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Looking for Heaven: the Abandoned Children of *Wuthering Heights* in their Path from Isolation to Maturity

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1.- Introduction

As is well known, the appearance of children in literature was not an original achievement within Victorian fiction. Yet, from the mid-18th century onwards, the conception of childhood became a turning point thanks to the new paradigms proposed by Romantic writers such as Jean Jacques Rousseau or, some years later, by William Wordsworth, who prompted a vision of children as innocent and pure creatures linked to the benevolence of Nature. For instance, Rousseau idyllically conceived childhood as "a brief period of sanctuary previous to the adulthood" as the psychologist David Choe claims in *The Development of Play* (20). Likewise, Wordsworth argued in one of his best-known poems that "the Child is the Father of Man" (Greenblatt 335) aimed to emphasize the extraordinary wisdom of uncorrupted children and their alleged moral superiority. On the other hand, the emergence of a reformist wave into the Protestant Church and the Victorian Evangelicalism led to considering children as heirs of the sins of their fathers and even the incarnation of evil itself (Banerjee *Childhood* 50). According to Georgieva (3), children, as bearers of sins, must be corrected and educated, thus aligning herself with Charles Dickens' fiction when denouncing the misfortune of children in a dangerous industrial society: "the child and the growing up were common metaphors for the regeneration of society" (3). In general terms, then, children were depicted in a double-edged way: as the vehicle to denounce society and its abuses or as a metaphor for the emergent industrial society.

Furthermore, children were to be seen as hope for humanity, an idea in concordance with the awareness of social movements towards the education of children (Berry *Child* 17). Presenting children as social victims and highlighting the negative behaviour that adults had towards them was a common feature in Victorian fiction,

especially from fathers and teachers, who supposedly should guide them to adulthood. So, it is frequent to find isolated children in the nursery (i.e. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*), heavy-handed Victorian fathers (i.e. Dickens's *Dombey and Son*), school bodily punishment (i.e. Dickens's *Oliver Twist*), and working children in terrible conditions as sweepers, miners or in factories (i.e. William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* or Elizabeth Barrett Browing's "The Cry of the Children"). Moreover, there is a generalisation in the use of the slum children, as best depicted by Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848): children living in the city alone and being abandoned by everybody).[1] By contrast, there are other children that far from being portrayed as passive bearers of suffering they are able to survive, thus exhibiting a strong desire to take revenge on society (Banjeree *Childhood* 58). As a result, it seems that there is a dichotomy between the idealised child and the street waif, a difference that slowly tended to disappear and gave way to the emergence of what some authors have called the figure of the imperfect child or "an individual who is comprised of both innocence and experience" (Malkovich 2).

The birth of industrialisation in England and the exploitation of children in factories, mines or as chimney sweeps for long hours and low salaries revealed the divergence between the romantic conception of childhood and the reality of the working children. This situation brought to light the contradiction between the conditions for children of the poor and the middle-class notion of childhood at a time in which innocence led to new campaigns for legal protection for children. As a result, new laws were needed for the protection of those working children. Remarkably enough, Berry appoints that "the notion of children rights did not appear for the first time during the

[1] Not coincidentally, Heathcliff illustrates this kind of child when Mr. Earnshaw finds him a vagrant in Liverpool "starving and houseless, and as good as dumb, in the streets of Liverpool" (Brontë 31). In this sense, Banjeree suggests that this reference could be based on the visit that Emily´s brother Branwell paid to Liverpool when the first influx of Irish Immigrants at the outburst of the potato famine (Banjeree *Childhood* 58).

custody debates in the 1830s. The protection of children was integral to child labour discussions at least as early as 1802" (Berry *Child* 102). Besides, the influence of the open debate about the rights of children and The Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834 favoured the creation of the Workhouse System.[2] The influence of the parents in the growing up of children initiated a new debate on the duty of parents, especially the fathers, to provide a proper education for their offspring. Those debates determined that the State took an active role in the education of children. As a result, education was no longer a private concern and became a public issue. The State conceived the idea that children were the future of the country, and it assumed its responsibility on their education as a social duty. Parallel to the development of the concept of childhood, there was a progress of Law in relation to infancy, as the legal status of children changed and evolved from considering them as economic objects to small adults in possession of the same virtues and vices than their counterparts, all of which fuelled a more protective status towards them and infanticide practices. To summarise, the 19th century brought about an important development in law and the first notions about the construction of the children´s mind. Simultaneously, this was the moment in which women started to vindicate their own rights as mothers, giving rise to a new concept of family. The first step was the enactment of the Custody of Infants Bill in 1839, which meant the end of absolute power at the hands of fathers.

As my analysis will foreground, Emily Brontë was aware of those literary works portraying notions about infancy, as well as of the legal changes that were taking place at the time. Because most characters in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) are children or young adults, this novel conveys a deep concern about childhood and its path to adulthood.

