



“His Life Did Harm to Others”

Domestic Violence, Abuse, and Gender in *Wuthering Heights* and
The Tenant of Wildfell Hall

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Abstract

This project looks at the portrayal of abuse and domestic violence in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). In the 1840s the ideal of domesticity was at its height, but questions were also being raised on how safe the domestic home was for women, while at the same time having to be a place of refuge for husbands who were in a position of power and ownership over their wives. Through historical gender ideals and ideals of domesticity as well as through the analysis of literary devices and genres, this project sets out to show how Emily and Anne Brontë created novels reflecting the issues of domestic abuse and domesticity by showing critique on how the law and society allowed relationships between husbands and wives to be unequal and abusive.

Keywords: Anne Brontë, Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Abuse, Domestic Violence, Gender, Domesticity, Masculinity, Femininity, Narrative Structures, Gothic

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Introduction

Domestic violence and abuse in relationships are topics that are more and more often discussed and addressed in our current society. Yet, it still is very much a taboo to be too forward with it. Anyone can name an example of a celebrity that has been accused of being physically and/or psychologically abusive, yet there are always many who come to their aid and the repercussions for the accused are sometimes small or even non-existent. Hush money is a viable option to erase such accusations and press is willing to go along with it. Still, it can be said that there is a positive movement towards an age in which this topic does become more readily recognised.

It is the Victorian Era that we have to thank for this progression. During the nineteenth century domestic violence became more widely recognised for what it was through many treatises and changes in law. One of these most important laws that brought about change was the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857. Its most important contribution was that it “secularized and regularizes legal procedures for obtaining a separation or divorce” (Poovey 467). Before, the ecclesiastical courts were in charge of divorces and many legal systems overlapped the proceedings and rulings of a divorce. By taking the Church out of the equation, it was possible to establish a civil divorce court. Although this Act was an improvement, it was still very much tainted by a double sexual standard that disadvantaged women and the poor (Poovey 468). These double standards were apparent to both legislators and outsiders, but women such as Caroline Norton were the ones to fight these double standards. Norton was married in 1827 to George Norton, but had to support their family by 1830, which usually would be in the care of the husband, especially as they were of a higher class. In 1836 he abducted their children and tried to file for divorce, but failed. Norton was seen as a fallen woman, as she was shamed for her husband’s accusation of infidelity. It would take Norton decades of fighting over custody of their children and money issues, but she used her misfortunes and position as a poet and novelist to raise her voice in order to help not only herself, but also other women who suffered the same fate. (Poovey 470). It was women like Norton who paved the way for the eventual changes in the marital rights for women, but these women would unfortunately never be able to benefit from these changes themselves.

It was not just facts and essays that furthered the discussion along. Novels helped to spread awareness and could become eye-openers to their readers in a less overt way of sharing information. They helped give a face and story to the ones who suffered abuse in their marriage. Their impact might not be as easily measured as that of well-known activists on the

subject, such as John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, but should certainly not be overlooked either. Still, enough novels of this sort were written to allow a trope to be formed. The trope consisted of a brutal and/or adulterous husband who is continuously forgiven, sometimes even nursed by his wife, until the moment of one of their deaths. In fewer cases the wife would run away, the reformation of the husband was even rarer. The other popular plot was the *Jane Eyre* one which first portrayed a bad marriage, as the one between Mr Rochester and Bertha, but then a good woman comes along to portray a happy and healthy union (Humpherys 44).

Amongst these authors of such novels were the Brontë sisters, who created fictional stories that tied into the ongoing discussion of domestic violence. Especially Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848) (henceforth referred to as *Wildfell Hall*) focused on domesticity and the possible unfortunate consequences that this could cause. They seem to echo Caroline Norton's story as similar issues that Norton had to face arise in the novels. At the time, Anne and Emily Brontë, as well as Charlotte Brontë, published their works under masculine pennames: Acton, Ellis, and Currer Bell. This does not only show their wish to be given a fair chance in the literary field and to be seen as authors—whereas publishing under their actual names would immediately mark them as *female* authors—but it also shows that they wished to protect their own identities from the scrutiny that would inevitably follow, considering the darker subjects of their novels. Writing about “coarse” subject matters was only allowed to men whereas it was regarded as something utterly unnatural for women to write about (Jacobs 208).

The novels certainly were regarded as dealing with coarse subjects and as a result many critics felt the novels were rather unnatural as well. Contemporary audiences were shocked by the rather radical and indecorous subject matter of *Wildfell Hall* (Langland 111). Even in our present time, critics such as Martin Wiener argue that novels such as Anne Brontë's *Wildfell Hall* fostered a “victimisation tradition” and “plac[ed] men's treatment of women in the dock” (qtd. in Godfrey 5). The story of a woman, Helen Huntingdon, fleeing her husband with their son Arthur after suffering years of abuse, neglect, and infidelity on his part, is a rather controversial one for the time in which it was written. While she is in hiding in a village where her brother lives at well, she pretends to be a widow to not raise suspicion. The villagers are suspicious of her either way, and curious gentleman-farmer Gilbert Markham eventually befriends her. In the end, Helen's husband finds her again and she returns to nurse him on his deathbed until she finally truly becomes a widow. She inherits a great fortune and is then free to pursue a marriage of equals with Gilbert.

Nowadays Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* is mostly known as an overly

romanticised story in which the physicality of the novel is translated to passion, which is mostly because of the romanticised screen adaptations that have been made. Although there certainly are romantic relationships in this novel—it could be argued they are epic ones—the novel is more than solely a love story. It could also be categorised as a tale of revenge.

Wuthering Heights caused a deep disturbance amongst its reviewers, who saw the violence in the novel and wanted to attribute it to fiction, instead of actual middle-class families. They sought to differentiate themselves from the violence (Jacobs 205). To shortly summarise *Wuthering Heights* is rather a feat as it spans several decades and generations. The novel tells of the life of the people living at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange on the moors in Yorkshire. The Earnshaw family of the Heights, consisting of a father, son Hindley and daughter Catherine, adopt orphan Heathcliff. Catherine and Heathcliff grow extremely close. When Catherine and Heathcliff meet the Linton family of the Grange, Catherine learns to become a more ‘civilised’ woman and marries Edgar. Heathcliff disappears and returns after a few years as a gentleman and marries Isabella. Catherine dies, leaving a daughter behind, and Isabella flees Heathcliff soon after with her unborn son. When Heathcliff is left with the new generation history seems to repeat itself, until Heathcliff’s death brings an end to it all and there is finally peace in the Heights.

With subjects, plotlines, and characters like these, it is no surprise that these two novels were not received kindly by the audiences of the 1840s. The lives of the sisters proved that they were engaged in the contemporary debates on topics such as abuse and alcohol and women’s rights in marriage, so despite the controversy of their honest novels, they were perhaps regarded more as a controversy than that they actually were. Society tends to react poorly to the exposure of publicly kept secrets and taboos. Change was actually already starting, as the 1840s were in fact the decade in which the debate of the Woman Question was at a height (Willis 126).

All three of the Brontë sisters are known for their darker tales, often making use of Gothic elements. Gothic lent itself well for these engagements with the issues regarding domesticity, gender, and marriage. Gothic itself was often seen as feminine and therefore as vulgar as most of its early writers and readers were women. Still, despite Gothic being seen feminine, a sub-category called the Female Gothic was coined in the twentieth century. This subcategory of the Gothic “takes as its focus female protagonists wrestling with repressed familial histories and problematic social and institutional pressures relating to female sexuality and gender roles” (Davison 124). This definition certainly seems to fit *Wuthering Heights* in particular. During the Victorian Era, Gothic literature lent itself well to interrogate

issues of sexuality, gender, and patriarchal social structures. Social realism started to merge with the Gothic in this era, a fusion of two genres that the Brontës liked to use for their fiction. The Gothic became a mechanism to express character psychology, by helping the social realism become more realistic through the uncertainties and inexplicabilities of the Gothic. Robert B. Heilman coined this as “New Gothic” in 1958, a term he mostly assigned to Charlotte Brontë. (Davison 128). Anne and Emily Brontë may have been less extreme in their use of Gothic to provide credibility to social realism, but they certainly also made use of the genre.

It is my aim to historically contextualise *Wuthering Heights* and *Wildfell Hall* and to show how the Victorian world enabled the Brontës to write these two classics. Gender roles and ideals for men and women and their places in the ideal of domesticity are a vital part of this world and create a certain sounding board for Emily and Anne Brontë to either base their characters on, or to have their characters deviate from. These novels are not just reflections of the time in which they were written but are also a critique of the domestic violence of the time that was enabled by the patriarchal marital laws, although the sisters differ in the way they offer their critique. Literary techniques, tricks, devices, and genres used by the sisters show an understanding of their contemporary world and literatures and of the very art of writing. *Wuthering Heights* and *Wildfell Hall* both show different portrayals of domestic abuse and violence. This thesis will set out to answer the question: How do Emily and Anne Brontë portray and critique domestic abuse and violence in *Wuthering Heights* and *Wildfell Hall* in regard to the Victorian society in which they lived and how do they employ literary devices and genres to strengthen their stories?

Chapter 1. The Victorian Domestic Ideal: The Truth Behind Closed Doors

To understand why Emily and Anne Brontë were able to write the novels they wrote and to understand how their criticisms and observations of society came to be, it is important to have an impression of what society was like in the Victorian Era. Cases like the one of the aforementioned Caroline Norton were rarely so openly fought in society, but the foundation of Norton's marital problems was a direct consequence of the gender roles and expectations of family life in the eighteenth hundreds.

