

## A Study of Hysteria and Gender Culture in *Wuthering Heights*

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### Abstract

Since ancient times, hysteria has been recognized as a woman's uterine lesion or a disease related to the possession of evil spirits. In Victoria era, hysteria was regarded as female malady connected to psychological symptoms related to a woman's failure to obey the prescribed social gender norms or societal gender images. In present society, women also suffer from hysteria because of the pressure from prescribed gender or patriarchal norms. Modern social studies have re-examined the symptoms of hysteria in Victorian period and determined that this term can be a subconscious or unconscious attempt to fight against oppressive gender expectations. To see how Victorian women retreated into a world of insanity, using hysteria to release their anger or anxiety, this study uses Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* as an example of hysteria to see how she fights against the Victorian cultural structure in the perspectives of gender and social class, and the interactive effects of these dimensions. The study applies the theories and criticisms of gender psychology, gender criticism, and gendered binary opposition to analyze the symptoms of female hysteria in literature and to demonstrate how Catherine, forced to conform to prescribed gender images, uses hysteria as a defense mechanism to express her anger toward gender subjectivity; it also aims to further deconstruct the androcentric society and discourses based on gender binary opposition. However, regrettably, realizing that it is futile to fight against the Victorian social norms, Catherine finally passes away after giving birth, refusing to take the prescribed gender role.

**Keywords:** Gender Awareness; Gender Binary Opposition; Gender Oppression; Gender Study; Hysteria.

In The word "hysteria" originates from the Greek word for uterus, meaning "of the womb," and was initially defined as a neurotic condition relating to women. In Greek medicine, women were afflicted with hysteria, that is, possessing excessive emotion, because of a wandering womb or a dysfunction of their womb (Nasio, 1998). Hence, during the Ancient Greek period, hysteria was classified as a female

genital disease. In medieval times, hysterical patients, especially women, were seen as being possessed or haunted by witches or demons. In modern medicine, however, hysteria is related to a neurological or mental illness.

Hysteria refers to a mental disorder or inappropriate behavior demonstrating excessive or uncontrollable emotion, such as fear or panic. Although men also suffer from hysteria,

mainly, the condition is attributable to women, especially among middle- and upper-class women aged fifteen to forty (Ehrenreich and English, 2005). Whether hysteria is the result of uterine lesions, an evil spirit, or a mental illness, it seems that, since ancient times, it has been identified as a female-specific disease, though its exact causes have never been verified. The common hysteria symptoms are fragility, headache, nervousness, depression, and fatigue. According to Mitchell (1878), an American physician and nerve specialist, those afflicted with female hysteria should take a “rest cure,” lying in bed for the majority of the time and eating plenty of food. In addition, they should not leave their bed or do household duties without a doctor’s approval (Smith-Rosenberg, 1975).

However, research on gender psychology has criticized the traditional psychoanalytic theory of hysteria, declaring that the traditional, socially constructed mechanism is male dominated; indeed, men are expected to discipline women under the patriarchal system (Jones, 1993). Modern social studies have re-examined the symptoms of hysteria and determined that female hysteria, as well as mental illness, can be connected to psychological symptoms related to a woman’s failure to obey the prescribed social gender norms or adhere to traditional gender images. Caminero-Santangelo (1998) declared that those afflicted with hysteria are unable to express themselves with their mouth and instead use their body to “speak out.”

Hence, hysteria may be a subconscious or unconscious, though always ineffective, attempt to fight against oppressive gender expectations. In order to escape the pressure of prescribed gender norms or patriarchal norms, women may retreat into a world of insanity, using hysteria to release their anger or anxiety. Moreover, they may use hysteria to represent their gender subjectivity and awareness, thereby receiving temporary relief from the patriarchal hegemony. In order to further illustrate how hysteria fights against

the existing culture structure, this study uses *Wuthering Heights* to examine hysteria in literature from the perspectives of gender and social class, as well as the interactive effects of these dimensions.

