



Marginality in the Brontë sisters' novels

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Abstract

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*The Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne have left their mark on the literary landscape of Victorian England. Beyond the fact that they belong to the same family and are all three remarkable writers in the same period, a unique fact in literary history, these sisters fully express their genius through the sensitive and aesthetic dimension of the various themes they address in their novels. One of the major themes common to their novels is the question of marginality in a highly stratified society of 19th-century Britain. Using Marxist, new historicist, feminist, and psychoanalytical reading grids, we aim to examine this theme of marginality precisely in *Jane Eyre*, *The Professor and Shirley* by Charlotte and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily. This work thus reveals the multiple faces and implications of marginality in these novels in a context of economic, political and social revolution.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Marginality refers to the state of a marginalised person or group of people. A marginalised person, as the name implies, is one who is on the margins of the society or the space in which he/she lives or works. He/she is treated without any consideration and even ill-treated. Marginality can take various forms depending on the factors that account for it such as poverty, gender issue, social rank, illness, convictions, passions, geographic location, etc. It has existed since the dawn of time and in all societies. However, it was a particularly notable fact in 19th-century British society. In effect, the advent of the industrial revolution that moved Great Britain from an initially agricultural country to a highly industrial one widened the gap between the already existing social categories. For example, people or groups became richer, while many more lived in deteriorated conditions. The Victorian woman, the weaker sex, also suffered the full brunt of the effects of the revolution. In addition, this form of exclusion related to the industrial revolution could be observed on the geographical level, as illustrated by these words from Clark (2):

Even within Britain the Industrial Revolution changed the balance of power. Up until 1770 the center of population and political power was the south. London had a population

of over 500,000 and was the center of Government. The next largest towns in 1760 were Bristol and Norwich, both in the south (see figures 1 and 2). Manchester, the center of the cotton industry had a population of only 17,000. But the Industrial Revolution was a phenomenon of the North of the country, and population, income and political power moved in favor of the north.

This analysis shows that the north of the country was industrialised and favoured over the south that was lagging in its traditional farming economy. Therefore, marginality took on different aspects in Victorian society. The novels of the Brontës depict, among other things, this complex issue of marginality in a period of profound change, which this study seeks to highlight. Using as a corpus *Jane Eyre*, *The Professor and Shirley* by Charlotte and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily, the paper draws on theories such as New Historicism, Feminism, Marxism, and Psychoanalysis. The New historicist theory that is mainly concerned with the background of the text will help us better examine the issue of marginality in relation to the historical, economic and cultural context of the novels under study. In exploring the condition of Victorian women from the angle of the theme of study, feminist theory will be of particular help. It will give us a better grasp of the various factors involved in the

objectification of women in this still highly patriarchal society. To speak of marginality in Victorian society is also to evoke the economic logic underlying the discriminatory treatment of a certain social category. From this point of view, the Marxist approach, which explains social inequalities by questioning the capitalist system, could serve as a good basis for analysis. Finally, resorting to psychoanalysis seems convenient to examine the self-defense mechanisms that characters develop faced with the unbearable weight of marginality.

The first part of the work attempts to point out chief marginalised groups, namely women in the domestic sphere, the old maids and the domestic and industrial workers. The second part analyses the main reactions of the marginalised characters to overcome their social ordeal and restore their dignity.

II. MARGINALISED GROUPS

2.1 Women in the domestic sphere

It is a truism to say that women were part of the groups that the social structures of 19th-century England had placed outside the centres of decision-making. The marginal status of Victorian women was the subject of various debates commonly referred to as the "Woman Question". For some, the woman should remain the guardian of the home by fulfilling the matrimonial functions assigned to her by society. Though women were generally referred to as "the cornerstone of Victorian society", men considered that "the perfect lady's sole function was marriage and procreation" (Vicinus 8).

This gender inequality was the result of a sum of prejudices of different kinds which resulted in theories such as 'The separate spheres'. That ideology emerged in the USA towards the end of the 18th century and developed in the 19th century. It maintained that women and men had divergent interests, with separate zones of influence. The domestic or private sphere fell to women who were to manage home and children, while men were responsible for the public sphere related to work and the outside world. In this perspective, the domination of men over women was believed to be natural and legitimate.