The Victorian Era highly idealised and promoted the ideal of domestic bliss and harmony. Having a family to provide for and to protect was of the highest importance. Interestingly, this ideal was mostly strived for by the middle class families in England. They were rich enough to be able to sustain such a lifestyle as well as seen as moral enough to uphold it. Families of the lower classes became something to differentiate from and to look upon in a condescending manner. Everything that was vile about domesticity could be blamed on them. The higher classes were not always well off either as they were seen as degenerate and immoral by the 1850s (Surridge 17). Domesticity became integral to society and England was the domestic nation par excellence (Tosh 5). As Tosh phrases it: “[D]omesticity became the talisman of bourgeois culture” (4). As a consequence, this ideal of domesticity also had an effect on how the Victorians pictured the ideal man and woman, or more important, the ideal husband and wife. This changed ideals in a manner not seen before, and also in a way unique to England. It was also the era in which middle-class families started to separate their work environment from their home for the first time, a concept that is still very much part of Western societies today (Tosh 8).

1.1: The Masculine Ideal

Gender ideals change continuously and are reflective of their . Masculinity can often raise images of strength, high intelligence and rationality, or for instance stoicism. The stereotypical idea of the male warrior who protects his family and provides for them by hunting is one that has been taught throughout history as the ‘original’ form of masculinity, and seen as the way the earliest humans lived. In a way, the ideal of masculinity that became important in the early decades of the Victorian Era, does take some of those stereotypical notions, but most of all it is still very much a product of the world England was part of at that particular time, thus creating a form of masculinity that was new to England.

The 1830s to the 1860s were a peaceful period in England which made military life

less appealing as there were few opportunities to rise in rank and make a good name for oneself (Tosh 7). The military was no longer regarded as the upmost respectable career for the second sons who had no inheritance and therefore had to earn their money. Instead, because of the peaceful period, domesticity became central to masculinity in early Victorian England. The importance of domesticity had never before been and has never been since that time so integral to the ideal of masculinity (Tosh 1). Whereas the home is usually seen as the domain of women and their children, it now became a place of men. Not only did the man possess the house, it was also the place where his deepest needs would be met. A Victorian middle-class man had to be a dutiful husband to his wife and children. His family and the home they created together was held as his highest priority (Tosh 1). The duty of wife and children was to meet every need that the husband might have in his domestic environment. As such, the home and the family become inseparable entities.

The military was no longer seen as the most ambitious career choice for men. Professional and entrepreneurial success was considered as a man's most important achievement. Consequently, it became a marker of bourgeois persona for men in the 1830s and 1840s if they showed restraint and abstained from violence while the lower classes were perceived as barbarous (Godfrey 6). This new and softer masculinity that the Victorians had created was often advanced by early Victorian Gothic as well. This masculinity was that of "a novel type of gentleman, free of the class, monetary, or criminal associations this figure possessed in the political Godwinian Gothic of the 1790s" (Davison 131). It became important to distinguish between the private and the public sphere for men. The idea of being a commuter between hearth and home and the office was now part of being a distinguished middle-class gentleman. This separation of the private and public in such a rigid way could then have positive and negative consequences. If work demanded a great amount of time of the husband, it meant he would spend little time at his precious home, creating a distance between husband and wife who are supposed to be companionable. At the same time, it could also mean that work never had to be a part of the private sphere. The home would then provide enough time for family activities. Spending time with one's family then became the objective of the domestic sphere, creating the option for 'quality time' at all times, as work never had to be incorporated into affairs at home. A life so divided could not have been anything but difficult for a husband, who in a sense was expected to live two lives at once and to never let them unite.

As men were supposed to spend their free time at home, being a husband meant having a lack of a homosocial life. Domesticity and a social life with other men seemed to be

mutually exclusive. Therefore wealthy husbands would sometimes have their own private apartment specifically for homosocial life or they would go to the gentleman's club. The wife was then again cut out from another part of her husband's life (Tosh 127).

1.2: The Feminine Ideal

If the husband is the one who is there to provide for the family and to offer protection, it is the wife who is responsible for the morality as the famous Victorian 'angel of the house'. It was seen as the husband's duty to keep out the dangers and knowledge of the outside world, as this was seen as the only way to create a happy and peaceful home that could act as refuge. As a consequence, an ideal domestic home was shielded from the outside world and reality as much as possible (Tosh 85). The opposite was as much true as well: the inside of the domestic home was also to be shielded away from the outside world, only showing the slightest glimpses of a family that lived up to the domestic ideal. It was the duty of the wife to inspire moral life in everyone at home. The wife had to become a holy creature (Tosh 29). She had to be passionless and completely submissive to her husband. Showing any form of sexuality was seen as corruption of the very being of a woman (Tosh 44). The woman as the "angel monitress" thus had to be always in control of herself, which meant that she was forced to suppress her emotions in order to not destroy the peaceful domestic environment. Secrecy about her own feelings thus became a necessity and an important survival skill (Jacobs 211). As a result, the home resembled a prison. She was obligated to make a house a home for her husband to come home to, yet she never had the opportunity to leave her work and 'go home', as her home and her duty were one and the same.

This ideal of submissiveness was also maintained when a woman did experience abuse at the hands of her husband. No matter the severity of the abuse women suffered, whether it was within legal limitations or not, a woman was not supposed to fight back in any way. Once a woman fought back, they were the ones who could face possible legal consequences if the husband wished to bring her actions to court (SurrIDGE 14). The legal consequences would also reflect poorly on the reputation of the wife, as is seen in Caroline Norton's damaged reputation, even though her husband was fully responsible for the abuse in their marriage.

Marriage in the Victorian Era was not as black and white as ideals might make it seem. Some of the ideals would actually contradict each other and create an image of perfection that in itself was not perfect and could not uphold every test. The Victorian Era was one in which sexual differences were seen as more absolute than ever (Tosh 7). As marriage was seen as a union between companions, it is not always as easy to see how that would work

if men and women were thought to be so very different from each other. Naturally, it could mean that their differences together make a perfect union, but it could also mean that it led to irreparable difficulties in communication and the forming of friendship between husband and wife.

A woman who was bound to stay at home would inevitably also be mostly in charge of the education of the children, or at least spend most time with them. When it came to girls, this was not much of an issue, but raising boys was a completely different matter. As women and men were seen as so intrinsically different, it was not a viable option for a woman to raise her son once he reached a certain age, as that exposed him to too much femininity which would ensure he could never be a 'real' man. Boarding school thus became a viable option for boys, as it would assure that they were not too heavily influenced by feminine ideals which were the opposites of the masculine ones. In novels this issue can often be raised when the husband punishes the wife by taking away their child. In *Wildfell Hall*, Huntingdon punishes Helen by hiring another woman to take care of Arthur, which leaves Helen without any opportunity to rescue her son from his father's destructive influence.

1.3: The Law, Marriage, and Divorce

The Victorian Era heralded a time in which law would come to change in ways that would protect women. The important changes in law regarding married women and their children happened after the Brontë sisters published their novels, some even decades later. It is therefore not vital to know these changes when analysing the novels, as they are not applicable to them, but they are important in regard to what exactly was fought for in these earlier decades, such as the 1840s.

Ideals of masculinity and femininity were not only controlled by society and culture but also maintained and furthered by law. This was mostly visible in the way marriage changed the position of a woman. Once a woman married a man, all her property became his. As women had no property, this also meant they had no rights, which put women on equal footing with criminals in Victorian society, completely disenfranchised. Not only her property became her husband's, she herself became her husband's too. A woman lost her status as a human being and became part of her husband, as a woman's identity was incorporated and consolidated into the identity of her husband (Davison 129). This law of coverture was justified with the notion that if a wife had separate rights from her husband, the harmony and companionship of a marriage would be destroyed. What it actually meant was that the wife had no legal recourse if the marriage did not turn out to be as happy as hoped (Humpherys

43). As a consequence, a husband was allowed to do whatever he wanted with and to his wife. There were limits to what a man was allowed to do, but many husbands were aware of these limits and made sure to stay within them. Any course of action a wife would want to take in for instance legal matters in opposition to her husband would be futile, as she was his property and would thus not be able to sue him. Caroline Norton was not able to sue her own husband either and therefore had to find other ways.

Yet, while at the same time that marriage had been established as a “bastion of privacy and domesticity, supposedly secure from outside interference, it was subjected increasingly to unprecedented scrutiny and regulation” (qtd. in Surridge 3). The sanctuary that the domestic home presented for families was thus almost immediately breached. The idea that everything that happened behind closed doors and drawn curtains was to stay within the home and between the family members was soon criticised. It is understandable, especially for women, that this very idea of a private sanctuary created the possibility for a dangerous and inescapable situation. A woman was not allowed to leave the house without her husband’s permission, as law dictated, and speaking out about possible misdeeds would then not only cause severe difficulties for her, but it would also create irreparable damage to the reputation of one’s family and that of herself. It would show that their supposed domestic bliss did not live up to middle-class standards, which would then invoke images of the lower classes that were seen as vile and incapable of the morality that middle-class households were supposed to have.