[2] The Workhouse System was mainly designed to give shelter to pauper children who were separated from their parents, both physically and psychologically. This system was based on the idea of the inheritance of poverty and designated paupers as a stigmatised group who were subjected to strong discipline and punishment.

This path is taken as an excuse to analyse the diverse influences that affect children when growing up, and it also serves as the mechanism that helps the plot to unfold. Conscientious of her literary and social surroundings, Emily Brontë chooses to set the novel in a period previous to 1830s custody laws at a time when the father´s custody was almost absolute. Furthermore, she uses the plot to question the children´s evolution without adult references or with defective ones, in a background of absent mothers. Moreover, the characters are set in a close family environment far from external influences, which will contribute to intensifying the children's imprisonment and sense of isolation. Thus, this dissertation aims to explore how the emergence of new configurations of the family – i.e. from a patriarchal to a more affective model – together with the rising concern about education, allowed Brontë to illustrate important aspects that were to affect both individual and social bonds that will lead children to reach a healthy adulthood. I contend that the novel can be approached as a faithful and accurate source of data regarding not only its structure (Sanger 1926) but also the representation of poignant questions related to Victorian infancy. For this purpose, I shall firstly point out some characteristics regarding the age of the characters, so as to continue with some legal shifts that took place at the time and that become essential for my analysis.

2.- A Chronological Approach to the Children's Age and the Question of Custody.

Although there is a lack of dates in the novel, Emily Brontë was really interested in creating a complete chronology, as her usage of an almanac suggests (Chitham 97). Consequently, despite the fact that in the novel, only three clear dates are stated – 1801, 1802 and 1778 –, there are multiple clues that allow to set the age of the characters, sometimes by creating indirect references: "nearly twenty-three years ago" (Brontë 55) or by directly indicating the age of one of the characters: "you (Cathy) thirteen years old, and such a baby" (171). All those crossed comments help to infer almost without mistake the age of most of the characters as well as the time in which the action occurs, revealing that infancy or young adults are in the centre of the plot.[3] Apart from the elder generation, Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw, and Mr. and Mrs. Linton, who die early in the novel, only Joseph, the servant, is an adult. In the first part, there are four children when Nelly´s narration starts in 1772; namely, Hindley (15) the same as Nelly Dean, Catherine (6),[4] and Heathcliff (7). With the passing of time, when they meet the Lintons in 1778, Catherine is 12 years old, and Heathcliff 13; Edgar is 14 years old and Isabella 12 years old. At this precise moment, the young adults are Nelly, and Hindley who are 20 years old and Frances Earnshaw, whose age is not mentioned but she seems to be a young girl, whose immaturity is highlighted in the narration: "I thought she was half silly, from her behaviour. […] Shivering and clasping her hands" (39) dying at 16 or 17 years old. In the second generation, there are only three children, the offspring of the first generation. The eldest is Hareton, who is known to be 5 years old when his aunt

[3] The custody of children was maintained until the age of 21. However, in questions of inheritance the boy could inherit when being 16 years old, though he needs a ward (Abramowicz 1367). So, children or young adults under the age of 21 could be considered children.

[4] In order to differentiate both Catherine Earnshaw and Catherine Linton and, as there is not consensus in academic works, I have chosen the name Catherine for Catherine Earnshaw, as it is the name that Heathcliff uses to call her: "He (Edgar) had never called the first Catherine short, probably because Heathcliff had a habit of doing so" (Brontë 162). So, Catherine Linton is identified as Cathy: "the little one was always Cathy" (162).

Catherine marries at the age of 18 which occurs in 1783. After Catherine´s death in 1784, once she has given birth to her daughter Cathy, the narrative jumps 12 years, so, young Cathy is a girl when the story of the second generation starts. His cousin Linton is “just six months younger” (176) than Cathy, and he dies at 16. From the first children generation, only Edgar and Heathcliff survive apart from the servants Nelly and Joseph. Isabella dies far from her home when she is 32 years old.

Being most of the characters children or young adults, questions of custody, education and growing up become significant themes in the novel. At the beginning of the nineteenth century changes in laws took place parallel to the emergence of the new role of women, particularly as mothers. Essential to this shift was the question of custody, which traditionally reflected the absolute power of the father, combined with the first vindication of women for equality. As Eileen Spring claims, writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Caroline Norton “with ideas about the legitimacy of a power structure that undermined patriarchy” (20) revitalised the figure of the mother and fuelled parliamentary debates that gave rise to the Custody of Infants Bill in 1839.[5] This law meant the first step towards the acknowledgment of the rights of women as mothers at the end of the 19th century.