Others believed, on the contrary, that the Victorian woman should be promoted socially, economically and even politically and enjoy a more honourable status in the industrialised country. The debate around the status of Victorian women had above all the merit of putting an old idea taken for granted on the scales of moral scrutiny. This is what led M'Carthy to assert that "the greatest social difficulty in England today is the relationship between men and women. The principal difference between ourselves and

our ancestor is that they took society as they found it while we are self-conscious and perplexed".

It goes without saying that in this debate the Brontës took up the cause of the Victorian woman. With a view to restoring the scorned dignity of the woman, they set out to reveal and criticise the "oppressive force against women" (Maine 9), that is the discriminatory and unfair treatment to which they were subjected. Talking about *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, for example, Maine (9-10) asserts that it "seeks to demonstrate and lament the injustices perpetuated by law, notably in regard the inequality of women in marriage and the treatment of insanity". The Brontë girls' advocacy of the Victorian woman takes various forms in their novels. They make their plea through female characters who suffer from the burden of housework.

Female characters like Nelly in *Wuthering Heights*, Bessie, Miss Abbot and Mrs Fairfax in *Jane Eyre* are confined to everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and washing. In *Villette*, Lucy, who is employed by the incapacitated Miss Marchmont, is so busy working that she is disconnected with the world outside. She confesses: "I forgot that there were fields, woods, rivers, seas, an ever-changing sky outside the steam-dimmed lattice of this sick-chamber" (C. Brontë, *Villette* 31). Taking care of sick family members is also part of the daily responsibilities of housewives. This is illustrated in *Wuthering Heights* by Zillah who keeps providing assistance to Cathy and Heathcliff until they pass away.

The Brontë sisters also highlight the lack of consideration suffered by Victorian women through the irresponsible behavior of their husbands. Because of the "separate spheres theory", men can often be away from home without this causing concern from their wives. Indeed, unlike women, whose household chores keep them eternally confined within the four walls, men have the opportunity to go out, given the professional activities that theoretically link them to the outside world. However, the reality is that many of them take advantage of this opportunity to frequent bars and clubs and indulge in alcohol, gambling, or visiting prostitutes, which is contrary to Victorian values of morality.

In *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne gives, among others, the example of Helen and her friend Millicent whose husbands rarely stay at home. The evil becomes more pronounced when the men's mistresses taunt the cuckolded wives. Such is the case with Helen to whom Annabella, her husband's mistress, retorts: "You need not begrudge him to me, Helen, for I love him more than you ever could" (A. Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* 248). Besides cheating the wives, men often prove very violent with them. The reader of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* may be shocked by

Arthur's brutality, but more precisely by the barbarity of his friend Hattersley, Millicent's husband. The latter attacks his wife only because she inadvertently saw him and his friends as they were leaving the bar. This scene of domestic violence for which there is no justification is ironically found in the chapter entitled 'Social Virtues'. Huntingdon, Grimsby and Hattersley were so drunk that they were unable to walk. When her husband saw her, he began to brutalise her. She begged him: "Do let me alone Ralph! Remember we are not at home" (A. Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* 218). It is sad to see a woman begging her husband not to beat her because they were not at home. It is as if the house were the place of torture agreed upon and accepted by this resigned woman. Helen was going through a similar situation with her husband. She ends up running away with the child because they were dangerously exposed to his growing violence.

The Victorian woman described by the Brontës' novels remains under the yoke of male domination in a society that is still very patriarchal. Takahashi (2) reminds us that the "women's social status in the Victorian era was low, and their lives were destined to be obedient to men and endure patriarchy. Many women had to endure unhappy marriages". However, they are consciously engaged in a fight for liberation to put an end to this subordinate, marginalised situation and to take full responsibility for themselves. This struggle to conquer dignity takes several forms in the novels under study. Nevertheless, generally speaking, it is a question of women leaving the closed environment of the home to venture outside, mainly in search of employment. Women remain convinced that success at work, whatever and wherever it may be, constitutes a first step towards their liberation. This is the reason why a good number of female characters go on adventures, moving from one place to another. The determination of these women to free themselves can be measured by the audaciousness with which they overcome the enormous obstacles that often stand in the way of their adventures. In Chapter 28 of *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte describes the challenges and hardships of Jane's journey in order to meet an employer. She alights late in the evening at Whitcross, a crossroad with only a stone pillar indicating the directions of the nearest towns, distant at least ten miles. It is night and she has accidentally left her packet in the coach and is now destitute. She tries to sleep in the wood (C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 285), and the next day, she eats from the porridge which is meant for pigs. She is finally taken in by the Rivers family. Lucy has a similar journey on her way to Villette. Beyond housewives, another category of women were also subject to marginalisation in Victorian society.