The first change that had a great impact was the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which became popularly known as the Divorce Reform Act. Up until this act, divorce had basically only been available to men which the cause of adultery of their wife. As sons inherited their father’s property and possible titles, it was important to the father to know that his son was actually his. Women, on the other hand, could also file for divorce on grounds of adultery, but the adultery their husband committed had to be of the gravest kind: only instances of incest and bigamy would hold up in court (Humpherys 43). A second option was that of a judicial separation from bed and board, but this was not the same as actual divorce. Remarrying was not a possibility and the wife would still have no legal status and was completely dependent on her husband, financially as well. Besides that, she also needed her husband’s permission for this separation (Humpherys 45). Either way, divorce and separation brought along with it the sense of deep shame that attached itself to divorced women, who were socially ostracised. Thus, a wife had to be deeply determined to get a divorce because she knew what the consequences to her reputation would be for the rest of her life

(Humpherys 46). The rest of the century luckily knew more changes in law and acts that continued to provide better care and protection for women and children, 1857 was only the beginning.

In the end, it was these changes in laws that changed the root of how our modern society understand spousal assault as well: it was no longer only a case of punishing abusive husbands after their perpetration or abuse of their position of power, it became a way of trying to protect married women and their children proactively, especially after the Married Women's Property Act of 1878 (Surrige 27). Through this change, women's rights had made a leap forward and most of all, women had gained hope and a chance at justice and protection, exactly what women like Caroline Norton had needed half a century before.

Chapter 2. Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*

Anne Brontë published *Wildfell Hall* in 1848, a year after her sister had published *Wuthering Heights*. Surprisingly many parallels are to be found between the two novels, despite still being very much their own work of fiction. *Wildfell Hall* has been neglected for a long time in the academic world, as has Anne Brontë herself, but over the last few decades the novel has become a great part of the canon. Davison even praises it as the “decade’s most daring exposé of what [Brontë] suggests are anti-Christian, socially generated and legally sanctioned Victorian domestic crimes” (129-30). The character of Helen is a female character that gets to subvert the plot of the fallen woman. She might have left her husband and therefore brought shame unto herself, despite her flight being utterly justifiable, but in the end she is not punished for it. Helen does not have to die, but instead gets to live a full, happy life.

It would not be interesting to list every single instance of physical or psychological abuse that occurs in the novel as there are too many and it is the interpretations of these instances that are more important for the analysis of *Wildfell Hall*. Therefore, several instances of domestic abuse will be provided and then analysed for their meaning as well as for their narrative structures and literary components.

2.1: Helen’s First Marriage: Arthur Huntingdon

Helen very much starts out as a young, naïve teenage girl in love with a rakish and drunkard of a man who can evidently not be trusted as many rumours circulate about his conduct and vices. Her aunt advises her not to marry him, but Helen is determined that their future will be one of shared happiness and nothing can deter her from her goal. She also physically desires him, as she kisses him before they are properly engaged, something that was most certainly frowned upon. As women at the time were not truly allowed to show their desire and their longings, physical affection was mitigated towards the ideal of the woman as a moral compass and saviour of the man. Women’s physical desires were illicit, which led to them being coded as spiritual ones in literature (Langland 118). Helen truly believes in this ideology of a fairytale and of spiritual love and basically sees her marriage to Huntingdon as a mission to make him morally good, as is evident from this conversation with her aunt:

I think I might have influence sufficient to save him from some errors, and I should think my life well spent in the effort to preserve so noble a nature from destruction. [...] sometimes he says that if he had me always by his side he should never do or say a wicked thing. (124)

Huntingdon is a challenge to her, as she knows the rumours but is willing to ignore them and instead focus on the goodness that she sees in him, exclaiming that if “I hate the sins I love the sinner” (125). Huntingdon has become her lifelong project and she is willing to risk her own happiness for the sake of his. Her longing to morally reform and uphold Huntingdon adheres perfectly to the domestic ideal of the wife, who was, after all, the angel of the house and the moral compass of the whole family. Yet, despite this wish to be his spiritual guidance, Helen did also physically desire him, as mentioned before. It seems that despite the morality of the time and the literary spirituality of female desire, Helen still manages to show her actual physical desire. In showing this, Brontë subtly and discreetly shows that both the spiritual and the physical can exist in women.

Openly discussing sexual relations in a Victorian novel is easily done and the same is true for *Wildfell Hall*. Still, Brontë makes a clear example of Helen’s and Huntingdon’s relationship. After Helen finds out that Huntingdon has been unfaithful to her with Annabella, she immediately proposes to him that she will leave him. As he does not allow her and she has their son to think of, she bravely utters the following words:

“I am your child’s mother, and your housekeeper, nothing more. [...] I will exact no more heartless caresses from you, nor offer nor endure them either. I will not be mocked with the empty husk of conjugal endearments, when you have given the substance to another!” (238)

What is interesting about this passage is that Huntingdon goes on to agree with her. He is not interested in her physically as he sees that there is no game to win there anymore. He is already her owner and can forbid her to leave him. Once again, it is her soul, her personality that he cannot touch and own, and “heartless caresses” are not going to change that.

Notable as well is that Huntingdon is not afraid to admit that he is unfaithful to Helen. Whereas Huntingdon would have grounds for divorce if Helen were to be unfaithful, his transgressions would have no consequences in court if Helen would wish to divorce him. As the extramarital affair is not one that is incestuous, for instance, Huntingdon is not able to be punished for his behaviour. Brontë clearly shows this double standard that existed for divorce.

Helen’s eventual flight from Huntingdon is one of many trials. Not only does Huntingdon know about her plan to leave, making it more difficult for her to eventually leave as he takes all her money and painting supplies—with which she hopes to support herself and her son—she is also further aggravated by Mr Hargrave. He, too, knows about her plans to leave and as he has always wanted her, he proposes to leave with her and to be her protector as well the one saving her virtue—something that hardly seems possible as she then would not

only be leaving her husband, but leaving him for another man. When Helen refuses him, he in turn becomes violent towards her, by for instance tightly holding her. Helen's response is anything but submissive:

I never saw a man so terribly excited. He precipitated himself towards me. I snatched up my palette-knife and held it against him. This startled him: he stood and gazed at me in astonishment; I dare say I looked as fierce and resolute as he. (275)

What stands out about his scene is that Helen is in fact prepared to defend herself against him. A little while later, after everyone has become witness of the scene, she even makes Mr Hargrave admit to the other men that she refused him, as she will not allow her husband and his friends to discredit her reputation and virtue as these are very dear to Helen. The fact that the men laugh at her and her husband says to her "a volley of the vilest and grossest abuse it was possible for the imagination to conceive or the tongue to utter" (276) invokes in her a need to defend herself immediately. This scene shows how Helen is prepared to fight and to do what is right for her as well. Helen does not only have to fear for her reputation, rumours of infidelity could prove to be enough evidence for a husband to divorce his wife or to take on sole custody of their children, as mentioned before. It is therefore in great interest for Helen to expose these rumours for the lies that they are, as they could have the gravest effects.

Some academic texts claim, such as the one by Jacobs (212), that Brontë only portrayed psychological abuse in *Wildfell Hall* between Helen and Huntingdon but there is much to be said for it actually being a portrayal of physical violence as well. Explicit physical violence was another taboo in writing, especially as it was part of that exact coarseness that female authors were thought of as unfit to write. Yet, the scene quoted above in which Helen feels the need to defend herself with a palette-knife shows the urgency and possibility of physical violence, even though we are not dealing with her husband in this particular moment. In order to still convey these instances of physicality, Brontë has used different techniques that are all successful in varying degrees.

One of these techniques was by having men mistreat animals instead of women. In this case, the animals became stand-ins for women. Whereas laws that would protect women still had to be legislated, maltreatment of animals had been made illegal in 1822 (Godfrey 5). This technique of having men commit violence unto animals was not a new invention by Brontë as it was used by others in that time. Anthony Trollope, for instance, used it to mark degeneration of both the physical and mental state of his characters, a form of symbolism that Arthur Conan Doyle would also use later on in the century (Godfrey 5).

[Huntingdon] struck it off with a smart blow, and the poor dog squeaked, and ran cowering back to me. [...] he called it to him again, but Dash only looked sheepish and wagged the tip of his tail. He called again more sharply, but Dash only clung the closer to me, and licked my hand as if imploring protection. Enraged at this, his master snatched up a heavy book and hurled it at his head. [...] “By what token?” I replied; “by your throwing the book at him? but, perhaps, it was intended for me?”

“No, but I see you’ve got a taste of it,” said he, looking at my hand, that had also been struck, and was rather severely grazed. (172)

The dog is clearly the one being attacked in this scene, yet Helen suffers injury equally. She even asks Huntingdon if he intended to hit her and he denies this, yet he does not offer his apologies to her either. Perhaps most striking is how the dog seeks refuge with Helen, and places itself on the same line as her. Both wife and dog wait on whatever their master decides. According to Surridge, the breed of the dog in this scene is important as well. The dog is a cocker spaniel, a breed that is often linked to women throughout history, as it supposedly is a creature that fawns on its owner and is very subservient and this passivity matches the passivity that was expected and often the case in women who were abused by their husbands (14). The symbolism is clear to those who are familiar with it, yet it does not seem fair to categorise Helen as a passive wife. As the aforementioned instances show, she is not afraid to speak out, even when Huntingdon physically hurts her. The dog might search for safety with others, Helen finds the strength to fight her husband on her own.

Despite its effectiveness of showing abuse without actually showing abuse, it was also a way to deflect from domestic violence yet again. Not every reader might have picked up on the connection between woman and dog and in that case a great part of criticism and exposure that Brontë tried to convey to her audience is lost. Still, at the same time, the connection made between woman and domestic animal is a rather telling one in itself and the position of women in society, which was, evidently, the same as that of a domestic animal. In this example, both become a creature to be owned by man and treated in the way he chooses. The link between animal cruelty and abuse is further established through Huntingdon’s favouring of foxhunting. The cruelty towards the dog, the foxes, and Helen become mutually reinforcing habits that only lead to more violence (Godfrey 81).