It can be stated that Emily Brontë was familiarised with those extended debates about custody and education. Initially, her knowledge of custody laws is reflected in the case of Isabella who is allowed to bring up Linton until her death.[6] On the other hand, it is perfectly possible to follow the exercise of custody of the children along the novel. As a result, not only Catherine Earnshaw and Hindley are under the custody of Mr.

[5] The Custody of Infants Bill in 1839 meant a change in the question of custody, until this moment a reflection of the absolute power of the fathers. This act was influenced by Caroline Norton´s vindications for mothers who thanks to this Act were allowed to maintain the custody of their children under the age of 7, and contact with their elder ones.

[6] According to Abramowicz (1360-1361), there are documented cases at the end of the 18th century in which separated mothers from their husbands were allowed to maintain the custody of their children, if they did not obtain the legal separation or divorce.

Earnshaw until his death in 1777 but also Heathcliff or Ellen as a member of the extended family. After Mr. Earnshaw´s death, his son Hindley inherits the property and the custody of the children, which means he has the power to decide their status and even their position inside the house as occurs with Heathcliff when "he (Hindley) drove him (Heathcliff) from their company to the servants" (Brontë 40) and with Ellen to whom he relegates to a service position after his return: "on the very day of his return, he told Joseph and me we must thenceforth quarter ourselves in the back kitchen and leave the house for him" (39). In the second generation, Hareton is firstly under the custody of his father Hindley until his death. Afterwards, Heathcliff will be in charge of him as Hindley´s mortgagee and since Hindley did not name a trustee for his son, Heathcliff declares "now, my bonny lad, you are mine!" (165). Right after his mother´s death, Linton remains under his father´s custody as Isabella never exercises it. In a similar vein, at Thrushcross Grange, the question of custody passes from the elder Mr. Linton on to his son, Edgar, who acquires the custody of his sister Isabella, his wife Catherine and, afterwards, of his daughter Cathy until her marriage. Finally, Cathy Linton marries Linton Heathcliff, and as both are below the age of 21, they become under the custody of Heathcliff, which allows him to fulfil his revenge. That is the reason why Edgar Linton is worried after his daughter´s marriage lamenting that "his enemy´s purposes was to secure the personal property, as well as the estate, to his son, or rather himself" (249). Conclusively, at a moment in which a concern about the poor condition and education of children were questioned not only in Parliament but also in literary works, *Wuthering Heights* portrayed custody as an interesting question in order to suggest that an abusing and non-educating custody can directly influence over the development of childhood and determine children´s behaviour as adults.

3.- A Dangerous Environment: Imprisonment and Violence inside the Family.

The question of custody goes hand in hand with family and education, since children´s development highly depends on them. Contrary to other nineteenth-century novels about childhood, Emily Brontë sets the children not in a dangerous social environment but in a domestic one, a safe place to grow up. In this sense two aspects should be underlined: the physical location and the internal environment. Regarding the former, Brontë choses to ground the novel in a place close to her home in Yorkshire moors, an inhospitable setting with rough geographical and climatic characteristics in the middle of which the house is erected. Mr. Lockwood, the homodiegetc narrator, describes Mr. Heathcliff´s dwelling as "a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather" (2). Moreover, the house is portrayed as strong enough to confront the weather, as "the architect built it strong" (2), thus anticipating the tumultuous and strong personalities of its inhabitants. Likewise, it contributes to stressing the suffocating atmosphere in which the characters are trapped. Similarly, the house exhibits an aristocratic past portrayed by the inscription that appears over the front of the main door. As Mr. Lockwood remarks: "I detected the date "1500" and the name "Hareton Earnshaw" (2) which signifies that the children of the house, far from being vagrants, with the exception of Heathcliff, belong to a gentry's family of ancient lineage.

Yet, the concept of family is not a stable one. It is from the 18th century onwards that the traditional patriarchal family, based on property and economic profit, evolves towards a more affective one, based on sentimental relationships (Spring 1). Other contemporary authors, such as Tadmor, refers to the family from two different points of view, sometimes involving not only the traditional nuclear family but also those who