2.2 The old maids group

The scourge of marginality also affects the group of older girls who cannot find husbands, the number of which was incredibly high in 19th-century English society. One of the most striking literary images of the suffering of old maids in the Victorian era is that found in Irish author Charlotte O'connor Eccles' novel, *The Rejuvenation of Miss Semaphore* (1897). Indeed, in this novel, Eccles paints a middle-aged bourgeois woman who, tired of the solitude in which her situation as an old spinster consigns her, decides to drink an elixir "the Water of Youth" in order to rejuvenate and escape her existential situation. Unfortunately, under the effect of the product, she regresses to the baby stage and is put into foster care. The image, both comic and tragic, expresses the deep suffering that torments Victorian spinsters subjected to the merciless gaze and judgment of society. They would do anything to regain their youth and free themselves from their degrading status as old maids.

Old maids' discrimination was based on the fact that it was anchored in the mentalities of people that to become a real English woman, the girl must first get married. The Brontë girls deplore the stigmatisation of girls whose only fault is to come from poor families, to be physically less attractive or simply to be unlucky, to name just a few causes. They are put at odds with people who consider them as a burden to their family and often as girls with bad morals. They are despised. In the homes, they are forced to work hard and often in deplorable conditions. That is what revolts Charlotte Brontë when she makes her character utter these words: "Look at the rigid and formal race of old maids, the race whom all despise; they have fed themselves, from youth upwards, on maxims of resignation and endurance" (*The Professor* 207).

Their challenge is to prove that the marginalising treatment society reserves for them is not justified. Charlotte devotes a chapter to this subject in *Shirley* which she entitles *Old Maids*. She clearly tells us about the situation of this group through Miss Mann and Miss Ainley. Their life is all the more pitiful as they are ostracised and left alone because the other girls avoid joining them. They are regarded as a factor of bad luck. Fanny, for example, seeing that little Caroline is bored at home, suggests her to go near Mann or Miss Ainley. She does not hide her reluctance and replies: "But their houses are dismal; ... they are both old maids I am certain old maids are a very unhappy race" (C. Brontë, *Shirley* 134). Ainsley has no brothers or sisters, nor anyone to take care of her. No one thinks of her and no one comes to see her either. The worst is that she leaves young men indifferent and "gentlemen always sneer at her" (C. Brontë, *Shirley* 134). Caroline does

not feel safe within this group. She is afraid of experiencing the same fate as they do. She does not want to call upon herself what Rosalie calls an 'infamy' or becoming an old maid (A. Brontë, *Agnes Grey* 62-63). This campaign which demonises these girls seems to succeed, but Fanny tries to explain to Caroline that all the ideas are only prejudices. Ainsley is known and praised for her generosity and honesty.

This marginalisation often pushes old maids to leave their area and opt for a certain form of exile, literally and figuratively. An unmarried girl feels a void in her life. That is what Frances explains in Charlotte's novel, *The Professor*: "Had I been an old maid I should have spent existence in efforts to fill the void and ease the aching" (460-61). Most of the characters' numerous movements could be explained by their desire to dispel that feeling of vacuity.

In *Villette*, Lucy gives the impression of fleeing that society which stigmatises and marginalises her. She says she is emigrating to Villette in search of work, but her long journey, like Jane's, looks more like a quest for a husband. She wants to be an English woman. Lucy was able to obtain both, but outside of her country and society. Anne Longmuir approves of these journeys, however perilous they may be because if those girls had remained in England, they would probably have become, "like millions and thousands, jaded, listless, unhappy women, unable to marry, and in many instances useless members of society" (Longmuir). Since society does not help them, these girls must fight for themselves by trying to go on an adventure. Curiously, they often manage to settle down on a foreign land, invest successfully, or even find a husband. They even become victims of jealousy and are eventually regarded as usurpers. The next marginalised group highlighted in the novels of our corpus is that of domestic workers.