Huntingdon’s ruin comes to him because of his lifestyle. It is drink that destroys him, and the signs had always been there. Even when first becoming acquainted with Helen, her aunt notes that he has a rather red face, something that in that particular day and age was

certainly associated with heavy drinkers and alcoholism. Brontë's father and brother were both members of the local Temperance Society. It is most likely that she was familiar with the rhetoric they used and the treatises written at the time, such as the "The Anatomy of Drunkenness" by Robert Macnish. Huntingdon easily fits one of the archetypes of drunks that Macnish describes, namely the sanguine drunk, the drunkard by choice (Tormählen 832-3). Alcohol was partly responsible for his abusive behaviour, making it clear that Helen could have known before marrying him that alcohol would become a problem in their marriage. Yet, despite the discourse on drunkenness, it seems rather evasive of the actual problem at hand to blame Huntingdon's abuse of Helen on his alcoholism. It would have been a recognisable element for readers at the time, but it might also cause readers to assume that alcoholism is the cause of Huntingdon's behaviour, instead of alcoholism being a consequence of character.

In the end, Brontë might show the domestic horrors that can ensue in a marriage in which a woman has no legal position whatsoever and thoroughly criticises it, but she still chooses to give Helen the satisfactory ending in which her husband passes away and thus frees her. Divorce is not the escape that is granted to Helen although Huntingdon's death is preferable as this means she does not have to try to file for divorce and might up end with nothing. Yet, not every woman in Brontë's time had a husband who was on his deathbed. The fact that Helen does not get a divorce might have meant that readers could have more easily sympathised with her, as she is now a widow instead of a divorcee. She would thus not be connected to that societal shame that is attached to divorced women. Perhaps Brontë herself did not think very highly of divorce. The person in *Wildfell Hall* who did manage a divorce is Annabella, and she is punished for it with an early death, after she has drowned in debts and misery. One difference between Annabella and Helen is that Annabella committed adultery, while Helen never did. In this way, Isabella becomes the true definition of the fallen woman, while Helen manages to subvert that fate for herself. Brontë allows only the moral character her freedom.

2.2: Gilbert Markham

Gilbert Markham as a character is a very important one in *Wildfell Hall*, as he is the narrator of the whole novel, a subject which will be delved into later. Most of all he is an example of how masculinity is not rigid but can be fluid. He is an opposite to Huntingdon, perhaps even a foil, but most of all he represents a second chance at the ideal of domesticity, this time a chance that can actually become reality for Helen.

When the reader first gets acquainted with Gilbert, he is still very much a young man, a boy. He is also a product of his society and its high regard and reinforcement of traditional gender roles. Gilbert is the epitome of male privilege and gladly uses his privilege to his full advantage. He is vain and self-absorbed, constantly valuing women on the attention they give him. Most of all, Gilbert's behaviour is shown to be a natural result of the upbringing he has had and the milieu he lives in (Jacobs 209). His mother taught him that it was a woman's responsibility to provide a man's comfort, and a man's responsibility to provide comfort for himself. Despite not being the husband in his domestic environment, he still has the full advantages of it, being an adult.

It is no surprise that, being a product of his society, he prefers to believe the rumours that are spread about Helen instead of believing the stories she tells him. When Helen's brother, Lawrence, is mistaken for Helen's lover by Gilbert, he attacks him. Gilbert has become the lover, but most of all a jealous one. This is his lowest point in the novel and from then on out he only changes towards becoming a better man, as this attack has made it necessary for Helen to explain her history to Gilbert.

The subversive quality of Gilbert is that he is the one who needs to change his ways to become a good prospective partner for Helen, not the other way around. At first he approaches her as he has approached every eligible woman he has ever met: as a possible admirer of his. He hopes to change her into everything he desires, but quickly realises that that is not a possibility. Especially when learning about her past and her marriage, Gilbert starts to see the mistakes of his ways and is willing to change his own view on women and marriage. In allowing himself to be changed as such, Helen changes as well. She now no longer is an object, but becomes subject (Langland 114). In an age where women are objects of their husbands and are supposed to suppress their own emotions in favour of men, it is a revolutionary way of showing a developing relationship between a man and a woman in the Victorian Era. Brontë shows an alternative to the gender and domestic ideals that are dictated.

After Huntingdon's death, the relationship between Helen and Gilbert changes, as marriage now becomes a possibility. Helen, having learnt from her previous romantic feelings, takes her time to 'test' Gilbert before deciding that she wants to be his wife. She made the mistake to quickly marry Huntingdon, blinded by her trust in the Victorian romantic ideology. Older, wiser, and more experienced, she is no longer incapable of being rational about matters of the heart. As Helen has become rich due to both her husband's and uncle's death, class distinctions between her and Gilbert become more apparent than ever. He can no longer court her as he is not in the position to do so, being so inferior to her in class. Gilbert,

who has been quite forward in his interest in Helen so far, now becomes submissive, silent, and passive. It is Helen who has to show her feminine desire for him, which was so frowned upon before. He has become the object of her desire and it is she who proposes marriage to him. Helen no longer holds any desires to take responsibility for her future husband's happiness in the way she did with Huntingdon, and explains to Gilbert that he is the only one who can turn this marriage into a failure. She will not be held responsible, once again turning everything around and subverting the story of her first marriage (Langland 121-2). As their marriage is said to be a happy one, it is remarkable that Brontë uses this course for their relationship, as it destroys the notion that women should be submissive and that men should not take responsibility in their marriage. Helen's marriage to Huntingdon adhered to societal expectations and failed dramatically; her marriage to Gilbert is the exact opposite and is rather successful. It is a rather notable form of critique on the societal expectations of marriage.

Although the idea of the subversion of the marriage is an interesting and promising one, the fact that the laws have not changed, means that Gilbert will still be in a position of power over Helen, no matter how equal they might feel in their relationship. That means that if their marriage were to fail after all—even if it is Gilbert's fault—Helen could still be the only one to truly suffer. Twenty years after their marriage, Gilbert says that they have always been happy together. Yet, Helen is never allowed to confirm this.

2.3: The Narrative Structure

It is important to not only analyse the characters and instances of abuse, but to also look at the art of the writing itself. The narrative structure and the narrative voice are then always important to the story itself and how it is framed. How a narrative is written can greatly influence the credibility and effectiveness of the plot. As mentioned before, male authors were allowed to address coarse topics whereas female authors were not. Men were the authority and seen as more credible, which can for instance be seen in the partnership between John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor. Although both advocated for women's rights and worked together, it was Mill's voice that was loudest and most respected. His position in society as a man allowed him to be heard. Therefore, if the Brontës were to address these topics on domestic abuse, providing a plot focused on these very topics would not prove enough. By framing their narrative in a certain way and by initially publishing their novels under male pennames, they allowed their voices to be strengthened. Therefore, examining the narrative structures of the texts provides further historical contextualisation as it is a marker of Emily and Anne Brontë's awareness of the society they were part of.

The narrative structure of Anne Brontë's *Wildfell Hall* is one that has been often criticised. Some critics think it is interesting, some think it is unnecessarily difficult. Terry Eagleton, for instance, thinks the narrative structure unfortunate because Gilbert's courtship of Helen takes away from Helen's abusive marriage with Huntingdon. George Moore, a strong supporter of the Brontës, would have preferred Helen to tell Gilbert of her past instead of giving him her journal, as it takes away from their romance. Inga-Stina Eubank's opinion is that the narrative structure is unnecessarily complex, although it does create an interesting play on immediacy and detachment in the narrative (Senf 448). Opinions vary and mostly show what each critic thinks is most important or interesting about the story that Brontë tells her readers. Moore and Eagleton are for instance focused on the presence or absence of romance and how this affects the plot. The debated narrative structure can be summarised as such: Gilbert writes letters to one of his friends. In these two letters he tells the story of how he and Helen met and how he then came to know her history through the journal that she gave him. Gilbert has incorporated this journal into the letters by writing Helen's story down again and edited it along the way as he saw fit.

What can immediately be stated is that the letters Gilbert wrote are extremely and unrealistically long, but the reader should perhaps ignore that fact in favour of appreciating the story for what it is and what it tries to accomplish. A second remarkable feature is that Gilbert is the one who is telling and editing a story that belongs to Helen, as the journal part of the novel is the most extensive one. Gilbert, a male voice, becomes the narrative frame for the story of a woman. The most brutal parts of Helen's story are about people Gilbert does not know, about events he did not witness. He only has her account of these events and no other points of view, yet he still has the opportunity to change her truth. He is part of Helen's audience, just as much as the reader is, yet he has all the power to change the story.

According to Jacobs, Gilbert presents the public world and as such he becomes a moral compass to the story and part of the world of the reader. He presents events through a society he himself is also part of; he tells the story from a societal perspective that is the very same society that allowed the marital abuse of Helen to happen (206). Although it is clear that Gilbert has changed and has become more attuned to what it means to be in a marriage in which equality is not achievable, he is not the survivor of the abuse that Helen has withstood. No matter how well he knows the story and Helen herself, it is not his story to tell and it should not be his judgement and morality that become the point of view.