### **Method**

To achieve the aforementioned goals, theories and criticisms regarding the study of gender psychology, gender criticism, and gender culture are applied in order to analyze the symptoms of female hysteria and to demonstrate how Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*, being ignored or oppressed by the prescribed gender norms in the social and family stratum, uses female hysteria to express her own gender subjectivity and to further deconstruct the prescribed gender norms and gender discourses. While intentionally and literally criticizing the textual fabrics in *Wuthering Heights*, the study intends to raise readers’ awareness of the fact that socially constructed gender norms result in gender inequality.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### ***Gender Culture and Marriage in the Nineteenth-Century Victorian Period***

Based on the social role theory, which places different gender expectations and social demands upon men and women, both must act differently in an attempt to conform to the gender stereotypes placed upon them (Cheypator-Thomson, You, & Hardin, 2000; Cook & Cusack, 2010). For example, based on the prescribed gender norms, women should engage in traditionally defined feminine behaviors: they should show nurturing, subordinate, caring, and concerning behavior toward others. Given these feminine qualities, the tasks of caring for the young and aged would fall into the hands of women. Men, in contrast, based on gender norms, should engage in traditionally defined male behaviors, such as bravery, assertiveness, and leadership. Hence, the task of supporting and protecting the family would fall into the hands of men.

In order to support the family, compared with women, men are inclined to work outside of the home (Vincke, 2004; Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003).

Because the existing gender norms are so rigid, what is known as gender culture has been established. Sexual or gender identities have been constructed based on the prescribed gender norms under the patriarchal system; hence, naturally, the creation and interpretation of literary works have been influenced by these norms as well (Grodén & Kreiswirth, 2004). Men or women who dare to transgress the gender-prescribed border may risk invoking public anger and social penalties (Canada & Pringle, 1995). The breaking, or transgression, of the existing gender norms may also influence people's ability to communicate effectively within the existing patriarchal system.

Victorian culture and society was unkind to married women; however, the culture also brought pressure to unmarried women and pushed them into marriage. Indeed, as Burstyn (1980) noted, by the time society became more industrialized, even unmarried Victorian women had been marginalized and left out of the workforce and work sectors. Hence, with no hope for financial independence, they sought economic support and shelter through marriage, even if it meant conceding some of their rights to their husbands, the patriarchs. In the nineteenth-century Victorian period, women were subjugated by their husbands, who served as the head and authority of the household. As a wife, a woman's identity as a free and independent individual was dissolved (Basch, 1974). In fact, once they were promised to wed, women could no longer dispose of or transfer their own property without their fiancé's consent; furthermore, she herself became the property of her fiancé (Perkin, 1989). Clearly, she was entirely at the mercy of her husband, whose responsibility it was to find economic support and shelter for them (Basch, 1974). Because of the legislation at that time, Victorian women could not even look to the law to attain independence from

their husbands in the case of domestic violence (Shanley, 1989). Moreover, with household duties falling on their shoulders, they had no chance to seek independence via an occupation, much less pursue a career. As a result, under the Victorian cultural norms, they were disciplined to be submissive and subjugated by the patriarchal system, all for the stability of the Victorian family: they were needed to provide care to their husbands, households, and children. With their freedom and mobility being constantly supervised by their husbands, women gradually lost their gender subjectivity and identity.

### ***Masquerade and Mimicry as Female Subjectivity***

Irigaray (1990) asserted that women do have a subjective existence, but the operation of the patriarchal system for thousands of years has long erased the opportunity for women to declare their subjective existence. Hence, to survive in patriarchal society, women have adopted a disguise, via mimicry and masquerade, as an alternative way to find succor.

Mimicry, as with hysteria, may be used as a defensive mechanism by women to resist patriarchy and regain their gender subjectivity, instead of passively being submissive to the patriarchal culture. As Irigaray (1990) stated, while using mimicry as a defensive mechanism, women can raise their status by deliberately expressing their feminine characteristics to affirm their identity, instead of being passively subordinate to the patriarchal system. That is, women may use mimicry and masquerade to disguise themselves in order to survive in the system, but somehow regain part of their lost voice within the system. For instance, in *Wuthering Heights*, Ms. Dean states that "in play, she [Catherine] liked exceedingly, to act the little mistress; using her hands freely, and commanding her companions" (Brontë, p. 30). As shown, Catherine is not a submissive woman, but a woman inclined to claim her subjectivity. While using mimicry as a means

to display her feminine subjectivity, Catherine is deliberately adopting a female role and expressing her subjectivity in the social pattern. Moreover, she mimics men's language in order to oppose patriarchal figures, symbolized by her father. While Catherine's father, Mr Earnshaw, scolds her for her disobedience and for not living up to the ideals of femininity, saying "Why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?" Catherine, instead of being submissive, mimics her father, saying, "Why cannot you always be a good man, father?" (Brontë, p. 31). By mimicking the phallogocentric language, Catherine adopts a role that is equivalent to the patriarchal man's. However, aware that she has irritated her father, she masquerades herself as a submissive daughter, using her femininity to escape from being punished: she soothes her father's anger by kissing his hand and saying that "she would sing him to sleep. She began singing very low, till his fingers dropped from hers, and his head sank on his breast" (Brontë, p. 31).

