In Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, written in 1846, she challenges the concepts and ideas found in traditional fairy tales. The traditional fairy tale includes a hero, damsel, villain, and a dilemma throughout the story. Older fairy tales, or folk tales, do not typically have a happy ending but simply have a conclusion, while more modern fairy tales have a happy ending to their story (Hintz 2). *Wuthering Heights* combines the two to make a different kind of fairy tale. The first half of the novel, focusing on Heathcliff and Catherine, evokes the older fairy tale, while the second half of the novel, which focuses on Cathy and Hareton, follows the contemporary version of a fairy tale. The novel follows the same story line as *Beauty and the Beast*, written a century prior to Brontë’s novel. They are similar in describing men with beastly features, and the female characters choosing to love the beast for their inner qualities rather than their outside appearances. After comparing these two stories and looking at the female characters and at how the men interact with the women, we can conclude that the fairy-tale theme becomes very prominent. Brontë uses *Beauty and the Beast* as a model for *Wuthering Heights* to challenge the role of men and women in society by representing the characters as beasts and damsels. The male characters’ beast-like attributes directly correlate with winning the love of a woman—or not. *Wuthering Heights* meets all the requirements of a fairy tale, while showing both sides of how the love of a woman can turn a man into a beast or save him from his beast-like characteristics.

**Defining Fairy Tales**

Fairy tales or folk tales have always been a way of building tradition, connecting people, and teaching lessons to children (Korneeva; Hintz; Lerer). Pier Paolo Picciucco wrote in his article “*Wuthering Heights* as a Fairy Tale,” that the villain “generally appears as a cruel, aggressive, greedy and wicked character with dark eyes . . . with a hair-covered body” (223). The physical description of villains is how we recognize them in the text; they typically resemble werewolves, ogres, or beasts, and are extremely unattractive and cruel.

The modern fairy tale usually has a happy ending, with the prince getting the princess and a happy conclusion to the story. Older stories, however, such as the Grimm Brothers’ stories, did not have this feature. The older fairy tales were used as lessons to teach children morals and codes of life (Lerer 1). For example, Hansel and Gretel are left in the woods and meet a witch who kidnaps them and tries to eat them. The moral of this story for children was to not put their trust in the wrong hands. In the original version of this story, the children were eaten, but in the more modern version they make it home safely. The differences between the tales shows that people’s intentions changed over time because the dangers children should fear changed as well. Victorian fairy tales differ from the Grimm Brothers’, too, in that they focus on courtship rituals between men and women.
They show women's perspective of being forced to love men they do not want and not having a choice in who they love. The fairy tale that will be compared to Victorian *Wuthering Heights* in this paper is the fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*. They both have similar fairy-tale elements, such as a beast or villain and a damsel with a dilemma both characters must overcome.

**Beauty and the Beast**

Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve wrote *Beauty and the Beast* in 1740. This fairy tale contains the essential fairy-tale elements discussed earlier, although Villeneuve presents a complex, ambiguous picture of both the stereotypical “beast” and “damsel.” Beauty, the protagonist, agrees to save her father by switching places with him in the beast’s castle to be his prisoner. The beast possesses the outward characteristics of a villain: he is hairy, dark, and gruesome looking. The dilemma centers on the fact that the beast only has a small window of time left before he remains a beast forever unless a woman comes to loves him. Beauty identifies the redeeming qualities within him and slowly begins falling in love with him, and eventually he turns back into a prince because of her love. Cristina Bacchilega states that Beauty’s choice to love the beast saves both herself and the beast, in addition to challenging society’s current gender roles:

> Beauty gains far more than most fairy tale heroines, active or not, because her submission and sacrifice transform another being, and more specifically, a sexually and/or socially threatening male. A virtuous, insightful, determined woman can change a beast into a person—such is Beauty’s power. Ancient and clearly related to our ability to produce new life, this belief in women’s transformative powers has been reduced within patriarchal ideology to the popular “kiss a frog” motif. (78)