2.3 Domestic workers

This is the group of those who are employed by upper-class families. They are responsible for all the domestic tasks. Their importance, however, contrasts sharply with the treatment they receive. After work, they generally meet in the spaces of the house reserved for them to relax, to eat or to sleep. This prevents them from interfering too much in these families' lives. The bosses and their children do not communicate with them a lot because they are only servants, and "that one must keep them at due distance, for fear of losing one's authority" (159), as it is explained by Fairfax in *Jane Eyre*. They keep that group at a distance without worrying about the effects of that treatment on their lives. The only thing that matters for these employers remains their image and their social rank.

In Emily's novel, Heathcliff is forced to join this group after his exclusion. He cannot bear living with them because he fails to identify himself morally or psychologically with this group of servants until his voluntary exile. On his return from his long journey, he goes to visit Catherine. On that occasion, Edgar reminds his wife Catherine that this man's place is no longer in the living room but in the kitchen to humiliate him. Servants like Nelly, whom Caywood (9) calls "a member of a largely marginalised class in England", love the kitchen, that place where they feel freer and sit together to share a meal, which is an act of communion. It reinforces the group's cohesion. That space is generally lively, "alive" (300) as Charlotte says in *Jane Eyre*, and contrasts with the atmosphere of "the red room which was silent, because it was remote from the nursery and kitchen" (C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 9). She also alludes to Bessie who, "as soon as she had dressed her young ladies used to take herself off to the lively regions of the kitchen and housekeeper's room" (300). The servant's eagerness to join the kitchen explains the importance of this place for this group. They take advantage of these moments to momentarily forget their marginality.

In the Brontë sisters' novels, marginality appears as a constitutive trait of the Victorian society, a society in the midst of changes resulting from the industrial revolution which is also more favourable to certain regions than to others. Bailly, cited by Rioux (637), points out that the centrality/periphery couple is then closely associated with that of socio-spatial well-being/socio-spatial unhappiness. The consequences of all these socio-spatial, socio-economic and even socio-cultural changes often affect the necessary cohesion among people and foster tensions which usually results in conflicts (Bailly, 1383), (Rioux 637).

III. Reactions to marginality

3.1 Violence in *Jane Eyre*

In *Jane Eyre*, Charlotte Brontë tells us the life experience of a young orphan girl of about ten years old, Jane, in her uncle's family. She does not live like other children as her aunt, Mrs Reed, and her children treat her like an outcast, which she cannot stand. The last straw occurs when her cousin attempts to attack her physically. She fights him back with that violence which surprises them. In fact, she argues and fights against marginality so as not to become "atypical or considered secondary" (C. Brontë *Villette* 306).

A psychoanalytic reading suggests a state of psychic regression with the interior resonances of a childhood marked by an emotional deficit. As a result, Jane is revolted by the fact that they do not consider and treat her as a human being, "labelling her as something other than human"

(Peters 57) and regarding her as a child to boot. That outburst of violence can be explained by what the senses reveal, but Jane's disproportionate reaction seems to show that she is moved by other arguments which she probably ignores, particularly when they are stored in her unconscious. It is a passionate revolt against social marginality, according to Susan Meyer.

Jane has failed to adapt to the changes that took place after her uncle's death. She has suddenly felt weaned from the attention and affection of the latter who used to help her live and grow well. Until his disappearance, Jane was sheltered from marginalisation. Her aunt's hypocrisy and jealousy ultimately cause her disaffiliation from the family. Liliane Rioux demonstrates how traumatic this experience can be, especially for a child. She explains that

rejecting an individual or group to the margins also means perceiving them as potentially dangerous; it is, for the marginalising group, affirming the legitimacy of its regulatory and integration functions but it is also allowing it to recognize itself as 'normal' by making the marginalised group or individual play a role of 'pusher'¹ (Rioux 636).