In addition, while staying at the Lintons of the Thrushcross Grange for five weeks as the result of a dog bite, with no intention of showing the Lintons her wild side, being "ashamed of being rude," Catherine disguises herself, imposing "unwittingly on the old lady and gentleman by her ingenious cordiality" (Brontë, p. 47), hence winning "the admiration of Isabella, and the heart and soul of her brother [Edgar]" (Brontë, p. 47). During her childhood, Catherine defied social conventions, always rambling with Heathcliff at the moor. However, after being accidentally pulled into Thrushcross Grange, Catherine, once a "wild, wicked slip" (Brontë, p. 30) learns how to act as, or actually, masquerade as, a young lady. Indeed, Catherine successfully uses masquerade and mimicry as a political weapon to attain her female subjectivity and identity in a phallogocentric society. As Irigaray (1990) stated, through mimicry and masquerade, women can wear a mask to fight against the social norms, restore their identity, and diminish the burden of being a woman.

### ***Being Disciplined to Adopt Victorian Social Norms***

Throughout her childhood, Catherine has been managing to live freely and escape patriarchal control. The moor was the site of Catherine and Heathcliff's rambling outdoor adventures when her father, old Earnshaw, was the head of Wuthering Heights. However, once Old Earnshaw passes away and his brother, Hindley, takes over the Heights, Catherine becomes marginalized, though not mistreated, by her brother Hindley. Hence, in order to escape her original family, to escape the oppression of her brother, Catherine must acquire a husband, thereby securing financial support and shelter for herself.

Compared with Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange, with its luxurious decorations, symbolizes a certain economic standing and social class in Victorian society. When Heathcliff and Catherine escape from Wuthering Heights to wander about at liberty, they accidentally glimpse the Grange and think they are in heaven:

—ah! it was beautiful—a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers. Old Mr. and Mrs. Linton were not there; Edgar and his sisters had it entirely to themselves. Shouldn't they have been happy? We should have thought ourselves in heaven! (Brontë, p. 34)

That same night, Catherine is bitten by the dog and is taken to the Grange. A maid brings her "a basin of warm water" to wash her feet, dries and combs "her beautiful hair," offers her "a pair of enormous slippers" to wear, and then wheels her to the fireplace (Brontë, p. 36). During her five-week stay at the Grange, Catherine imbues herself with the qualities of the Victorian culture surrounding her; hence, she gradually becomes accustomed to customary Victorian women:

The mistress visited her often, in the interval, and commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery [...]. so that, instead of a wild, hatless

little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless, there lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in. (Brontë, 55)

As Gilbert & Gubar (2000) noted, being showered with the luxuries of an upper-class family at the Grange, a symbol of Victorian hierarchical culture, Catherine, gradually losing her agency and independence, has also been patronized and castrated by the Victorian social norms; hence, she becomes disciplined as a desirable Victorian woman, the so-called house angel. By the time she returns home, she has been totally disciplined as a typical restricted Victorian woman. In fact, Hindley exclaims amazingly, “Why, Cathy, you are quite a beauty! I should scarcely have known you: you look like a lady now” (Brontë, p. 37).

Although she grew up with Heathcliff and they share a desire for nature, after the death of her father and after being marginalized by Hindley, Catherine yearns to escape her oppression and to help Heathcliff—and the only way she can gain prestige and social status is by marrying up, that is, marrying a man who can offer her financial support. That is why Catherine chooses to marry Edgar, not Heathcliff: she seeks Edgar’s high social class and economic standing and fails to consider that a marriage not based on love, but on wealth and a higher social class, would only lead to destruction.