Even though Beauty follows some of the constructs of the fairy-tale damsel—partly through her name because she is a beautiful, young woman, and because she’s fated to stay with the beast against her will—she also challenges it by choosing to love him, therefore transforming him from a beast. Tatiana Korneeva states in her article “Desire and Desirability in Villeneuve and Leprince de Beaumont’s ‘Beauty and the Beast’” that fairy tales turn women into objects of desire: “[They] also determine what kind of woman men should find desirable. Thus, the [fairy tale] genre implies two distinct aspects of desire, a desired object, and a subject who desires the object” (235). Beauty turns into the object of desire in the story, and the beast becomes the subject who desires her. By describing Beauty’s features and personality, Barbot de Villeneuve constructs gender stereotypes for the reader, reinforcing existing social norms about what makes women beautiful or attractive.

The story, however, complicates previous gender roles because Beauty is depicted as well read and knowledgeable, impressing the beast. At the time, women were not educated unless they taught themselves, and most women did not have access to resources to do so. Korneeva adds to this argument that one of Villeneuve’s goals of the fairy tale was to challenge the role of women and their education:

> Villeneuve [was] proposing an educational curriculum capable of producing a woman endowed with psychological depth rather than being merely a physically attractive surface, a woman who would excel in qualities that differentiate her in terms other than her family’s wealth and title. By displaying tireless concern for wellbeing of others, Villeneuve’s protagonist embodies moral rather than material values or idle sensuality. (245)

Beauty cares for the beast, along with his health and safety, which also makes her different from other women in fairy tales. The beast complicates the gender roles of male characters who are hideous and cruel suitors. Contrary to modern interpretations of the Beast which argue that his outside is made to reflect his inner personality defects, Villeneuve portrays the Beast as a kind and thoughtful character who just happens to be cursed; a depiction which runs counter to the nature of villains presented in fairy tales. The Beast shows kindness to Beauty by giving her permission to go home to see her father and assure him of her health. Through these representations of the two characters, Villeneuve questions the development of the fairy tale and proves that no character completely falls into the restrictions of their gender roles.

Beauty still has the choice of whether she will love the beast or not. This is interesting because women at this time did not typically have a choice of who they could love. Barbot de Villeneuve thus questions the way society controls women’s choices on courtship and love. The beast’s hideous nature can only be seen when viewing his outward appearances, but he
remains nice and caring to Beauty as she stays with him. She learns to love him for what she sees on the inside, and she hates to see him in pain from his curse, telling her sisters: “I would die to save him from pain. I assure you it is not his fault he is so ugly” (Barbot de Villeneuve 23). She talks to a prince in her dreams, and it becomes clear, even though the prince’s outward appearance is attractive, his inner qualities are ugly and grotesque. He tells her to leave the beast to die and asks why she should care if he dies. Barbot de Villeneuve does an excellent job in showing both sides in the fairy tale of women being forced into unwanted marriages, but the power of love in a relationship. Richard Conway defends this idea because Beauty chose the beast instead of the wealthy, handsome prince, arguing for Beauty’s “renunciation of wealth and her recognition that goals beyond mere social position should be the focus of a woman’s powers” (304). This means that by choosing the Beast and not the Prince, Beauty shows that women have the power to choose someone to love for more than money, beauty, and social position. By learning to love the beast for more than these qualities, Beauty breaks the restrictions fairy tales placed on female characters by choosing to stay and love the beast when he sets her free. Love does not have to equal beauty or social position for her. She learns to love the beast even though he is isolated, cruel, and grotesque but, with her love, he transforms from a beast to a man. Beauty’s decision to love the beast demonstrates the power of women’s choices in courtship rituals.