lived under the same roof, which means a "household, defendants, servants, co-residents and relatives" (112). Hence, two kinds of relationships existed: one based on economic power and the other one on blood. Drawing upon this distinction, Ellen Dean, the intradiegetic and homodiegetic narrator of the story, could be considered a member of the both families, since right from her infancy, and as she points out, she belongs to the Heights: "I was almost always in Wuthering Heights because my mother had nursed Mr. Hindley Earnshaw […] and I got used to playing with the children" (Brontë 30). She considers Hindley her friend and after hearing of his death, she mourns: "I confess this blow was greater to me than the shock of Mrs. Linton´s death: ancient associations lingered round my heart; I sat in the porch and wept as for a blood relation" (164). Yet, after Catherine´s marriage, she changes the home and she becomes a member of the Linton´s house recognising Mr Linton as "my master" (224). Besides, special attention should be paid to the inclusion of Heathcliff in the family since, by being introduced by Mr. Earnshaw, he acquires an ambiguous status: firstly, he is considered a member of the affective family, as he is given the name of a dead son – "they had christened him "Heathcliff": it was the name of a son died in childhood and it has served him ever since, both for Christian and surname" (32). However, the last part suggests that he is deprived of a family name that would provide him an attachment to a kinship that would give him an identity, unlike Hareton, who, notwithstanding Heathcliff´s efforts to hide his noble lineage by preserving him from literacy, always belongs to the aristocratic house that bears his name: "Hareton Earnshaw" (2). Yet, once Mr. Earnshaw dies and Heathcliff is degraded by Hindley to the position of a servant, he maintains his affective bond with Catherine and, as Nelly observes, they are even allowed to sleep together during their childhood: "I ran to the children´s room […]. The little souls (Heathcliff and Catherine) were comforting each other with better them" (38). In fact, he is

considered a member of the family and so when Heathcliff comes back from his three years journey it is logical he stays at home.

The prevalence of the patriarchal family all throughout the 18th century meant the father held absolute economic and physical power over both his home and his offspring. The general rule was that the eldest son inherited property. With the passing of time, the fathers' power would increase and would eventually acquire the right to make a will to change some properties within their inheritance in order to preserve them for their daughters or younger sons, appointing a guardian or a trustee after their death (Spring 4). Brontë's awareness of this prerogative of the *pater familiae* is obvious, since Edgar Linton tries to preserve his property from Heathcliff after knowing that Cathy has married Linton Heathcliff. As Nelly remarks: "however, he (Mr. Linton) felt his will had better be altered – instead of leaving Catherine´s fortune at her own disposal, he determined to put it in the hands of trustees, for her use during life" (Brontë 250), although the attorney does not get in time, following orders from Heathcliff.

As mentioned before, a notion of a family based on blood relationships was permanent, although secondary, until the end of the 18th century when the family progressively started to be identified with affective relationships. Conversely, the family is used in the novel to establish power dealings rather than affective ones. Affective relationships are only found at the beginning and the end of the novel. This lack of affects in the plot not only works to strengthen the power of those who exercise the custody, clearly observable in Heathcliff who materialises his revenge from his position as father or guardian, but also to increase the sense of abandonment of children. The disaffection inside the family provokes that far from being a secure refuge, the families become a suffocating environment that threat children´s maturation and cause their fates. Due to this, the first generation of children is portrayed abandoned by their elders,

hence, once Mr. Earnshaw dies, the defective character of Hindley pushes the children to the wilderness of nature, as it is highlighted by Mr. Linton: “what a culpable careless in her brother” (44). Influenced by Rousseau´s conception of infancy, this gives Brontë an excuse to explore the growing up process without any adult or qualified reference; therefore, when Hindley reveals to be a bad influence, Nelly complains about how "the master´s bad ways and bad companions formed a pretty example for Catherine and Heathcliff" (58). Consequently, the children are impelled to move by instincts and the wildest side of nature is employed to describe the passion of Catherine and Heathcliff who bare a total identification with the moors, depicted as a place of freedom, far from the imprisonment of the house, especially tough after Mr. Earnshaw´s death. Ellen Dean is aware of the connection between both mates and the moors, “the only place where they are happy” (40), the only place in which they feel free and equals: “it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors […] – they forgot everything the minute they were together again” (40).

This profound identification between characters and nature becomes evident when the latter is used to describe the characters´ dramatic emotions, such as the storm that follows after Heathcliff's departure – all of which reflects Catherine's outburst after feeling abandoned by her mate. Afterwards, when close to death, the deep connection between Catherine´s infancy and the moors is highlighted in her desperate plea for returning to them: “I wish I were out of doors – I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy and free” (111), searching for her lost childhood and her lost identity, which she rejected in order to grow up and become a more conventional woman (van Ghent 191). Regarding Heathcliff, nature is echoed in his animalisation and he is depicted as an animal, as in the case after Catherine´s death, expressing his suffering since he “howled, not like a man but like a savage beast” (Brontë 148). Both Catherine and

Heathcliff identify with nature, and their passions, far from being tamed, trap and lead them to a sad fate, from which only death will release them. By contrast, in the second generation, nature loses its relevant position. Children in the second generation experience contact with adults, who, though defective, allow them some room for education and, as a result, some of them are able to overcome the savage state and be tamed and educated through literacy, assisting them in achieving a healthy adulthood and a better socialisation. A good example is Hareton, who despite being described as a dog by Cathy, "he´s like a dog, is he not, Ellen?" (276), and through education and affectivity, he is capable to overcome this animalisation and become an elegant man as Mr. Lockwood discovers after his return: "the male speaker was a young man, respectably dressed […]. His handsome features glowed with pleasure" (273).