Even though Catherine loves Heathcliff far more than Edgar or even herself, she fails to resist the pressure of Victorian social conventions. Instead, she surrenders herself to the social class and norms of that time, believing that marrying Heathcliff would detract from her identity:

Nelly, I see now you think me a selfish wretch; but did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? whereas, if I marry Linton I can aid Heathcliff to rise, and place him out of my brother’s power. (Brontë, p. 59)

Aware of the limitations imposed

on her feminine body, Catherine mimics domestic Victorian women’s feminine characteristics and masquerades to meet the expectation of Victorian social norms. However, though willing to marry Edgar, unlike Victorian domestic women, Catherine harbors an optimistic but unrealistic goal, to use her husband’s money to help Heathcliff, without knowing that, upon her marriage, she must concede her rights and autonomy to her husband, Edgar, under the Victorian patriarchal social norms. That is why Nellie, the housekeeper at Wuthering Heights, disagrees with Catherine’s optimistic thinking and advises her: “With your husband’s money, Miss Catherine?” “You’ll find him not so pliable as you calculate upon: and, though I’m hardly a judge, I think that’s the worst motive you’ve given yet for being the wife of young Linton.” (Brontë, p. 59). However, despite having been accused of being immoral, in order to gain respect, to be “the greatest woman of the neighbourhood,” and to “be proud of having such a husband” (Brontë, p. 56), Catherine accepts Edgar’s proposal, thus breaking Heathcliff’s heart and shattering her female subjectivity.

In the Victorian era, Catherine’s choice to marry Edgar Linton, a man with wealth and social status, was in line with the value judgment of the society. Unfortunately, Catherine has no idea that, to gain a marriage founded on wealth and social status, she must sacrifice her freedom and independence. Once the marriage is contracted, she is doomed to be subordinate to her husband and, hence, lose her female subjectivity forever. In fact, the fact that the marriage is not based on mutual affection finally causes Catherine’s mental breakdown; she cannot live with the betrayal of her soul and her soulmate, Heathcliff.

### ***Convenience Marriage versus Soulmate Marriage***

Blackstone (1765) commented that a married woman and man are regarded as one person under the law; that is, once they marry,

her independence or self-identity is suspended; instead, she is subjugated by or subordinate to the husband, who offers shelter and protection for his woman. Moreover, being feminine, the wife is also supposed to be weak and passive; thus, she is expected to subordinate herself and please her husband. As Wollstonecraft (1975) mentioned, it is the duty of Victorian women to make themselves agreeable to their husbands—their masters. Married to a woman with no independent identity, the husband acts as an authoritative figure of the household and the wife's supervisor (Basch, 1974).

Catherine and Edgar's marriage, not based on romantic love, reveals the typical Victorian courtship and a marriage of convenience, which maintains the strict Victorian social hierarchy (Phegley, 2012); in other words, theirs is a marriage formed not for love and commitment, but for personal gain or for pragmatic reasons. Hence, in order to maintain the stability of the marriage of convenience, men, as the head of the household, are inclined to dominate and subordinate women, without taking their desires and feelings into consideration.

Compared with marriages of convenience, which use domination or intimidation to enforce the stability of the husband-and-wife relationship (Wiese, 2015), soulmate marriages are more well balanced, with stronger bonds between husband and wife, as each serves as an equal partner in the marriage. According to Orfali (2011), soulmates have a stronger bond with each other, and they may feel that their lives are meaningful and complete. Also, when they are distressed, they can talk to their soulmates and derive a sense of relief and security from them (Orfali, 2011). Soulmate marriages share the following characteristics: a drive to have a close connection with each other, with separation causing pain; mutual understanding, with no intention of deception or manipulation; a sense of relief, comfort, security, or even satisfaction from each other; and confidence that their bond will last forever, regardless

of time, distance, or separation (Badame & Diamond, 2022). In childhood, Catherine and her companion Heathcliff used to run away from the patriarchal household to ramble at the moors and breathe free air. As Gilbert and Gubar (2000) mentioned, Heathcliff is the "metaphorical whip," shaping Catherine's female subjectivity and her happiness, for he urges Catherine to go outdoors and run away to the moors—in essence, to run away from the male domination of the Heights, first through her father, Old Earnshaw, and then her brother, Hindley. Catherine and Heathcliff, as soulmates, see themselves in each other (Carroll, 2011). Heathcliff regards Catherine as his soul, saying, "Oh, God! it is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!" (Brontë, p. 122). Catherine also considers Heathcliff her other self (Ahmed, 2010), declaring that

'... I cannot express it; but surely you and everybody have a notion that there is or should be an existence of yours beyond you. What were the use of my creation, if I were entirely contained here? My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem a part of it.—My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our separation again: it is impracticable; and—' (Brontë, p. 59-60)

Catherine and Heathcliff, as soulmates, care about each other because of the similarities between them, rather than because of what the other person has. Catherine even goes so far as to declare that "I am Heathcliff!" (Brontë, p. 60). If she and Heathcliff married, their marriage would become the type of soulmate marriage in which they both could help each other expel loneliness and rebel

against the male domination at Wuthering Heights (Knobel, 2010). However, Catherine's visit to the Grange leads to her discipline as an idealized Victorian woman; it also leads to the end of her girlhood and freedom. Once she slides into the "slippers" (Brontë, p. 36), Catherine, with the cultivation of manners, is disciplined to fit the mold of the Victorian genteel woman (Newman, 2007). Gradually, having been confined and restricted to the domestic life and indoor leisure activities of the Grange, she has decimated her female identity and subjectivity, at least until the reappearance of Heathcliff, which causes her tension between who she is and who she is expected to be.