The characters and plot of Beauty and the Beast directly compares with those of Wuthering Heights. Brontë creates her novel as a revision of Beauty and the Beast to further explore the ambiguities present through the two different plots in Wuthering Heights. Carrie Hintz discusses the concept of revising fairy tales in her book Reading Children’s Literature, in which she explains that many fairy tales are revised from previous ones with a fresh element in the plot, setting, and/or characters (60). Wuthering Heights and Beauty and the Beast are very similar, making Wuthering Heights seem like a revision of Beauty and the Beast. The beast correlates to Heathcliff because they both represent villains with their cruel and gruesome nature. Beauty’s character reflects both Catherine and Cathy as the damsel in distress. In “Beautiful Maidens, Hideous Suitors: Victorian Fairy Tales and the Process of Civilization,” Laurence Talairach-Vielmas explores the way Victorian fairy tales were
written at the time, showing the ways Victorian writers reconfigured villains and damsels:

The ambiguous reading that the illustration offers, simultaneously suggesting Beauty’s wild nature and her relationship with the Beast, on the one hand, and the construction of the Victorian lady, fated to be objectified and sold in marriage, on the other, was developed further in Victorian tales figuring beautiful maidens and hideous suitors. (Talairach-Vielmas 8)

This adds to Brontë’s notion of the beast-like characters and damsels in *Wuthering Heights*. In the beginning of the novel, Heathcliff is almost saved from transforming into a monster by Catherine’s love; this is similar to the beast being saved from staying a monster because of Beauty’s love. Heathcliff and Catherine demonstrate what could have happened if Beauty had not fallen in love with the beast and had instead picked the prince – the rich, handsome man. Michael Popkin explains in his essay "*Wuthering Heights* and Its “Spirit”" that the difference between Catherine’s failure and Beauty and Cathy’s success comes with the immaturity and maturity of the characters. He determines that maturity equals human fulfillment because the characters discover that loving someone for more than money or looks creates a greater happiness (Popkin 3). He explains that Beauty grows while staying with the beast and discovers that viewing the beast as only a beast is immature, and she feels love and fulfillment when she chooses to love him completely (3). This directly correlates with Cathy’s love for Hareton because she must accept his beast-like features and imperfections before she can genuinely love him.

**Wuthering Heights: First Generation**

*Wuthering Heights* can be seen as a fairy tale by examining the two plots contained within the story. In the beginning of the novel, the first plot focuses on Heathcliff and Catherine. When Heathcliff, the beast or villain in the story, first arrives at Wuthering Heights, he looks like a “dirty, ragged, black-haired child,” and Mr. Earnshaw keeps referring to him by the pronoun “it” instead of “he” (Brontë 29). This is the first introduction to Heathcliff as a beast. He becomes a close companion to Catherine as a child, so the reader feels optimistic that Catherine’s love will save him from his beast-like characteristics, such as his cruel and untamed nature toward others. But once Catherine picks Edgar Linton to marry instead, Heathcliff loses all redeeming characteristics. As Catherine says:

> Tell her what Heathcliff is—an unclaimed creature, without refinement, without cultivation; an arid wilderness of furze and whinstone. ( . . . ) He’s not a rough diamond—a pearl-containing oyster of a rustic; he’s a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man. (79-80)

Heathcliff turns from a man into a beast because he lost the love of the one woman he cared about. Heathcliff and Catherine show that a man transforms for the worse when he loses the love of a woman. The two have an overtly complicated relationship that is more that just about love, and, as K. C. Belliappa says in her article, their relationship is “more than love, passion, commitment; it is a craving, a need of a more fundamental kind” (41). By growing up together, Catherine sees his redeeming qualities and loves Heathcliff. However, despite knowing his redeeming qualities, Catherine rejects them by choosing status over love. Nelly accuses Catherine of only loving Edgar because he is “handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich,” and if he did not have those qualities, she would not want him (Brontë 61). Brontë shows that Catherine’s choice of money over love not only destroys Heathcliff, damming him to monstrosity, but also herself because her decision to choose security results in her becoming a damsel in distress emotionally.

