenges posed by the patriarchal society put on women, are vividly expressed in these novels, for example through the madness of Bertha Mason and Catherine Earnshaw Linton, and Maggie's eventual role as an outcast.

Each of these three novels thematise women's emotional life, and in particular the passion within the protagonists. Traditionally, Victorian women were expected to be weak and helpless, incapable of making decisions beyond the domestic sphere. The passion experienced by Jane, Maggie and Catherine, and often visibly expressed, is therefore uncommonly direct. This serves to underline the fact that women are not naturally weak and helpless, that they are not born temperate and confined. At the same time and in line with Victorian codes of conduct, passion is demonstrated to be a destructive force that needs to be restricted. In all three protagonists' lives, these strong feelings seem to be the determining factor as they struggle to negotiate between these and their reason whenever they make decisions. Jane and Maggie manage to control their emotions, while Heathcliff's return makes Catherine regain her passionate nature.

In matters of self-fulfillment, both Maggie and Catherine fail to succeed, and become instead self-destructive. Since Maggie is so strongly connected to her past and her family, she in the end lets this destroy any chance of autonomy and happiness. In fact, her need of Tom's forgiveness indicates how dependent she is on others, and then especially her brother, for acceptance. Catherine is also self-destructive in the sense that she refuses to stay true to her own instincts and imprisons herself inside Thrushcross Grange. Locked up inside the Grange, she is deprived of any opportunity to become independent and is condemned to a life as the submissive wife. The contrast to Jane is unavoidable: Jane refuses to be suppressed. She does not wish to live as Rochester's mistress or marry St. John Rivers, since both offers will mean a violation of her nature. Jane's situation is exceptional since she lacks any past attachments that control her conscience, and she is not, like Catherine, uncertain of what she really wants.

Considering the fact that Jane is aware of what is right and wrong (both in terms of society's laws and in terms of her own instincts) she is, as a woman, represented as a better Christian and a better moral person than Mr. Rochester, who is a man.

Although none of the three novels portrays a radical feminism, as this was expressed later in the century, they were nevertheless considered radical by many contemporaries. All three in different ways emphasized the necessity of a change in gender roles. Jane by seeing herself as Rochester's equal and by making the decision herself to marry him, Maggie in her lack of interest in domestic affairs, her intelligence and her own decision to leave Stephen and come back as an outcast, Catherine by behaving more as the master of the Grange than Edgar who *is* the master, her 'lamb' as Heathcliff calls him.<sup>99</sup> Particularly in *Jane Eyre*, the role of the woman is shown to have other dimensions than those decided by a male-dominated society. According to Victorian values, women were to be confined to the domestic sphere, less intellectual, free of an independent intellectual life and dependent on a man. Because of this, one might argue that Jane is the most radical of the three women. Although *Wuthering Heights* as a novel was considered even more shocking than *Jane Eyre*, it was the story as a whole and not Catherine as a character that caused this reaction.<sup>100</sup> Jane is more strong-minded, and in contrast to the other two, she succeeds in gaining her independence without having to die. Jane stays true to her heart (unlike Catherine who marries Edgar, although she feels that it is wrong), and her actions are not restricted by the family's expectations (as Maggie is by both her father and especially Tom).

Even though Jane seems to be the biggest supporter of equality between the sexes, all three share a number of similarities. Jane and Catherine are similar in their frank and honest opinion, regardless of whom they are talking to (Rochester, Edgar, Hindley), a bravery which Maggie lacks. Although she refuses to be silent and speaks her mind a couple of times in the novel, this is more the exception than the rule with her. Furthermore, all the three heroines manage to decide their own fate by taking control of their own lives at crucial moments: Jane by refusing to become a mistress, or a wife in a loveless marriage, Catherine through her choice of destroying (and eventually murdering) herself, Maggie by choosing to return to St. Oggs, although she will become an outcast, and by willingly jumping after Tom out of the boat.

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<sup>99</sup> Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. Pauline Nestor (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 114.

<sup>100</sup> Janet Dunbar, *The Early Victorian Woman: Some Aspects of Her Life (1837-57)* (London: George G. Harrap & Co, 1953), p. 131.

In addition to demonstrating the gap between society's ideology of women and reality, these novels also criticize marriage as an institution. This is shown very directly in *Jane Eyre* as Jane rejects marriage as a social contract both when it concerns Rochester and Blanche, and when it concerns herself and St. John Rivers. In *Wuthering Heights* unhappiness in marriage is portrayed both in Catherine and Edgar's and in Heathcliff and Isabella's marriage. Both marriages are based on other motivations than love and respect. This novel is also concerned with women's situation in marriage, how they are their husband's property. In *The Mill on the Floss*, although Maggie has self-sacrificing reasons to marry Philip, she understands, as soon as she has feelings for Stephen, how wrong it would be to marry Philip. The stories of these heroines show how marriage should not be a sacrifice for women, but a choice based on love. By explaining the importance of love and respect in marriage, the novels thematise a romantic view of love where the liberty to choose freely who to marry is fundamental.

The lives of Jane, Catherine and Maggie portray how many women in the first half of the nineteenth century struggled to adapt into a society whose claims were a constraint on them. The opposition between the 'angel' and women's own thoughts, emotions and will causes a reaction, which is portrayed in these novels. Catherine and Maggie's deaths underline how difficult this struggle between the individual and society's claims can be. The novels portray new dimensions of human life and of human psychology, with a particular focus on women. They are perhaps not primarily written with the intention of reforming society. I rather believe all three authors were too well aware of the impossibility of that happening in their own time. Nevertheless, they are written to demonstrate how there is more to women than society believes, that women are more than 'angels'. These three heroines represent the emerging end of the Perfect Woman, and the start of the New Woman, as they claim their right to be a subject, and seek to be agents of their own lives.<sup>101</sup>

These novels differ from many other novels of their period in that they not only portray society, but they criticize some of its deep-rooted beliefs and seek to change it. In general, the majority of male authors tended to reinforce conventional restrictions on their female protagonists, while a few women, as I hope to have shown in this thesis, subverted, expanded, or showed how destructive they were.<sup>102</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, the

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<sup>101</sup> See Gorsky for a definition, p. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Alison A. Case, *Plotting Women: Gender and Narration in the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 9.

realist novel was initially not meant to criticize, only to portray, and through this teach readers about society.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, the restrictions which were put on women's sphere made it difficult for them to express their intelligence. Arguably, both the authors and heroines discussed in this thesis stand out as new and radical, albeit to different degrees. This again underlines the connection between these novels and the emerging wish for female autonomy during the Victorian period.

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<sup>103</sup> Gorsky, pp. 4 and 7.



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