#### ***Identity Confusion: Tension between Who You Are & What You Are Expected to Be***

Considering her spiritual attachment to Heathcliff, it is no wonder that, when Catherine accepts Edgar's proposal, she feels uneasy, exclaiming "in an irritated tone; chafing her hands together, and frowning" (Brontë, p. 56). In accordance with Victorian social and cultural norms, Catherine chooses to marry Edgar because of his high social status. Nevertheless, she can sense an obstacle, as she responds, "Here! and here! . . . in whichever place the soul lives. In my soul and in my heart, I'm convinced I'm wrong!" (Brontë, p. 57). While physically rubbing her hands, she somehow reveals her tension (Ahmed, 2010), feeling torn between being her natural self, symbolized by Heathcliff, or obeying the Victorian social and cultural norms, symbolized by Edgar. In other words, Catherine is torn between who she should want to be and who she is expected to be, as shown by the names scratched on the ledge by the windowsill:

This writing, however, was nothing but a name repeated in all kinds of characters, large and small—Catherine Earnshaw, here and there varied to Catherine Heathcliff, and then again to Catherine Linton. (Brontë, p. 14)

Catherine has difficulty choosing whom she wants to marry and who she wants to be, as shown when she carves the names of *Catherine Earnshaw*, *Catherine Heathcliff*, and

*Catherine Linton* (Moeller, 2015).

The prescribed gender norms may solidify the stability of the so-called patriarchy system, in which men should demonstrate their assertiveness, ambition, or domination, while women should demonstrate their submissiveness, obedience, and carefulness (Cook & Cusack, 2010). However, when forced to conform to the prescribed gender norms imposed on them, women may doubt the existing gender-socialization patterns in the patriarchal system and become susceptible to the pressure of transgressing the prescribed gender border. The torture and pressure of attempting to maintain their gender images may also lead them to experience mental instability, illness, or even madness or hysteria (Wood, 2017).

As a young girl, Catherine defied social expectations and spent time rambling, with Heathcliff, at the moors, a free, wild, and untamed place associated with nature; these ventures in some degree shape her independent identity and female subjectivity (Moeller, 2015). However, her marriage and move into the Grange separate her from the moors and Heathcliff, her sole connection to nature. Hence, after being restricted in a domestic sphere of the Grange for seven years, when she finally sees Heathcliff again, she begins to reflect upon her subjugation and oppression in the marriage mechanism. Feeling imprisoned at the Grange, in hysteria, she yearns to live a free, uninhibited life:

Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! Why am I so changed? why does my blood rush into a hell of tumult at a few words? I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills. (Brontë, p. 92)

According to Ahmed (2010), those complying with social norms may experience tension between who they are and who they are expected to be. Those failing to dissolve the tension may become frustrated, with increasingly restless movements of their bodies, which in turn, reinforces their mental distress.

Aware that Heathcliff, as her soulmate and source of happiness, has returned, Catherine glimpses him and, contrary to social norms, flies “to embrace him,” giving him “seven or eight kisses on his cheek” (Brontë, p. 38). However, once her husband forces her to choose between Heathcliff, a person she loves more than herself, and him, a person conventionalized through social norms, she is torn between who she really is (symbolized by Heathcliff) and who she is expected to be (symbolized by Edgar). With no resolution, Catherine finally succumbs to a nervous breakdown and, then, hysteria.