Consequently, children in *Wuthering Heights* are trapped in an environment that prevents them from growing up. In turn, this creates a suffering that will affect their mental development, as Sally Shuttleworh suggests (213). Emily Brontë explores this suffering translating it into an imprisonment which is both psychological and physical. Brontë´s concern about infancy is already present in her previous works, such as in her "poems of childhood" (Bradner 130-131) in which she associates infancy to an imprisonment condition after Paradise that ultimately means being with God: only death is able to liberate us from this prison which is getting harder and harder after growing up, as the distance from God increases. Hence, childhood would be a condition closer to that lost paradise from which children even refuse to grow. Accordingly, she depicts children as wild characters trapped in their infancy. In this sense, one of the best examples appears at the beginning of the novel, with Catherine´s child ghost tapping the window and asking for entering in the house: "Let me in, Let me in […] – I discerned, obscurely, a child´s face looking through the window" (Brontë 20). She is surrounded

by snow and a gelid wind, resembling a gothic image of death. However, this image becomes paradoxical, since Catherine dies as an adult and returns as a child in search of her lost paradise, which is in the moors and far from Heaven. In a seemingly longing for returning to her psychological imprisonment, she confesses to Ellen: “heaven did not seem my home and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth” (71).

Nonetheless, psychological and physical imprisonment, as in the case of nature, works differently from one generation to the other. In general terms, psychological imprisonment prevails in the first generation, where children are depicted confined by their own decisions beyond their infancy. It is remarkable how the psychological imprisonment of an adult Catherine tends to merge with physical imprisonment after her marriage with Edgar, once Heathcliff has returned, since in an attempt to reject her maturity, she identifies Thrushcross Grange as a prison from where she desires to escape. Heathcliff, in spite of reaching adulthood by age, appears psychologically doubly trapped by his love for Catherine and by his revenge desires. Once Catherine dies, Heathcliff claims, “I cannot live without my soul” (148), acknowledging that the only way to escape is through death. By contrast, as Berry suggests, physical imprisonment gradually gains strength in the second generation, since *Wuthering Heights* “turns into a penal colony” (*Child* 106). Hence, the usage of words such as “jail”, “jailer” or “gaoler” to refer to those who exercise the custody or act as caretakers is quite recurrent in the novel. Yet, physical imprisonment is also relevant in the first generation, as for Heathcliff and Catherine the house becomes a prison after Mr. Earnshaw´s death, when they pass on to Hindley´s custody, underlining the undoubted relationship between prison and custody. This will be reinforced when Heathcliff exercises it. Consequently, for the second generation Hindley and Heathcliff become the guardians who transform the house into a physical prison for its inhabitants. The

character of the house as a prison is reinforced by the image of dogs as guardians of penal colonies. By contrast, the Grange symbolises a safe place for the Linton children and afterwards for Cathy, as the danger comes from outside. Conversely, the dogs become a symbol of protection. The Grange only becomes a psychological prison for Cathy when a clash between her sheltered upbringing and her desire to explore other spaces emerges, consequently, she claims: "I can get over the wall" (213) expressing her desire to escape to the Heights. For the second generation, imprisonment becomes a physical one, exercised by outside forces, as most of them suffer it as soon as they enter the house, as occurs with Isabella, for whom the Heights become a terrible prison once she marries Heathcliff: "I (Heathcliff), being your legal protector, must retain you in my custody" (Brontë 134); for Linton: "as I close the door, I heard a cry […] – Don´t leave me!!, I´ll not stay here!!!" (185); and for Cathy: "Hareton was a model of a jailer" (245). Even Mr. Lockwood feels as in a prison after spending the night in the Heights: "I took an opportunity of escaping into the free air" (26). This physical imprisonment is generally exercised with violence, a violence that prompts the reader to reflect on the use of violence in the novel.

This violence surrounding infancy is a constant element in the novel; however, children instead of innocent, reveal to be both abused victims and cruel torturers. As a consequence, cruelty and violence erupt, enacting powerful feelings of pain and hate (Thompson 70). In his infancy Heathcliff is abused physically especially by Hindley who, likewise, suffers physical abuses from his father. In addition, Heathcliff suffers psychological abuses not only by Hindley who treats him as a servant, but also by Ellen, especially in the arriving day, as "I put it (Heathcliff) on the landing of the stairs" (Brontë 32), or even by Catherine when she claims that "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff" (71). Consequently, his temper will be resented and revenge will be his life