That is where the journal comes in. The part of the novel that is the journal might be edited by Gilbert in such a way as he deemed necessary, but it is still Helen who speaks to the

reader at this point. Her narrative and her voice take over Gilbert's. He might still be the official narrator, but his voice is drowned out by Helen's. In this way his narrative truly becomes a frame, as the journal is the middle part of the novel and his voice is the strongest at the start and the end of the novel. Gilbert opens and closes the story for Helen, but allows her to tell the middle part. As a male voice he would achieve more credibility and as stated before, male authors were the ones who were allowed to broach discussions on coarse subjects. By having Gilbert open the story, Brontë has followed this contemporary idea just so, exactly in the same way she published her novels under a male penname. Gilbert's voice is a necessity to gain credibility and an audience.

Langland applies Roland Barthes's idea that narratives are a form of exchange to *Wildfell Hall*. Gilbert tells Helen's story to his friend Halford as a payment to him, as Halford has earlier on provided Gilbert with a personal story. Gilbert references money multiple times and thus places value on the exchange of stories (112-3). If Barthes's idea is applicable here, does this also mean that Helen allowing Gilbert to tell her story is a form of exchange? It would be an explanation for her silence after her marriage to her second husband. In this light, it could imply that the restoration of her honour and place in society is in exchange for her voice. Helen gives Gilbert her story to edit as he deems necessary and he takes her story and legitimises it by the use of his male authority. Helen in this way relinquishes control over her own story but is given the power that a male voice held in that time in return. Still, it is unclear how willingly she allowed Gilbert to retell her story to others. At first, Helen gave Gilbert her journal so he could understand her story and her history. At this point, they were not married yet and Gilbert thus had no legal ownership over her story. Now they are married, and for twenty years at that, we have no idea how their relationship has progressed. Even if Helen would agree with Gilbert that their marriage has been a happy one, that statement does not indicate to what extent the couple could have possibly reverted to stereotypical marital gender roles in which Gilbert has full authority over Helen. The law of coverture stated that by marrying Gilbert, Helen would relinquish her voice and become part of his. This narrative structure could therefore be an example of how that exactly worked out, which would indicate Helen did have to fully give up her ownership over herself again.

The narrative structure does not necessarily have to be viewed in this rather negative way which assumes that Helen has become voiceless. Gilbert should have enough knowledge of Helen's voice after twenty years of marriage to be able to at least partially retell her story himself, partially through her journal. The narrative could be nothing more than a clever way to tell a woman's story and lend it credibility. At the same time it has also become Gilbert's

story as it shows his journey of discovery in which he realises society's mistakes, which could perhaps be more identifiable for the readership of *Wildfell Hall*. Still, no matter from which positive or negative perspective this narrative structure is analysed, the fact remains that Helen's narrative silence at the end of the novel remains troubling.

2.4: The Gothic Aspect

The Brontë sisters and the Gothic are undeniably linked. Their Gothic is that of the mid-nineteenth century, the kind that could involve the dark moors the sisters grew up on, but one that could also be brought into the house and thus the domestic sphere. As this genre is so connected to the Brontë sisters it adds a new perspective to the analysis of the abuse portrayed in the novel. Emily and Anne Brontë both show how they not only used complex narrative structures to strengthen their plot, but that they were also sufficiently knowledgeable in regard to the Gothic in order to draw from it and add to the monstrosity of domestic abuse and violence. By analysing their use of the Gothic it becomes clearer how they exactly applied this genre to further their message on domestic abuse through literary means.

It was Mary Wollstonecraft, an author of Female Gothic herself, who first made the trope of the domestic sphere as a prison popular (Davison 129). This trope certainly continues in *Wildfell Hall*. Huntingdon continuously leaves Helen to reside at Grassdale Manor alone, while he is living a debauched and alcoholic life in the city with his friends. Huntingdon is a perfect example of the men who longed for a homosocial life outside of their marriage and would flee their houses to acquire it, as described by Tosh. Huntingdon only returns to his wife and Grassdale in order to be nursed back to health after his indulgences. Grassdale Manor is the location that should be Helen's domestic sanctuary, a place in which she is safe. During Huntingdon's absence, Grassdale certainly is a safe place for her to stay. It is during the moments in which her husband is home that she truly is imprisoned, especially when her husband's friends are present as well. Helen has to watch them all corrupt each other and is utterly powerless to stop them; she is merely a spectator to their show of debauchery. It is only a logical development that she should feel she should escape, because if she can escape Grassdale and thus the domestic sphere she is imprisoned in, she can escape everything—or more importantly, everyone—that has hurt her.

Unfortunately, although she succeeds in escaping Huntingdon, she is still imprisoned. Huntingdon is no longer able to subject her to his abuse on a daily basis, but Helen and her son Arthur are still confined to a small and poor new location. *Wildfell Hall* is kept dark and only a few of the rooms of the house are used. It is a dark location, echoing the darkness of

the Gothic. Helen may be on her own in Wildfell Hall, but the threat of being discovered by her husband is a constant burden. She cannot afford to be too open and present in public society and has to keep a low profile. It is an imprisonment she has to impose on herself in order to escape the one of Grassdale Manor. In showing the reader this persevering darkness at Wildfell Hall, Brontë cleverly insinuates that Helen cannot be truly free until Huntingdon is dead.

Jacobs also sees Gilbert's framing narrative as one that echoes a Gothic tale as such a tale would create "a closed off region within an outer world" (206). In this sense, Gilbert becomes the border around a story that is unacceptable in the subject of abuse that it broaches. The Gothic is Helen's marriage and younger years and by framing it as a story told by someone else, it can take on the same narrative as for instance a ghost story.

W.A. Craik notes another aspect that is responsible for a diminishment of the Gothic elements present in *Wildfell Hall*. The story is told from a perspective of the present looking back twenty years into the past. The reader follows Gilbert in his relationship and knowledge of Helen. Gilbert first meets her when she takes up residence at Wildfell Hall. At this point, she has already managed to escape Huntingdon (qtd. in Senf 449). The reader having this knowledge about Helen has as a consequence that when the reader finally gets to read her escape from her husband, the fear and thrill of her escape are already diminished, knowing that she escapes safely. Not only her escape is diminished, but her abuse is diminished in a certain way as well. The reader knows that no matter how badly Huntingdon might treat Helen, it could be assumed that she is never hurt too badly, physically at least, as there are no signs of this when Gilbert first makes her acquaintance. By having Gilbert look back twenty years later, Brontë may have diminished the suspense of the story, but she has also made it possible for the reader to concentrate on the events and their significance and to be able to fully comprehend them without being spurred on by suspense. The primary focus is no longer on the suspense of when Helen will suffer, but on how she is actually treated, which provides the possibility of reflection for the reader on Helen's circumstances.

Craik's argument is fair; it is true that the reader is not left with the doubt of whether or not the heroine will survive. By taking away the suspense of her fate it could be argued that the severity of the abuse becomes more muted and less immediate. Perhaps Brontë wanted a slightly more clinical and objective way to show Helen's story, which becomes possible by reducing the suspense. It makes it impossible for the heroine to be accused of being too focused on drama and drawing the story out of proportion. By looking back at Helen's history from a safe point of view, the story has become one that is perhaps less obviously Gothic and

suspenseful, but it has created a story that reads more as an account of Helen's life than a sensationalised version of it. As a result, it becomes more realist and true.

Chapter 3. Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

Emily Brontë published *Wuthering Heights* in 1847. The novel is an example of how violent and sometimes even demonic the middle class can be. It is a statement that violence is not limited to the lower classes, a belief the Victorians preferred to uphold. It is a novel that deals with issues of class and gender, but most of all with the power structures that exist between the characters because of those issues. It makes for an intense novel that albeit being known for its romance, is far darker than expected.

3.1: My Name Was Isabella Linton

It is the story of Isabella that shows the most stereotypical or most well-known idea of what an abusive relationship between a husband and wife could look like. All the trappings of marriage are exploited by Heathcliff, who knows the law and therefore knows exactly what he is allowed to do to Isabella. When Isabella is still enamoured with him and wants to marry him, he is clever enough to elope with her, thus making it impossible for her to draft a marriage settlement that would have at least given Isabella some economic power in their marriage, but now, Heathcliff holds all the reins (Pike 358). Isabella has, after all, now become his property. After they have been married, Heathcliff further abuses his power over her. He especially demonstrates his knowledge of marital law in chapter fourteen in which he discusses his rights as a husband and the reason why he locks up Isabella at the Heights: he simply wants to preserve his social standing and reputation, which would be harmed by Isabella's walking about in the lowly state she was in now since living at the Heights. Why Isabella is in such a 'lowly state' does not have to be disclosed, nor the fact that he might be the reason for her state. Heathcliff would be allowed to keep her in the house in regard to his marital responsibilities towards Isabella. As Isabella's brother is the local magistrate, Heathcliff knows to be specifically careful to not break any laws: "But tell him, also, to set his fraternal and magisterial heart at ease, that I keep strictly within the limits of the law. I have avoided, up to this period, giving her the slightest right to claim a separation" (110).

Emily Brontë also makes use of the violence inflicted on dogs to show violence inflicted on a woman, as Anne Brontë had done as well, although it can hardly be a surprise to any reader that Heathcliff is physically abusive towards Isabella:

"The first thing she saw me do, on coming out of the Grange, was to hang up her little dog; and when she pleaded for it, the first words I uttered were a wish that I had the hanging of every being belonging to her, except one: possibly

she took that exception for herself. But no brutality disgusted her: I suppose she has an innate admiration of it, if only her precious person were secure from injury!” (110)

Heathcliff enjoys making Isabella fear him in whichever way possible. This passage is a rather explicit one that does not leave much to be decoded through symbolism and metaphors. That Heathcliff wants to harm Isabella in any way that he can is evident as he is not afraid to voice the very idea himself.