Even with her love for Heathcliff, Catherine chooses Edgar because she says, “I’ll would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he’s handsome, Nelly, but because he’s more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same” (62). Popkin argues that, by betraying her own heart and choosing Edgar for his outward appearances, Catherine also turns into a beast by not seeking true love (10). This creates a new dilemma in the fairy tale if both man and woman are beasts. Brontë deliberately fosters this monstrous ambiguity in her portrayal of these characters. Scholar Jacqueline Simpson describes Heathcliff as a rebellious demon and Catherine as an ineffective wizard because neither of them keeps any redeeming qualities in the novel (52). Catherine’s description as a wizard correlates to her ability to manipulate others with her constant changing emotions. The characters and the reader never know what she is thinking or what her true intentions are. Samantha Przybylowicz defends the theory of Catherine being a villain because she
manipulates and antagonizes the other characters:

One of the reasons I believe we find it hard to pinpoint Catherine as a villain, other than her being overshadowed by Heathcliff, is because of her agency in constantly changing her identity. At any time in the novel, we are unable to label her as filling any one role; she repeatedly shifts into other manifestations of herself. (12)

The reader becomes confused and struggles to keep track of Catherine’s different identities, so they do not know whether to sympathize with her or condemn her. Catherine’s quixotic nature demonstrates her choice causing in the ending she has. Brontë creates all of her characters in this manner, so no one is completely good or bad; therefore, she rejects the fairy tale concept that there is a perfect prince for a perfect princess.

_Wuthering Heights_ continues to follow the fairy tale theme that men make the damsels feel distressed. Brontë complicates this notion by implying a woman’s love can save the man, rather than the man saving the women. While fairy tales and _Wuthering Heights_ show the redeeming qualities of a woman’s love, Catherine’s decision to choose Edgar over Heathcliff shows the other side of that narrative aspect in that men who do not receive women’s love go unsaved and become monsters. Heathcliff watches Catherine’s house to assure himself of her safety, while her husband, Edgar, watches her inside the house; effectively, the two men become the guards of Catherine’s prison, and they control all of her actions. In response to her own unhappiness from her choices and the monstrous behavior of the men, Catherine becomes extremely ill and dies while giving birth to a daughter, Cathy. After Catherine’s death, Cathy takes over as the protagonist in the novel, starting the second plot. When she becomes a teenager, Heathcliff kidnaps Cathy to marry his son, Linton Heathcliff, who later dies, but now Cathy must stay with Heathcliff forever since her own father died. While Cathy’s role is to show what Catherine could have been, Brontë uses Hareton Earnshaw in the same way to represent Heathcliff’s unrealized potential goodness. Cathy gives Hareton Earnshaw love and kindness, which reverses his beast-like traits and turns him into a perfect suitor with whom she falls in love and marries. The two plots connect, making a full fairy tale with the failed happy ending of a fairy tale between Catherine and Heathcliff and a fulfilled happy ending with Cathy and Hareton when he receives the love of a woman. The contrast between the two endings and the ways the characters’ choices define their roles as villains or damsels reflects the ways that Brontë’s society allowed for more complexity and ambiguity than the public for whom Villeneuve wrote.

_Wuthering Heights: Second Generation_

The birth of Cathy and death of Catherine represents rebirth and potential re-balance in the fairy tale because Cathy becomes the only character without beast-like qualities at this time. Joseph Carrol argues that this second generation has the same characteristics and potential of the first, but Cathy chooses to do better, while Linton does not:

By rising above that snobbery and forming a beneficial bond with [Hareton], [Cathy] resolves the conflict between social ambition and personal attachment that had riven the previous generation. Linton Heathcliff had embodied the worst personal qualities of the older generation—the viciousness of Heathcliff and the weakness of the Lintons—and Hareton and the younger Cathy together embody the best qualities: generosity and strength combined with fineness and delicacy. (15)