motif (Banerjee *Childhood* 58). Heathcliff's desires of revenge confine him into a psychological prison and equally lead him to abuse those who were under his custody, such as Isabella, Hareton, Linton or even Cathy. However, Heathcliff is not a violent character when he arrives at the house: rather, his violence, unlike Catherine's or Hindley's, develops as a consequence of being abused in his infancy. On the other hand, the identification between violence and childhood is a recurrent element in the novel. Children are presented as wild beings far unable to dominate their passions, so, for instance, Catherine's violent personality is anticipated when she asks her father for a whip (a masculine tool) as a gift. For this reason, it is not surprising that she systematically exercises violence against other characters such as Nelly, pulling her hair or pinching her arm: "she (Catherine) snatched the cloth from my hand and pinched me very spitefully on the arm" (Brontë 62), or even over child Hareton when "(Catherine) drew her fury on to his (Hareton) unlucky head: she seized his shoulders and shook him till the poor child waxed livid" (63). At the end, her inability to grow up is illustrated by her violent reactions and her disinterest in living that inevitably leads her to death. Hence, this identification between violence and childish behaviour is often highlighted by Nelly, who censures Isabella for exhibiting a violent and uncontrolled behaviour after abandoning Heathcliff: "Fie, fie, Miss! One might suppose you had never opened a Bible in your life" (159). In the second generation, violence still persists. Linton, in spite of being psychologically abused also threats at using physical violence against Cathy in order to fulfil his father´s desires, when he wickedly points out that "he (Heathcliff) says I´m not to be soft with Catherine"(247). Even the pacific Hareton exhibits a violent behaviour when he acts as a jailer of young Cathy (248). And Cathy, notwithstanding having been educated in tenderness and love, reveals violent responses on her cousins as soon as she trespasses the Heights: "she gave the chair a violent push

and caused him (Linton) to fall" (211), especially against Hareton, to whom she considers an inferior, and as a result she despises him claiming that "he looked so stupid" (194).

In order to escape from imprisonment and violence, children have two options: to mature or to die. For the first generation both options are underlined by the use of a powerful metaphor materialised in "trespassing the window" (van Ghent 190-191). For Catherine, the passage occurs when she looks through the window of Thrushcross Grange to a world totally unknown to her, the world of adults or what is the same, the world of relationships in society, by which Catherine is fatally tempted (191). In this way, the window becomes a powerful symbol used by Brontë as a border not only between childhood and maturity but also between life and death. It is Catherine who wants to return from death through the window at the beginning of the novel, when wailing "let me in, let me in" (Brontë 20) and it is also Catherine who wishes to go through the window to return to her lost childhood: "I wish I were a girl again" (111). In addition, it is through the window that Heathcliff enters to see Catherine for the last time: "I opened one of the windows to give him a chance of bestowing on the fading image of his idol one final adieu" (148) wishing to join her in death. As Nelly points out, it is precisely an open window that presides over the death of Heathcliff, as "I observed the master´s window swinging open" (298), in an attempt to finally join Catherine in death. Contrarily, in the second generation, windows disappear as a symbol and give way to education and socialisation. Both are learnt through building up diverse bonds with the other members of the house.

4.- From Isolation to Socialisation: the Value of Attachments in the Process of Maturing.

As mentioned above, the plot of *Wuthering Heights* occurs before parliamentary debates on education, in a period when affective relations inside families started to be considered relevant for the future of children. In fact, Brontë seems to choose this specific moment in order to portray the impact of the relationships between children and the absolute power of fathers, especially in their emotional growth. From this starting point, an interesting theory about relationships inside the novel is given by psychologist Mc Niermey who considers *Wuthering Heights* as a proto-attachment narrative based on a cyclical nature of damaging parent child attachments in the dawn of the interest in childhood mental development (13). For him, *Wuthering Heights* is a circular story of failure attachments, and only when the circle breaks, the story of the family is restored. Consequently, in his work he analyses the interactions between children and their parents or reference adults. According to this theory, we can approach Brontë's novel as a significant text that reflects a striking absence of mothers, thus depriving children of the tenderness and guidance of motherhood, maybe reflecting the absence of her own mother too. According to Banerjee, the fact that Catherine grows up without a mother affects her ability for maturating (qtd. in McNierney 19). She dies giving birth to Cathy who also grows up deprived of a maternal figure; Hareton loses his mother days after his birth. Heathcliff, seemingly, never knew her. The only figure that resembles a mother is Ellen Dean, who acts as a foster mother with Catherine, Heathcliff, Hareton and Cathy. Yet, far from being a tender mother, she is endowed with certain ambiguity, a tendency towards manipulation and an excessive control which makes her a negative influence as educator (Berry *Custody* 40). In the case of Isabella, she does not seem to

be successful either, since Linton, her son, is one of the most defective characters. However, unlike McNierney´s belief that "Linton is raised by Isabella – presumably with affection" (25), this failure in his character cannot be attributed to Heathcliff as Linton arrives at the Heights when he is thirteen and his personality is already formed. The maternal figure who will save the children is only recovered at the story, when it emerges personified by Cathy who, in overcoming her own scarcities (Moglen 401-402), will end up acting as a maternal figure for her cousins, being successful in educating Hareton.