The idea that women were not allowed to fight back, no matter what their husbands did to them, is certainly applicable to Isabella in her marriage to Heathcliff. A woman's loyalty and silent submission to even the worst of abuses was something that was still idealised in fiction, even if a writer might be against such abuses of power. One example of this is for instance the character of Nancy in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. No matter how much violence Sikes shows towards Nancy, she keeps returning to him, inevitably leading to her death at his hands. Dickens might have sympathised with Nancy's life but he certainly did not show a way out for her, instead he chose to romanticise her loyalty. Brontë, on the other hand, decides to choose for her characters to fight back. One very clear moment of defiance and refusal to submit to Heathcliff comes in the moment in which Isabella flees the Heights. Heathcliff throws a knife at Isabella, wounding her slightly, which would have allowed her to file for divorce or separation. Yet, she does not take this opportunity that Heathcliff—most likely unwillingly—offers her to separate herself from him. She might not be aware of the law as Heathcliff is, or perhaps she is simply unable to not reciprocate, as she verbally attacks Heathcliff after he wounds her. Although her attack was only a verbal one, harmless compared to Heathcliff's knife, it would already have destroyed Isabella's case in court. A divorce would no longer be granted to her because she chose to speak up for herself.

Isabella has to endure Heathcliff's legal power over her in many ways, for instance his aforementioned right to keep her locked up in the house if he thought this to be better for their family. Charlotte Brontë showed an even more severe case of imprisonment in *Jane Eyre*. The character Bertha Mason has been locked up and kept away from the public eye for as long as she has lived in England. Mr Rochester easily justifies her imprisonment and even considers it a gracious choice on his part, as he could have also kept her locked up in another house that he owns, but this house is not in a very healthy environment and would thus have probably made Bertha fall ill. The imprisonment is never questioned but rather a part of everyday nineteenth-century reality, the only thing that is stated is his 'generosity' in thinking of her health. Heathcliff has no such 'generous' considerations towards Isabella, he simply wishes to

lock her up because he can and because she has served her purpose: he only wanted her for her money and the power he could have over her. If he cannot possess Catherine and he has to suffer through her marriage with Edgar, he will take revenge by marrying Isabella, and she will have to bear the burden.

Despite showing Isabella's bravery and bold choice to leave the Heights in order to save herself from Heathcliff and perhaps even death, the structures and ideals of how a wife should submit to her husband are still present in the novel. As Surridge points out, it is Nelly who still criticises Isabella's flight from the Heights and draws attention to the state Isabella is in: a state that Nelly would perhaps agree would justify a man to lock his wife up in order to keep her away from society. Nelly is "the keeper of women's decorum" (Pike 370). Isabella refuses to give in to decorum until her escape from the Grange is arranged; she has made her plan to flee and is now determined to go. It is only after she feels satisfied with the planning that she allows Nelly to dress her in warmer clothes that better cover her up as well. It is surprising that Nelly would still uphold decorum when she is aware of Heathcliff's nature and his character that is prone to violence. The ideal of society in which women must conceal their feelings and the outside world is only allowed to see a perfect family picture have become part of Nelly to such an extent that she cannot let go of decorum in even the direst of circumstances.

Isabella's escape is successful, but that also means she becomes a single mother. She is the epitome of the fallen woman. Her social and economic position are terrible, yet she still deems it as a better option to live on her own than to remain at the Heights with Heathcliff (Pike 379). Even though she is successful in her escape, as soon as Isabella leaves, her voice disappears from the narrative as well. No word is heard from her anymore until her death is announced. As a wife on the run from her husband she was as scandalous as she could be and despite providing every reason for her flight, the plot still chooses to ignore her life outside of the Heights. It seems as if the narrative does not want to or simply cannot leave the Heights. Her eventual early death seems to only reinforce the trope of the fallen woman: she has done what she should not and therefore she must die.

3.2: I Am Heathcliff

The intense relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is perhaps the most memorable one and certainly the one that is most iconic in *Wuthering Heights*. Their romance, if that is the right word to use for their relationship, is one that does not know its likeness. Domestic abuse or violence is difficult to apply to these two characters as they are

both violent with each other but also violent with themselves, sometimes even because of the other. Physicality has been important to their relationship from the very start.

When Heathcliff and Catherine are still young their ungendered childhood upbringing is celebrated as it brings them joy and passion without bounds (Davison 131). When they grow older gender ideals start to be pressured onto them by society, which leads the ambitious Catherine to repress her primal relationship with Heathcliff and to instead choose for a ‘civilised’ life of status with Edgar. She suppresses her female passion and trades her selfhood for social privilege (Davison 131). By repressing her passions and emotions, Catherine tries to follow the feminine ideal of the Victorian Era. Heathcliff tries to follow Catherine’s path by making his career as an entrepreneur, which was the epitome of ambition and the true mark of masculinity at the time. We never get to fully see how Heathcliff comes to be this entrepreneur, as his narrative disappears when he leaves the Heights, similar to Isabella’s disappearance from the story when she flees. Intentionally or unintentionally, Brontë adheres to the husband’s duty to keep the outside world and the dangers and knowledge of it out of the domestic sphere. The *Wuthering Heights* are the domestic sphere, and anything that happens outside of it, remains mostly unknown, thus making the Heights a truly well-shielded domestic environment.

Catherine’s reform into a lady seems to go well for a certain time, but after Heathcliff’s return to the Heights, it becomes more difficult for her by each passing day to repress her true nature. Her ungendered and free upbringing, as well as her passionate relationship with Heathcliff, are too strong and so intrinsically linked to her being, that she can no longer play the lady. It could perhaps be categorised as a trump of nature over nurture—or nature over society. Either way, the reunion between Heathcliff and Catherine shows that their natures will always be strongest, although that does not mean that it also makes them happiest. Society cannot truly tame them, but their natures are so destructive and self-destructive that not complying to societal norms leads to their respective downfalls. It could also be seen as a warning against society. Heathcliff and Catherine are happy before they are forced to be what they are not, it is only when they try to become respectable and are ambitious that their lives slowly take a turn for the worse.

One noticeable difference between *Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights* is the more present sexual nature of the latter. All the different kinds of relationships presented in the novel tend to be far more physical in nature, something that leads to different dynamics of power. Sarah Lodge claims that the very template of vengeful sexual dynamics in *Wuthering Heights* is based on the idea that two men cannot properly satisfy this power dynamic between

each other and therefore use a third party to claim territory over (15). Such a dynamic does sound awfully familiar to the way Catherine is placed in between Heathcliff and Edgar, both fighting for her affections and attention, if not to possess her. When Heathcliff loses Catherine to Edgar, he tries to gain more leverage by marrying Isabella, as she is Edgar's sister. Yet it is doubtful if this is a successful strategy, as Edgar immediately breaks off contact with his sister because he will not tolerate Heathcliff or their elopement. In this idea, Catherine and Isabella become the battleground between Heathcliff and Edgar, but whereas Catherine is still fought over, Isabella is simply discarded after Heathcliff has shown his victory by marrying her.

Lodge's claim does seem like an underestimation of Catherine as it reduces her to the mere role of the passive third party. Instead, she is an active part in the dynamic between the three and she actually constantly encourages the men through her behaviour. She refuses to let either of them go which only leads to continuous confrontations which seem to only be able to be resolved through the death of everyone. Isabella might have been a more vulnerable third party in Edgar's and Heathcliff's battle, but she refused to be part of it any longer in the end, choosing the harsh life as a single mother over being abused by Heathcliff. Therefore, if Lodge's idea of a third party who must be claimed by Heathcliff or Edgar is applicable to the novel, it does show an unsuccessful result for this claim, with both Catherine and Isabella resisting to be fully claimed. They thus prevent the satisfaction of the power dynamic between Heathcliff and Edgar, foiling their intentions. Neither Heathcliff, nor Edgar wins. Heathcliff might outlive him, but he has to do so without Catherine, and only her ghost as a haunted memory can keep him company.

Another interesting article by Robin DeRosa explains how every relationship in *Wuthering Heights* is that of a masochist and a sadist. Although the article provides ample arguments as to why DeRosa views the relationships as such, it seems debatable that it would apply to every single relationship portrayed in the novel. It certainly does apply to Heathcliff and Catherine. As mentioned before, both of them love hurting each other as much as they love hurting themselves, all in the name of love for one another. According to DeRosa, Catherine has been a sadist from the moment she was born. The fact that she asks her father for a whip when she is only six years old does show her attraction to physical violence. When her father loses the whip on his trip home and instead brings Heathcliff with him, Catherine spits on Heathcliff for good measure (30). When the two of them have grown up their conversations and behaviour seem to suggest that they have evolved and are now able to be both masochist and sadist to each other, switching in whatever way necessary (DeRosa 31). Heathcliff introduces this idea when he says to Catherine: "You are welcome to torture me to

death for your amusement, only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style” (81). Heathcliff phrases it in a way that undoubtedly shows that they both enjoy the torture they inflict upon themselves. With an admission such as this one, it is hard to argue against DeRosa’s point, as it is the character’s own words that admit to being a masochist and sadist.