***Hysteria as the Emancipation of Female Subjectivity in Phallogentric Social Norms***

Irigaray (1992) blamed women’s hysterical symptoms on their loss of female subjectivity and their marginalized position in conventional patriarchal norms, which can never be healed if they are not given the space to express themselves and reclaim their female subjectivity. Hence, the hysterical syndrome can be interpreted as a rebellion against the patriarchal demand of emotional control and femininity. Showalter (1985) also revealed that women’s hysteria has resulted from their confining social roles as daughters, wives, and mothers amid phallogentric social norms. As women have been characterized as unnatural and irrational (Showalter, 1985), in order to express the fury of the phallogentric culture, women may use hysteria, the extreme of feminine qualities, as a subtle subversion to undermine the phallic language of the symbolic patriarchal hegemony. Hence, hysteria becomes a form of anticomunication in the patriarchal language and culture, as, according to Cixous (Cixous, 1976), hysteria is being used as irrationality to protest against the so-called rationality of the patriarchal system. Namely, being imprisoned in the nineteenth-century household, as Gilbert and Gubar (2000) mentioned, the hysterical voice, the feminine of the feminine, can be taken as a means for women to intentionally

or unintentionally express themselves within the patriarchal discourse, without violating patriarchal conventional norms.

After Catherine marries Edgar and moves into the Grange, Heathcliff reappears. At that point, she begins to realize that she has been figuratively imprisoned at the Grange for seven years. She points out that her marrying into Thrushcross Grange against her will makes her an “exile” from her former world, that is, Wuthering Heights. This awareness causes her trauma and hysteria because she finally realizes that her marriage to Edgar means that she is “the wife of a stranger: an exile, and outcast” from her world (Brontë, p. 92). She, with Heathcliff, is eager to return to the moors, a space that allows her physical and spiritual freedom without being constrained within the domestic space at the Grange as a good wife defined by the rooted social norms. However, her optimistic but unrealistic notion of having both Heathcliff and Edgar at the same time is totally shattered by her husband, saying,

‘Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be my friend and his at the same time; and I absolutely require to know which you choose.’  
(Brontë, p. 86)

Knowing the impossibility of returning to the moors, her nature, and her girlhood, Catherine eagerly opens her bedroom window to take one more breath of the fresh air wafting from the moors, as she says to Nelly bitterly, “‘Oh, if I were but in my own bed in the old house! . . . And that wind sounding in the firs by the lattice. Do let me feel it—it comes straight down the moor—do let me have one breath!’” (Brontë, p. 91).

As Caminero-Santangelo (1998) mentioned, those afflicted with hysteria are unable to verbally express themselves; hence, they use their body to “speak out” instead, intending to fight against oppressive gender expectations. Aware that her female subjectivity has been depleted and that it is impossible to have both Edgar (symbolizing conventional social norms) as her husband and Heathcliff (symbolizing nature) as her friend,



Catherine refuses to maintain the charade of an ideal domestic woman in the Victorian period; in hysteria, after giving birth to a baby girl, she passes away; in a way, through this action, she is refusing to adopt the social role of mother. This is her final escape from the constraint of conventional social roles.

Catherine uses hysteria, a stereotypical feminine characteristic taken to the extremes, as a way to challenge patriarchal discourse (Hooper, 2019) and the gendered social norms of daughters, wives, and mothers in Victorian patriarchal culture. As Mitchell (2000) indicated, in contrast to the phallogocentric language, hysteria, a representation of women's language, can be considered a resistant and subversive discourse about rebelling against oppression and subjugation by the patriarchy of the nineteenth-century Victorian period. Frantic and delirious with hysteria, Catherine is under the illusion that she has returned to her bedroom at Wuthering Heights, a place where she can be herself and maintain her female subjectivity.

'Oh, dear! I thought I was at home . . . I thought I was lying in my chamber at Wuthering Heights. Because I'm weak, my brain got confused, and I screamed unconsciously. Don't say anything; but stay with me. I dread sleeping; my dreams appal me.' (Brontë, p. 91)

Realizing that there is no point in fighting against the Victorian social norms, in her hysteria, Catherine is trapped by memories as she ponders another past world, exclaiming that she wishes that she could be a girl again. As Saarnisalo (2020) implied, Catherine's dreams about returning to Wuthering Heights indicates her aspiration to regain her freedom, to escape from the constraints of marriage, and to leave her unfamiliar environment.

## Conclusion

In Victorian patriarchal society, women's value depended on their social roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, especially their ability to bear children. They were restrained by patriarchal social norms, with their feminine characteristics always being examined and

regulated by strict moral standards. If they dared to violate the gendered social norms, they would be strongly criticized, belittled, or even attacked and expelled. Hence, being forced into the prescribed gender image, with an aspiration to regain her liberty, Catherine chooses to use hysteria as a defense mechanism to express her anger and gender subjectivity in the patriarchal system. Though, regrettably, Catherine finally passes away after giving birth, she uses hysteria as a defensive mechanism to release her anger, anxiety, and rebellion against the prescribed gender norms.

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