The absence of mothers is compensated by the constant presence of fathers. However, rather than being a guidance for their offspring, they are "defective and contribute to a failure attachment" (McNierney 15). Five different fathers appear in the novel and neither of them manages to educate healthy characters, with the exception of elder Mr. Linton, the most traditional of them, whose son Edgar Linton resembles him. On the contrary, Mr. Earnshaw embodies an ambiguous fatherly figure for he introduces Healthcliff providing him a name and a family, but this behaviour contrast with the treatment of his own offspring. Regarding Hindley, Mr. Earnshaw seemingly prefers Heathcliff to his biological son, towards whom he does not hesitate in using violence: "he seized his stick to strike him, and shook with rage that he could not do it" (Brontë 35). As a result, Hindley develops a jealous and violent nature that for McNierney sparks off the mechanism of the tragic story of the family (18) as he will fail as caretaker of his sister and Heathcliff and as father, acting as an absent and violent one with Hareton. In the case of Catherine, her father´s inability and defective character is emphasised by his intolerance towards children but at the same time his permissive treatment of her daughter reinforces Catherine´s manipulative and narcissistic nature, because "she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once, and she

defying us with her bold, saucy look and her ready words" (Brontë 36). In the case of Edgar Linton, he is not a violent father, and his treatment of Cathy is affective and tender. However, he embodies an over protective father that makes Cathy incapable of developing a healthy socialisation (McNierney 26). The case of Heathcliff is even more complicated because, having suffered a double abandonment (Banarjee *Childhood* 58), he is unable to execute a father or caretaker role, failing in both. As a father, he controls and abuses Linton, whom he despises, but uses him as a tool for revenge (Berry *Child* 118). However, Heathcliff's behaviour towards Linton is not violent but manipulative. He pushes him into his marriage when he is not ready for it, just for his own benefit. Despite being his offspring, Linton resembles too much his maternal family and as a result, Heathcliff gives him not even an opportunity, especially after discovering that the resemblance is not mere physical but also psychological, underlining the fact that the only case in which a mother has the chance to educate her son in the novel the result is a defective, spoiled child unable to adapt, hence growing up egoistic and narcissist.[7]

Besides the lack of parents, the figure of the caretaker emerges strongly in the novel. This role is preserved to Heathcliff and Nelly as the other adult, Joseph, is relegated to the role of the intransigency of religion or, in Moglen words, he is the "representative of the repressive forces" (404), unable to understand and far less to educate. Therefore, Heathcliff becomes Hareton's caretaker after Hindley´s death. From the beginning, Hareton is treated by Heathcliff as a way to take revenge on the Earnshaw´ family. However, rather than using physical abuse, his revengeful method is to withdraw Hareton from any education, making him an illiterate person which will distance him from his lineage: "I cannot read it" (Brontë 194), he confesses in front of the inscription that bears his name, which deprives him of his identity. Nevertheless,

[7] This could lead us to consider that Brontë was critical with the wave of the sentimental education, probably as a reflection of her own rigid education.

Heathcliff develops such a sympathy and attachment for the boy that he even brands him as "gold" (193), and due to his resemblance to Catherine and his good character they even acquire a kind of father-son attachment. In fact, only Hareton mourns Heathcliff´s death: "Hareton was the only one that really suffered much. He sat – weeping in bitter earnest. He pressed his hand and kissed" (298-99). In this case, a defective caretaker is not enough to destroy Hareton's benevolence, seemingly connected with his aristocratic ancestors, and maybe anticipating a genetic influence. Unlike Linton, who is shown as a peevish character, Hareton is depicted as a not "bad-natured" (186), curiously as a mirror of first Heathcliff who was described by Ellen as: "the quietest child that ever a nurse watched over [….] he was as uncomplaining as a lamb" (33). Regarding Ellen Dean, she takes care of the two generations, Catherine, Heathcliff, Hareton, and Cathy towards whom she exercises a manipulative conduct and in many occasions acting as Heathcliff´s accomplice. As an intradiegetic and homodiegetic narrator, her ambiguity and manipulation have an impact on the readers; thus, not being a good referent for the children of the story either.