The novel shows many other instances where Heathcliff and Catherine either harm themselves or others. Their nature is violent towards everyone around them, including themselves. Categorising their violence towards each other as domestic violence therefore becomes problematic, as their harmful behaviour goes beyond the domestic. Using the masochist and sadist descriptive for their relationship and their characters confirms this, as it shows a tendency and need to destroy and to be destroyed in return. Their story is not about the limitations and laws and abusive possibilities that the domestic sphere provides, but about two people who are utterly unable to show their love for each other in a healthy and non-violent way. Their abuse and torture is one that is necessary for them, as it is how they communicate. It is not a case of domestic abuse, as they both draw enjoyment from it. A second argument is that they are in fact not married to each other. Heathcliff therefore is not in a position of power over Catherine, as he does not possess her. He can do everything he wants to Isabella, but that is not applicable to Catherine.

3.3: The Narrative Structure

The narrative structure of *Wildfell Hall* is very important to the meaning and message of the novel. *Wuthering Heights*’s narrative structure is no different in its complexity. Considering the novel has multiple characters who are violent or are being violated—characters are also able to be on both ends—it is interesting and important to the legitimacy of the story itself to see who is actually in charge of the narrative and what this means for the portrayal of the abuser and the abused.

The narrative structure of *Wuthering Heights* is a complicated one with many changes in its voice. The prime narrator is Mr Lockwood, who is an outsider to both the Heights and the Grange. Nelly tells him the history of the place, who then becomes the second narrator of *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood is the kind of narrator who approaches a “pervasively violent private reality” (Jacobs 213) from an outside perspective, embodying the ideology of his contemporary society that justifies and allows violence to happen. He might be a ‘civilised’ man, but he shuts out “possibilities of darkness and violence” (Jacobs 214). The text itself shows the truth of Jacobs’s words from the very start. The very night Lockwood is forced to spend at the Heights, he locks himself away in the room he is given. By locking himself away

he hopes to keep out the rest of the Heights and its occupants and the violence and coarseness that is part of them. But the Heights refuses Lockwood his shelter, as he is sleeping in Catherine's old room and it is her ghost who disturbs his rest. Catherine's ghost is desperate to come inside his room, but he refuses her. In a way, this is Lockwood refusing Catherine to become part of the story; he will not allow her narrative to be heard from her own perspective. She has to remain on the outside. As Catherine is not allowed to tell her own story, Nelly will have to tell her version of what has happened in Catherine's life.

Nelly is the narrator who is most knowledgeable on all that has transpired, as she has been both present at Wuthering Heights and the Grange and she knows all of the important characters of the story personally and she knows them well. She herself is part of the story and has lived it for the past few decades. As a consequence, her judgement is also coloured by her preferences. The people she favours or knows better will most likely be portrayed in a better way than they perhaps deserve. It also shows in which details are quite pronounced. For instance, the aforementioned scene in which Isabella flees to the Grange in order to free herself from Heathcliff, is a telling one of Nelly's point of view. As she is the woman of decorum, she draws a lot of attention to Isabella's state, something that might have been less emphasised had another character been the narrator. Nelly does also show a fondness of Heathcliff, despite his abusive and violent ways.

Again, the reader is confronted with a narrative that is framed within a narrative. Again, the reader is confronted with the narrative of a woman framed within the narrative of a man. Lockwood resembles Gilbert's role in *Wildfell Hall* in many ways: he is the framer of the narrative, he is the man who gives credibility to the story, and he is the one whom the reader is supposed to identify with on a moral and societal level. Yet, Lockwood is also different. He is not truly involved with the people living at the Heights; he does not care for them and barely knows them. He has no investment or interest in their story besides the amusement it provides and the curiosity that the family has raised in him because of their unusual ways. In the end, it is nothing more than a story for Lockwood and that makes it easier for him to distance himself from it, just as he tried to lock himself away in his room during the night. Lockwood truly is an outsider perspective, a stranger visiting Wuthering Heights and a stranger to the narrative.

Isabella Linton is the third narrator, one who is often glossed over and only seen as a silly girl by readers and critics alike (Pike 348). Calling her a silly girl seems an unobservant judgement to make as she does provide an important counterbalance to Nelly. Isabella is the one who had to live with Heathcliff after their marriage, while Nelly was residing at the

Grange at that time. Isabella gets to tell her own story of suffered abuse. Her letter that is featured in chapter thirteen is an important one, not only because she voices a detailed critique on her marriage, but also because it shows how unreliable the different narrators can be in *Wuthering Heights*. Isabella's account in chapter thirteen differs greatly from the story that Heathcliff tells of her and their marriage in the next chapter. He does everything in his power to discredit her (Pike 351). This forces the reader to read between the lines as well as to perhaps choose who to trust above the other. Brontë could also have structured the narrative as such to show that there are always multiple truths to a story, although it seems unlikely that Heathcliff was as innocent as he made himself out to be towards Isabella. He might try to discredit her, but he has already admitted to act within the law and do everything he can according to the law. Heathcliff's narrative trying to drown Isabella's out is also a show of force that a husband could have over his wife. It would always be his word over hers, he is the who has a voice and will be heard. Heathcliff discrediting Isabella and her narrative helps him to further his reason to keep her locked up. If anything, it is a testament of how aware Heathcliff is yet again of how to twist everything to his own advantage. Isabella will have to, yet again, bear the burden of it.

3.4: The Gothic

Wuthering Heights is a novel that could be categorised as New Gothic, the term applied to the writings of Charlotte Brontë. Yet, it fits Emily Brontë's story just as well, with its raw and realistic portrayal of the life on the moors and it creates more insight into the psychological states of the characters through instances of the Gothic. The apparitions of Catherine's ghost and Heathcliff's extreme emotional reactions to her are an example of such an insight through the Gothic.

Most notably is the remoteness of the locations in which the novel takes place. Not only are *Wuthering Heights* and *Thrushcross Grange* far removed from the outside world and not even necessarily that close to one another, they also both have a certain atmosphere that marks them as their own two little separate worlds. *Wuthering Heights*'s name in itself paints a picture that is dark and dangerous, while *Thrushcross Grange* with its large garden seems to be a small world closed in on itself. What highlights their remoteness from a world outside of these moors in Yorkshire is the fact that the novel only takes place in either of these houses or in between them. When characters travel to the south or to the city, as many of them do, the characters disappear fully and we do not get to see them again until they set foot on familiar ground once more. Heathcliff disappears for years and no one knows what he is doing;

Isabella runs away and is never seen again. Once a character leaves they might as well not exist anymore. The Heights and the Grange have created their own separate world in which their stories and horrors can unfold, without interference from the outside world. This also ties in with Mary Wollstonecraft's idea of the house as imprisonment, which is certainly true for Isabella, who is kept locked up by Heathcliff until she manages to escape. Young Cathy is kept at the Heights by Heathcliff as well, her movements as well as her future both in hands of Heathcliff. It is only through his death that she can finally manage to be free and to make her own choices.

The most apparent and telling element of Gothic in the novel is the moment in which Mr Lockwood sees Catherine's ghost the night he is forced to spend at the Heights. The suspense of something supernatural is first established by the scratching of the branches over the window. These upset Lockwood so much that he makes the rather unexpected choice to break the window to reach for them, but when he reaches, it is an ice-cold hand that he encounters. Catherine's ghost begs him to let her enter and will not let go of his hand:

As it spoke, I discerned, obscurely, a child's face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and, finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes: still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear. (17)

This moment shows the madness that comes over Lockwood because of the encounter. He is supposed to be the civilised gentleman, but he immediately starts to harm Catherine's wrist in defence. It shows how he is part of a society that allows for marital and domestic abuse to happen and it shows the violence of a man towards a woman. Clearly even gentlemen are capable of violence.

This scene is also an example of Brontë's New Gothic. Despite the terror that Lockwood just experienced, it is Heathcliff's cries for Catherine's ghost to come back and enter the Heights that truly strike him. The supernatural encounter leaves him rather sceptical, but it is the emotion that Heathcliff now shows for Catherine that gives more depth and insight into his character, especially for someone like Lockwood who is a stranger to the Heights and its tumultuous history.

A last example of Gothic aspects in *Wuthering Heights* is the way in which Heathcliff is sometime portrayed or seen by others. When Isabella comes to live at the Heights after her honeymoon she writes about Heathcliff to Nelly. She asks Nelly: "Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? [...] I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have

married” (99). In these few words Isabella calls Heathcliff the devil and dehumanises him. Whatever Heathcliff has done to Isabella, she now in return plans to portray him as a monster, as that is how she sees him and how he treats her. In an age where monster making has become a way to criticise social anxieties (Davison 127), portraying Heathcliff as such seems fitting, since he embodies all that a wife can fear from her husband. He not only has possession over Isabella, but as stated before, he knows exactly what to do with his power over her. In the end, he is so well versed in playing the monster, that he outlives everyone but Nelly.

Conclusion

Gender and its performance are an important part of society. Both Anne and Emily Brontë took this into account and had their characters either confirm to gender stereotypes and gender roles or had them be something that went against these ideals. Especially their male characters, Gilbert Markham and Heathcliff, show a great change in their personality and behaviour. They reinvent themselves. Heathcliff was the poor orphaned boy without any education and of a low class, but he worked himself up to a gentleman of means that could become a landlord. Yet, his urge to violence remained. Gilbert was a vain young man, a typical product of his society and education, but he managed to overcome this state of blind, male privilege without a care for others through the world that Helen showed him and in turn he became a more compassionate and less selfish person with consideration for equality between men and women. It is Gilbert who undergoes the most successful transformation, as Anne Brontë makes him an example of what men can be. He is the foil to Huntingdon, a man who is everything that a woman could fear to encounter in a marriage. Both their characters are realistic and reflective of their society. Heathcliff, on the other hand, is such an extreme character. His story can certainly be real, but it is less representative of society. He is an outlier, although his superb knowledge of marital laws and what he could legally be capable of is a clear comment on domestic abuse and how the law failed the wives of abusive husbands. Emily Brontë is less subtle than Anne Brontë on the insufficiency of the law and brings across the message of cruelty in a marriage more clearly. Yet, although Heathcliff is more extreme than Huntingdon, it is the marriage between Helen and Huntingdon that is more shocking. The reader could hardly have expected Heathcliff to treat Isabella right, and although Huntingdon's failures as a husband are not much of a surprise either, it is a lot more shocking to see how the perfect possibility of a harmonious and happy marriage is ruined by the freedom that is allowed to the husband but taken away from the wife.