As Carrol notes, Linton takes the path of his father and refuses to accept Cathy’s love even when she tries to take care of him while he’s sick. Because he does not accept or return her love, he keeps his beast-like characteristics and is described as turning into a “wretched creature” (Brontë 213). Here, Brontë uses ambiguity to play with the portrayal of male characters in fairy tale. Both Heathcliff and Linton want to claim dominance in their lives and do so by trying to control the women around them. Both men find dominance over the women by kidnapping them. Similarly to _Beauty and the Beast_, the men treat women like property and try to remove their identity and sense of self. Unlike _Beauty and the Beast_, the male characters in _Wuthering Heights_ do not respect the females because they hold them against their will and speak negatively toward them. Heathcliff and Linton constantly degrade Catherine and Cathy throughout the novel and never respect them as human beings.

Although fairy tales reinforce the gender role of men being strong physically and mentally, Brontë undermines that part of the
fairy tale structure through her portrayal of Linton Heathcliff. Examining Linton and Heathcliff's response to him, the notion that male characters are not supposed to show any kind of weakness becomes clear. Therefore, Linton's sickness makes Heathcliff resent him, and his father's rejection makes Linton harsher to Cathy. Heathcliff wants to keep the men in power, and he uses cruelty and violence to do so. He teaches this lesson to Linton, who then treats Cathy with cruelty to control her and keep her prisoner:

[Heathcliff] says I'm not to be soft with Catherine; she's my wife, and it's shameful that she should wish to leave me! He says, she hates me, and wants me to die, that she may have my money, but she shan't have it; and she shan't go home! She never shall! She may cry, and be sick as much as she pleases! (Brontë 212).

He believes by controlling her and keeping her prisoner, she will relent and accept her place as his wife. The men try to use control and brutality to remove the woman's choice in who to marry and love—Brontë uses this portrayal to create the underlying monstrosity of the male characters. She develops the theme that women save men by choosing to love them, while men become monsters by removing women's choice. Richard Conway describes the conflict between the male characters and their need to control the women by noting that Brontë's portrayal of Heathcliff and Linton shows that a woman must be disciplined "else she'll get so masterful, there'll be no holding her" (296). He continues to argue fairy tales use this portrayal of men/villains to keep the social structure of society with men in power. If men bring women down continuously, they will not fight or challenge the rules as they grow up.

Older fairy tales present women as passive and easily manipulated because they are weak and uneducated; a notion that Brontë critiques through Cathy's determination to become educated. When Heathcliff kidnaps Cathy and traps her in his house to marry his son, the only resource she has to defend herself is her education. Many feminist critics believe this type of story is portrayed in fairy tales and these stories "reinforce gender stereotypes such as female passivity and an emphasis on stereotyped female beauty" (Hintz 141). Unlike the older fairy tale models, Cathy, however, does not fit this stereotype: because of her thorough education, she argues and fights back against Heathcliff any chance she gets. The lack
of education connects to Carrol’s postmodern perspective that “these components theories emphasize the exclusively cultural character of symbolic constructs” because the women cannot fight back without an education (7). This theory states that men placed themselves in power through social construction and push women down in order to stay in control. Nancy Armstrong contends that fairy tales have a direct correlation to the social construction of society between men and women:

During the eighteenth century, one author after another discovered that the customary way of understanding social experience actually misrepresented human value. In place of the intricate status system that had long dominated British thinking, these authors began to represent an individual’s value in terms of his, but more often in terms of her, essential qualities of mind. Literature devoted to producing the domestic woman thus appeared to ignore the political world run by men. Of the female alone did it presume to say that neither birth nor the accoutrements of title and status accurately represented the individual; only the more subtle nuances of behavior indicated what one was really worth. (Armstrong 12)

Brontë does what Armstrong states by showing the female characters as well-educated and strong. The characters in Wuthering Heights show the relationship culture of the time period of how men and women interact with each other; men like Heathcliff and Linton constantly try to degrade the women while taking their social positions, and women like Cathy fight back against the way they are being treated and restrained.