Jane is actually regarded as a threat to the social and cultural norms of this group who view themselves as superior. She appears as an intruder who has taken the place of Mrs Reed and her children in Mr Reed's heart. From a Marxist point of view, they cannot participate in the promotion of inferior classes. Mrs Reed and her children want to reconstruct Jane's character and make her into another person who matches her true social level. For them, Jane's acceptance into the house does not equate with total inclusion in the family which should remain the epitome of high society. In consequence, Jane must be excluded. Her exclusion is here synonymous with marginalisation the aim of which is to reduce her influence. Jane is clearly aware of Mrs Reed's new attitude to achieve her plans but she does not panic. Charlotte uses the phrase, "were now clustered" (C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 3), to mean the coalition that is being established between the mother and her children against Jane. They are now in battle order. To better refine their strategy, they hide their plot by making people believe in their friendliness with the girl. All the good words they preach about Jane are often reported to her by Bessie. They often tell her that Jane remains the beloved daughter of the family although she is native of a poor family. Jane knows all now: "I was a discord in Gateshead Hall; I was like nobody there; I had nothing in harmony with Mrs Reed or her children" (C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre* 3). She is aware of the

determination of her "adversaries" to return her to her initial social state of less than nothing. For example, to prevent the ten-year-old orphan of being on the same intellectual level as her children, her aunt forbids her to consult the books of her cousins Eliza, Georgiana, and John.

Jane resolutely embarks on the path of confrontation to defend her dignity and identity. This is what Mérias (3) explains when she says that Jane seems to be constructed through opposition to the established order. Her belligerent attitude does not define her. It results from a necessity to fight for survival. Her fight against John opens the way for Mrs Reed to implement her plans. By sending her to "the red room" for punishment, she separates her physically from the family. This exclusion will be completed when Mrs Reed sends Jane to Lowood boarding school where she meets Helen Burns who is three years older than her. She instinctively becomes her friend. Their complicity seems to indicate that they have something in common. Indeed, Helen is the unloved student in the school. She is a thirteen-year-old girl. For the slightest mistake, she often receives the most severe punishments. She always submits without protest. Jane cannot understand her impassivity, but she considers that it is her own way of experiencing marginality.

Jane does not know her father and has not got the chance to benefit from maternal tenderness. What society offers her through her aunt and cousin John, instead, turns out to be just contempt and total enmity. Therefore, she must struggle and defend her personal space that constitutes a system of defence and safeguarding of intimacy, by regulating interactions with the social environment² (Rioux 639). Jane manages to withdraw into herself and find the space of the self for want of integration. It is as if she were doomed to walk alone, despite her attempt to get closer to others. Helen Burns, her only friend with whom she would exchange, dies shortly after they meet. After all, she hugs herself for rebelling against her aunt. Her transfer to Lowood appears as a liberation and an opportunity to learn more about the outer world. Six years later, she becomes a teacher at the same school.

Isolation and marginality have characterised Jane's life. Thus, the loneliness and darkness of the red room at Gateshead Hall, or the last moments Jane spent alone at Helen's bedside in Lowood, could be related to that moment when she returned to Rochester, to join her husband who secluded in his estate after Thornfield had burnt. She has fought so valiantly to escape from marginality but at that stage, she seems to relapse into the isolation of the periphery

¹ Rejeter un individu ou un groupe à la marge, c'est aussi le percevoir comme potentiellement dangereux ; c'est, pour le groupe marginalisant, affirmer la légitimité de ses fonctions de régulation et d'intégration mais c'est également lui permettre de

se reconnaître comme 'normal' en faisant jouer au groupe ou à l'individu marginalisé une fonction de « repoussoir »

of society. As Sarah Eron notes, “Jane never leaves her station as a woman who remains on the outskirts of society”, even after her marriage to Rochester, she fails to join the upper class depicted in chapter seventeen”.

Charlotte illustrates the theme of marginality through another atypical character, Madame Bertha. She is discreet essentially because she is sick and isolated by her husband. Physically, morally and psychologically marginalised, she represents the hidden part of Mr Rochester's life. They have a tumultuous but secret life together until Jane arrives in the house. That discovery brings back many memories to Jane particularly about her stay with her uncle, including her confinement in the Red Room. The similarity between Jane and Bertha is obvious. They both, at one moment, plunge into the madness of anger and overreact. For Jane, this state is temporary, but for Bertha, it is permanent and even more violent. The latter goes so far as to pose a real danger to her husband and to the whole house. Indeed, she once set fire to Rochester's bed while he was sleeping. He narrowly escapes from death, saved by Jane who discovers the fire on time. Mason, a friend of Rochester's, has also experienced the mad woman's brutality. Bertha's revolt is reminiscent of Jane's. River explains Bertha's attitude who voices out “her resistance through acts of violence such as the burning of Thornfield. The symbolism of lighting fire expresses her presence, her denial of concealment, and her terrorism against the patriarchal powers”.