Beyond children-parent attachments Banaajee claims that unhappy children search for comfort in the company of other children (*Childhood* 58). This idea is perfectly illustrated with the relationship forged between Catherine and Heathcliff after Mr. Earnshaw´s death when they find "comfort each other" (Brontë 38) identifying the children´s room with heaven. However, this relationship is presented as compensatory and exclusive (Banaajee *Childhood* 60), a childish bond unable to survive in the adult world (Moglen 293) and materialised in Catherine´s desire for other social relationships. This makes her abandon her friendship with Heathcliff. The crisis comes when she discovers that she does not like those social conventions and wishes to return to her lost infancy, leading her to death. Isabella Linton changes the happy childhood of the

Grange for the mysterious world of the Heights, in this case, her sheltered upbringing as well as the personality of her husband prevents her from building up relationships in her new home, pushing her to escape. In the case of the second generation, Catherine´s maturity comes when she abandons the security of Thrushcross Grange and enters the diabolic world of the Heights. Unlike her mother, she has been educated in a safe and social world; however "she must throw off the prejudices of society to reach an understanding of a value that is more subtly defined: righting, this way, the wrong that the Lintons originally committed against Heathcliff" (Moglen 401-2). Educated by her father, Cathy has been preserved from any kind of evil; and having inherited her mother´s strength, she is eager to know how to create social relationships.

When it comes to forging relationships, she has two cousins, Linton who resembles her father Edgar, and Hareton, to whom she identifies as a servant provoking her rejection and disdain. As a result, she establishes a relationship with Linton based on generosity and pity, acting half as a mother and half as a child-bride (Moglen 403). This relationship is hindered by Linton´s personality and Heathcliff´s mediation. The identification between Linton and Edgar increases when they die close in time, which confronts Cathy with death. In the case of Hareton, she overcomes her first rejection towards him and the misunderstandings deriving from the imprisonment of the Heights, this, along with the loss of Heathcliff´s interest in revenge, "allows them to begin to form attachments to each other" (McNierney 30). The acceptance of Hareton and their kinship helps Cathy to integrate her personality, and even to act as an educator, guiding him towards his development as an educated adult able to collect his inheritance. This is the union that brings the resolution of the conflict to an end giving the children the opportunity to reach adulthood. Hareton is a social outcast, a shadow of Heathcliff, and yet, unlike Heathcliff, he assimilates education that comes from the social world of

Thrushcross Grange, thus leading him to abandon his instincts and progress towards domestication. The moment coincides with Heathcliff's abandonment of his revenge desires just after visualising Cathy and Hareton enjoying together, because this vision reminds him of his own desires to be with Catherine. From this turning point, the relationship between the children starts their path towards adulthood providing the novel with a linear movement. In this way, only when the circle of detachment breaks and the line between childhood and maturity is trespassed, the dialectic of personality can be resolved (Moglen 404).

5.- Conclusion

The turn of the 18th century meant the starting point for an increasing awareness about infancy and its needs. This awareness materialised in the 1830s debates about education and infancy together with the importance of mothers in a model of family increasingly based on affections. Such elements constitute a precise background for Brontë in order to write a novel in which the main characters are children or young adults. These characters present little evolution in the story, unlike the structure of the novel, which effectively provides a complete vision of evolution of childhood. By dividing the novel into two generations, Brontë explores different infant responses to the path towards maturity, from an infancy abandoned and surrounded by a violent nature to a more social evolution through literacy and new social relationships. Hence, in a pessimistic first part, she depicts characters with a lack of interest in life. Mirroring an endless circle of attachments and detachments, Catherine is only interested in recovering her lost paradise; Heathcliff in Catherine, and Isabella in Heathcliff. In the second generation, Brontë introduces new features, and children are endowed with further

resources in order to overcome the imprisonment that mainly comes from the outside, and as a result, they gain interest in getting to know their environment and the society in which they live.

In the dawn of psychology, Emily Brontë intuitively understood infancy as a kind of imprisonment that comes from a separation from God. However, she uses the novel to illustrate the happiness of infancy when children are in contact with nature, as happens with Heathcliff and Catherine. Such happiness is broken when they keep in contact with adulthood, by being in custody of adults, or when they are pushed to grow up with the passing of time. However, Brontë understands that maturing is part of the natural development of childhood, and connects this moment with trespassing a boundary, from one place to another, looking for a better place, which she identifies with a heaven. Nevertheless, this heaven becomes a hell, as in the case of Catherine or Isabella, who despite the fact that they voluntarily cross the line towards maturity in the hope of happiness, they find out that adulthood is even more painful than infancy. The failure in trespassing this boundary comes from the fact that children lack an adult guidance, a role that traditionally is carried out by parents. As a result, those children who are not able to adapt to a new situation, establishing healthy associations with other people, are condemned to die (Catherine, Linton), or to run away (Isabella). On the other hand, those children in which resentment and violence nest, become embittered and defective adults unable to create hope and much less to fulfil their function as educators. Only when children look inside themselves in order to overcome their own scarcities through education and literacy are they able to shift to another social and psychological condition, thus taming their own "wuthering heights".

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