Catherine and Helen also show how gender performance works its ways. Catherine is raised in a rather genderless manner which suits her, it is part of her nature. Yet when she is faced with the 'civilised' ways of the Lintons, she lets them nurture her into a lady. Nurture trumps nature, civilisation overcomes freedom. Helen realises the same thing in how she raises her son, by taking Arthur from his father's influence, she teaches him to be kind and softer and shows how a maternal influence does not have to be harmful for a boy's growth into adulthood and thus masculinity. In this case, it is nurture that triumphs. Like she educates her son, she educates Gilbert. Helen's story promises the reader to be successful in the future

as well, whereas Catherine's 'civilisation' cannot hold its reign over her nature. Her longing for freedom and her true nature, along with that of Heathcliff, in the end do prevail. Yet, it only leads to death and misery. The question remains whether it was her failed attempt at civilisation that killed her, or her nature that should have been repressed.

Whether or not the portrayals of abuse in these two novels are accurate and realistic ones is still hard to tell, as it shows environments that are thoroughly corrupted and spread over multiple families and thus domestic homes. *Wuthering Heights* and *Wildfell Hall* definitely do show possible scenarios, especially in the way in which the characters deal with being abused. Helen, for instance, still loves Huntingdon and continues to do so for a long time, even though he treats her appallingly. Yet, if she sees an opportunity to speak up for herself, she will, until she has had enough and flees her home. She learns from her experience of being an abused wife and she refuses to let it break her. She learns to trust her head over her heart and not let it lead her into a badly thought out experiment, as her marriage to Huntingdon turned out to be. It is through her abusive marriage to Huntingdon that she, unfortunately, learns to more aware of the men she meets.

Isabella eventually flees Heathcliff as well, but her story is different. She accustoms herself to the abuses she suffers and learns to live with them and how to become part of them. She is still afraid, and that is how she eventually manages to escape, taking her unborn son away from his father. Both Isabella and Helen try to keep their sons away from their father, in order to raise them without their corrupting influence. Here lies the difference between Heathcliff and Huntingdon, as Heathcliff has no need for decorum and what is supposedly right according to society. Isabella leaves him and he lets her be, along with their son, while Huntingdon on the other hand tries everything in his power to gain Helen and Arthur back again. It could be argued that Huntingdon simply cares for his son and Heathcliff does not, but it is also a power play on Helen in which Huntingdon shows that he is the one who can decide on what happens to his son but also on what happens to her.

Either way, both novels show different levels of physiological and physical abuse and violence. While both novels show forms of domestic abuse, the victims and perpetrators differ. *Wildfell Hall* shows abuse as something between a husband and wife, something that is often hidden behind closed doors and behind the protective layer of the domestic ideal. It is to be ignored by bystanders as long as the husband stays within the boundaries that the law has set. This is the ideal that society has created and by admitting its issues, the favoured ideal of domesticity would also have to be destructed and admitted to be flawed. The fact that both *Wuthering Heights* and *Wildfell Hall* were met with such outrage show how unwilling society

was to confront the issues of domesticity.

Wuthering Heights creates an environment that is far more violent and passionate than that of *Wildfell Hall*. The violence and abuse is not only perpetrated between spouses but can be inflicted on everyone that is close. Children, servants, and any passerby could be its victim. Heathcliff and Catherine in particular show an affinity to violence which they are not afraid to use on both themselves and each other, in a way that might be even called sadomasochism. It is difficult to call their violent tendencies towards each other and themselves domestic abuse, as it is indeed sadomasochistic in nature and so different from what the more common portrayals of domestic abuse look like. The fact that Heathcliff and Catherine are not married also changes their legal positions towards each other. Heathcliff is not in a position of power over her. A clearer example of domestic violence in *Wuthering Heights* is to be found in the marriage of Heathcliff and Isabella. Heathcliff expertly demonstrates how easily a husband could abuse his male privilege and power. As long as the husband made sure to pay attention to the laws, he could get away with a great deal of abuse, while the wife had to simply bear it.

The Gothic that all three of the Brontë sisters are known for also found its way into *Wildfell Hall* and *Wuthering Heights*. The New Gothic especially provides the novels with a sense of realism and psychological character depth that is only heightened by adding Gothic elements. The genre was used to serve the purpose of the story: to show the horrifying parts of abuse, but also to show the depths to which it affected people. Yet the appearance of Catherine's ghost and the remoteness of the Heights add to the sensational aspect of *Wuthering Heights*. As a consequence the story becomes more of an outright Gothic tale than *Wildfell Hall*, which takes away from its critique on domesticity and societal roles, as it seems to not necessarily reflect society as a whole, but to form a very contained and specific, separate story. Isabella's and Heathcliff's marriage is more representative of domestic violence, but unfortunately it is pushed aside by the great importance that is placed upon the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff. Their story is worth telling, but less interesting in a historical context. It could therefore also be interesting to more closely analyse the marriage between Catherine and Edgar, to see how they reconcile the differences that the law makes between them.

Wildfell Hall, on the other hand, relies less on the intensity and dramatics of the Gothic and because of that choice, the story remains more credible and representative of society. The fact that Helen is a lady and a 'civilised' one also helps her story. Her account is credible and the framing narrative structure provided by Gilbert only reaffirms that. Despite the complexity of the narrative of *Wildfell Hall*, the message is not lost but instead shows a

great understanding of how male voices would have more authority in the 1840s. It is a way of silencing the female voice, and that is unfortunate, but Helen's voice remains clear and distinctly her own throughout her tribulations. It is a sacrifice that Anne Brontë felt that was necessary to make in order to bring all the credibility to her story as she could, which was only proved by her originally publishing the novel under her male penname.

It is a sacrifice that Emily Brontë also made in *Wuthering Heights*, but her narrative frame, which is also a male one, has a different responsibility than Gilbert's narrative. Whereas Gilbert is linked to the story of Helen, Lockwood is indifferent to the story of *Wuthering Heights*. His narrative is that of an outsider. He does provide credibility to the story, but at the same time he also furthers the idea of *Wuthering Heights* as a Gothic tale, not of one on domestic abuse. He is an outsider who ends up being forced to stay at the Heights, where he then hears the story. Even the way Lockwood comes to hear the story is in the form of a Gothic tale. As a consequence, the story's critique is diminished as the more explicit use of genre creates more distance to reality and thus makes the horrors of domestic abuse less recognisable as such: instead they become the horrors of the Heights.

Despite the novels being critical of abuse in marriage and how easily it is to perpetrate by husbands, in some ways the novels still conform to what was thought of as right. Helen may flee from her husband but she never divorces him, it is his death that sets her free while Annabella is punished for her adultery and her divorce with death. Helen does get her happy ending, even though she owes it to her husband's bad health, not because of what she herself had been able to arrange. In *Wuthering Heights* Isabella might gain her freedom from Heathcliff, but the reader never receives information on how Isabella's life as a single mother has been. She was still young when she died and her son sickly, like both of them had lived in bad circumstances and therefore could not survive in this world or deserved to die, seeing as Isabella was a fallen woman. Helen is the only one who makes it out of her marriage alive and enters a new one that promises her happiness. Despite *Wuthering Heights* ending with the note that Heathcliff's death brought peace back to the Heights, it is mostly *Wildfell Hall* that shows that happiness can be found in marriage after all, if equality between the spouses is achieved. Yet, this message might be hopeful, but it does not rebel against the ownership that husbands still had over their wives. Both Emily and Anne Brontë show how these laws could destroy a marriage and destroy a wife, but neither of them uttered the words explicitly to change the law for the betterment of wives.

Still, their critique might have been more subtle and not as overt as possibly needed to bring about change, but in an era that was against female authors and against female voices,

both Emily and Anne Brontë showed bravery by publishing these stories. They even dared to write about abuse in the middle class, something that was not accepted and unheard of, if not widely ignored by society. Their influence might not have been on a major scale, but they did show that women could defy the ideals of the Victorian Era, and should not be afraid to do so. It would be interesting to further research how their novels have influenced other fictional or non-fictional works on domestic abuse and whether this influence remained for a long period of time. Analysing the other novels written by all three of the Brontë sister must also certainly provide more insight.

In the end, Anne Brontë's *Wildfell Hall* is more successful in its critique on marriage and domestic abuse as it is more realistic and all the literary devices, tricks, and genres are used to further Helen's account of abuse suffered by Huntingdon. It is the journal part of the novel that is at the centre of everything. This is where Anne Brontë creates a faithful and representative example that would have been recognisable to the readers. *Wuthering Heights*, on the other hand, does provide a great example with Isabella's and Heathcliff's marriage, but everything that happens around their marriage is too extreme and distracting. It is the story of the violent horrors of families in a remote, disconnected location, instead of an explicit story on domestic violence alone. It does not strive for realism as *Wildfell Hall* does and that makes all the difference.

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