The restriction of freedom is always unbearable. Both Jane and Bertha are pushed to react in violent way to express their frustration, but especially their hatred for their oppressors and the social system that marginalises them. Although Bertha is sick, she continues to claim her rights as a married woman in her household. Her isolation only exasperates her death impulses. That woman with an affected psyche is actually crumbling under the weight of the pressure of the subconscious, psychoanalyst critics would say. Her violent behaviour appears as the expression of a claim for liberation and justice. Wandering is also another form of reaction of the marginalized to their unenviable social situation.

3.2 Wandering in *The Professor*

Wandering is a major theme in the Brontë sisters' novels. From a new historicist point of view, the predominance of this theme can be explained by the experiences of these three writers. The issue has, in fact, much to do with the history of their family. Their father, Patrick Brontë, has Irish origins. He immigrated to England for professional, but

mainly security reasons. In Ireland, he lived with his parents in a difficult context due to the conflict between Catholics and Protestants. Born from a Protestant father and a Catholic mother, he was constantly attacked by his peers when he was young. They called him “mongrel Pat” or “Pat the papish” (Wright 227). He experienced marginality from his early age but he managed to live and grow safely until he became a pastor. However, it was difficult for him to serve in his country. He did not hesitate to accept the offer to go and work in England. As a pastor, he constantly moved with his family to the parishes where he was posted. His children were born in Hartshead or Thornton. That seems to have an impact on the girls' fictions with numerous travels, long walks through wide open spaces like the moors, adventures, migrations from the countryside to the city, or from the South to the North, etc.

The expression of wandering can plainly be read through William or Frances in *The Professor*. The characters' trips to Belgium are reminiscent of Charlotte's stay at the Hegger Boarding School in Brussels. She went there with her sister Emily. Patrick wanted them to study for six months but Charlotte had the idea of staying there to find work, “Before our half year in Brussels is completed, you and I will have to seek employment abroad.” (qtd by Reef 56) She was very ambitious like her father and imprinted this mark to her marginalised characters. To achieve their ambitions, William did not hesitate to involve in wandering.

In the novel, the main explanation for wandering seems to be the socio-economic situation which has created precariousness within many families. Most wanderers are marginalised people in search of a solution to their material, financial and sometimes psychological problems. Wandering is therapeutic; even if it is ‘very risky’, as Olivier Douville says, it remains for François Chobeaux, the solution they have found to escape their psychological, intimate horrors and to protect themselves from the ‘ça’³ In the novels under study, the wandering characters aim to reconquer or gain a social status.

William is comparable to Jane in *The Professor*. He is involved in wandering because his parents persecute him by trying to impose their ideology. They all disown him. He gets into a family breakdown and cannot find work, but he does not despair. He dares to face poverty and all other forms of suffering. It is a harsh experience of marginality. As D. Laberge and S. Roy support, the most commonly forms associated with social marginalisation and exclusion generally relate to the world of poverty. William's exclusion

³ Entretien N°3 François CHOBEAUX Annexe 1-3. ‘la solution qu’ils ont trouvée pour fuir leurs horreurs psychologiques, intimes et pour se protéger de ça.’

actually begins when his maternal uncles, Lord Tynedale, and the honourable John Seacombe seek to influence the choice of his future profession. The former wants him to be a pastor and the latter to marry one of his daughters. The young man declines all these offers. From that time, they let him know that he must make his own way. He refers to his brother Edward who agrees to recruit him into his company. Unfortunately, he removes him from the position shortly after for family reasons.

William finds himself alone, helpless and with no support in a society where one can easily succumb to the temptation of deviance. Aware of his social vulnerability, he avoids vice by keeping on his quest for a job. He actually believes, like Jane, that it is the only way to regain centrality and dispel marginality. Shuttleworth (28) notices that “both Jane and Crimsworth make their way by hard work, thus avoiding the taint of upper-class idleness, and the overt money-grubbing of trade. (28)

William dreams about investing in business, to follow in his father's steps as he promised his uncles. They had a real contempt for that man because he was a merchant and of a lower rank. He eventually decides to go to Belgium to explore another path to success. Travelling is the usual practice for marginalised characters to escape from isolation. Yorke Hunsden helped him when he left his brother's company by recommending him to a school principal in Belgium for a teaching position. Unfortunately, after a few months, he has problems with the headmistress linked to jealousy. He freely chooses to leave the school. Consequently, he begins to believe that he was born to live in wandering and die in poverty and contempt. (C. Brontë, *The Professor* 298).

In the story, Charlotte illustrates moments of turmoil in this character's life. Unlike Jane, William shows restraint and uses diplomacy in case of provocation. Marginality and wandering seem to reorient his life but to the positive direction. He meets Mr Vandenhuten who resolutely leads him to the way of success and Frances, his future wife. He manages to build his own school, make his fortune and regain centrality.

William displays great courage by daring to meet and trust unknown people from different cultures, despite all the risks inherent in living in exile, as a refugee or an immigrant. He might have been rejected or a victim of xenophobia or any other forms of discrimination. He seems to focus on the issues of his quest. Indeed, William has got landmarks. As Claudio Bolzman says about wandering, people are in fact part of a subculture that gives access to the codes necessary to survive in the world of marginality.⁴

He tries to get away from the environment that rejected him in order to meet the challenge for survival and social identity.

In *The Professor*, the destinies of two wanderers have crossed. William and Frances who share the same passion for teaching fall in true love after recovering each from repetitive emotional frustrations. Wandering is beneficial in view of the positive results it brings in the marginalised people's lives. Most of them have managed to reconcile with themselves and with society.

3.3 Social ostracism in *Wuthering Heights*

In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily portrays characters belonging to different classes the relationships of which is marked by exploitation and subjugation. The upper classes exercise almost a tyrannical power over the lower ones. Characters like Heathcliff find this situation so unbearable that they have decided to escape from this society

The experience of marginality is part of what makes Heathcliff an important character in Emily's story. Even when he disappears from the *Wuthering Heights* scene, he continues to be feared by Cathy, Edgar or Hindley. They are aware that he will return and the most worrying thing is that they cannot know the moment and his new intentions. Given the conditions of his departure, they naturally expect revenge on them, because of the role they have played in his exclusion since the death of Mr Earnshaw. Heathcliff also seems to understand that the first catalyst for his marginalisation and exclusion remains the changing English society. His marginality can be interpreted as the reverse or failure of integration, assimilation or social integration (Laberge and Roy 5).

Heathcliff receives the same treatment as Mr Earnshaw's children. The family adopts him, but his integration is never complete despite all the advantages. He is not surprised when Hindley, one of Mr Earnshaw's children, insists that all the privileges should be taken away from him. He immediately falls into a total state of relational isolation (Rioux 635). Readers are eager to know if Emily will create a surprise by making him into a marginalised character who brings misfortune to society, or one who tries to deliver it from evils (Rioux 635). His long absence from the story cannot but let us expect to see a revengeful marginal person tending towards evil upon his return. Indeed, he had gradually and discreetly shifted from a human to a monstrous character. As Huxley (159) puts it, a person different is inevitably alone and is liable to treated abominably.

The harsh experience of marginality makes Heathcliff better realise the need to react to the aristocracy

dominated society which has failed to support and protect him. The only way to find a place in that society is to make a fortune. Far from being an isolated case, Heathcliff lives every day, like many other people or groups, with that injustice. Unsurprisingly, the upper classes act as real oppressors, “our august aristocracy” with its “footprints... see how they walk in blood, crushing hearts as they walk” (C. Brontë, *The Professor* 332). These terms clearly express the cruelty of the system that William complains about in *The Professor*, which has greatly contributed to establishing the phenomenon of marginality. And yet, these classes only exist thanks to the work of industrial or agricultural workers, servants and all the lower social categories at their service. They have allowed them to build their wealth. Victor Hugo (79), referring to patriarchy and aristocracy in England, writes that it is from the hell of the poor that the paradise of the rich is made. That is the type of society Heathcliff wants to fight.

Heathcliff's life changes after Mr Earnshaw's death particularly when Hindley orders him to distance from his sister Catherine because he is neither a rich young man nor a young man of good birth. Heathcliff refuses to abdicate in view of all that she represents to him, beyond the emotional aspect. The girl seems to represent centrality to him, which is his main reason for living i.e achieving his dream of social ascension. Unfortunately, he is made to give up. That confirms his definitive exclusion from the childhood kingdom he built with Catherine through their ramblings in the moors when they were young. Indeed, what disturbs him most is less Hindley or Edgar's attitude than Catherine's about-face. By agreeing to marry Edgar, she is made to accept the social argument supported by her brother and her cousins. So, the dream kingdom of the innocent past years becomes a kingdom of nightmares and a prison. Heathcliff loses his sovereignty.

To complete his marginalisation, Emily chooses to make Heathcliff disappear from the story for years. During this long absence, he lives on the fringes of society in absolute discretion. Emily does not give any information about his activity or the source of his fortune. It is as if Emily wanted to take him on a spiritual retreat in order to get him ready for his mission: to change this society that excludes and marginalises.

By falling back into marginality, he gives the impression of returning to square one. In fact, he arrives in this family as an outsider and leaves it, more ostracised than ever after years of dream. By withdrawing her unwavering support, Catherine inexorably pushes him down the path of exile. Heathcliff does not look so offended by what may appear to the reader as a misfortune. He considers that it is only a forced passage for anyone who intends to achieve

normality or settle at the centre of this society where people are obsessed by fortune. Travelling offers opportunities for getting money, a job or even marriage. When Heathcliff returns from his trip, he becomes rich and ready for the mission. Armstrong (96) explains how he manages to control society thanks to his fortune:

A competitive principle rooted in the accumulation of capital provides the transforming agency that moves Heathcliff from the margins of society to its very center. Once there, he displays all the vices that have accompanied political power, the Lintons' sophistication, their veneer of civility, as well as the Earnshaws' brutality. It is money alone that empowers him to infiltrate the timeless institutions of marriage, inheritance, and property ownership and to shape these institutions to serve his own interests. Upon gaining possession of both the Heights and the Grange, Heathcliff initiates a new form of tyranny that undoes all former systems of kinship and erases the boundaries between class as well as between family lines.

Through his control over Heights, and Grange, Heathcliff lays the foundations of a new order characterised by the social tyranny he steps up and conducts alone. He still remains locked in his marginality, with the only difference that he moves from the status of an oppressed to that of an oppressor. He becomes rather dangerous because of his thirst for revenge which consumes and makes him more and more violent and nearly inhumane. All the acts he carries out aim at taking people hostage and stripping them of their property. Armstrong (108) specifies that the new master and tyrant “ends up leading an imprisoned inner existence, one epitomised in the plot of his unceasing unrest in the last half of the novel”.

The quest for power and domination never leaves Heathcliff, even after defeating all his adversaries. He eventually becomes too obsessed that even by the end of his life, he chooses to stay alone at the climax of marginality. He does not want to accept any suggestion to improve his worsening health condition. He stays away from any human presence until death.

IV. CONCLUSION

Marginality is an obvious reality in 19th-century English society. The reading of the Brontës' novels in the

light of New Historicism, Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Feminism has helped better identify the causes, manifestations, consequences and functions of marginality. The patriarchal and capitalist mentality of 19th-century England - that fosters individualism, selfishness and even malice - is the main underpinning of this social evil. The main aim of marginality is to consolidate the social position of the dominant party, which is only possible if he/she succeeds, through humiliation of all kinds, in objectifying the weaker party. This evil affects various categories of people including women, old maids, and domestic workers who struggle everyday not to stay on the margins. As Takahashi (1) underlines, “the ultimate aim of the central figures of Brontë was to become insiders in the real sense”. This struggle for recognition is expressed in a variety of ways, such as violence, exile, the stubborn search for work, wandering, self-imposed isolation, etc.

At first glance, we can say that the results of the liberation struggle led by marginalised groups generally seem mixed. It is neither completely a success nor completely a failure. Two examples are enough to illustrate this fact. These are the fate of Jane Eyre in Charlotte's eponymous novel, and Lucy, the heroine of her third novel, *Villette*. Indeed, Jane asserts women's rights but eventually settles for the Angel in the House withdrawn in gloomy Ferndean; Lucy is quiet and unassertive, but eventually fulfills her dream of founding a school, and remains single for the rest of her life (Takahashi 5). However, if we take a closer look at the wave of multi-faceted revolt that unfolds in the Brontës' novels, we can easily imagine the imminent collapse of the discriminatory social system and the transition of outcast figures from a position of social marginality to confirmed membership of the gentry (Shuttleworth 8). In this regard, the Brontës' novels herald a new era of freedom for the oppressed trapped in an iniquitous social system.

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