Similarly to Linton, Cathy starts to take the older generation’s path when she is first forced to live under the same roof as Hareton. Brontë does this to show that the characters’ happy ending depends on their own personal choices. Cathy mocks Hareton for being uneducated and refuses to see anything but the beast-like characteristics and is described as “a young man, respectably dressed, and seated at a table, having a book before him” (233). Cathy’s love completely erased all his beast-like characteristics on the outside:

“Miss Catherine! I can read yon, nah.”
“Wonderful,” I exclaimed. “Pray let us hear you – you are grown clever!”
He spelt and drawled over by syllables, the name –
“Hareton Earnshaw.”
“And the figures?” I cried, encouragingly, perceiving that he came to a dead halt.

As Cathy continues to make fun of his lack of education, Hareton tries harder to prove his capability by taking her books and trying to teach himself to read. Cathy ignores his efforts at first until she finally becomes so harsh toward him that he gives up completely. He gives all of the books to Cathy, but, as she continues to mock him, he “gathered the books and hurled them on the fire” (229). Cathy’s following in her mother’s footsteps is due to her position as a damsel trapped by the monstrous Heathcliff. In attempting to reject the role of damsel, she gives into more monstrous impulses herself. Through her attempts to reject the role of damsel, she does everything she can to provoke the people around her. Here, Cathy’s choice to be cruel and unloving have direct consequences on those around her. Her harshness starts to turn Hareton more into a beast than he was previously presented.

However, Cathy changes from the previous generation and starts to show kindness and love towards Hareton. She starts to appreciate his efforts in trying to learn and better himself and admits she does not want to hinder his education when Nelly, the housekeeper, says, “I saw she was sorry for his persevering sulkiness and indolence. Her conscience reproved her for frightening him off improving himself” (Brontë 237). She then feels guilty for the way she treated him and decides to try to teach him to read. As she teaches him, she falls in love with him, transforming him from a beast to a man, and Przbylowicz says, “Cathy falls in love with Hareton and accepts him—the act that her mother could not perform when she decides that to marry Heathcliff would be degrading” (18). Cathy chooses love over money and social class, unlike her mother in the first plot of the novel. Hareton loses all of his beast-like characteristics as he was described in the beginning of the novel, with “his dress and speech were both rude ( . . . ) his thick, brown curls were rough and uncultivated, his whiskers encroached bearishly over his cheeks, and his hands embrowned like those of a common laborer” (Brontë 9). However, once Cathy chooses to love him and he chooses to love her in return, he loses all of his beast-like characteristics and is described as “a young man, respectably dressed, and seated at a table, having a book before him” (233). Cathy’s love completely erased all his beast-like
characteristics, including his rough looks, his rude manners, and his lack of education. The difference between Linton Heathcliff’s failure and Hareton’s success in the novel is Hareton accepted and loved a woman while Linton refused to.

Conclusion
Looking at the two different plots of the novel it is clear to see the difference in the beast-like characters when they lose and gain love. The villain throughout the novel, Heathcliff, changes from man to beast because of external factors: “Hero–Heathcliff of the introductory sections becomes the villain–Heathcliff in the second part of the novel” explains Piciucco (222). Piciucco also notes that Heathcliff has redeeming characteristics in the beginning of the novel and continuously tries to save Catherine from the external factors that keep trying to hurt the two of them, such as her father, money, and Edgar (225). Once Catherine picks Edgar, Heathcliff loses her love, causing him to also lose his redeeming hero qualities and turn into the villain of the novel. Brontë describes him as looking like a beast with dark skin, thick hair, and a stocky build, making him larger than other male characters in the novel. Catherine is portrayed as the damsel in the novel because she constantly becomes sick or depressed and needs to be saved from herself and her choices. The last time she becomes sick, she refuses to eat or come out of her room for even her husband. When she dies and Cathy is born, Cathy replaces her in the role as the damsel. Edgar constantly protects her and will not let her go see Heathcliff until he lures her to Wuthering Heights and kidnaps her to marry his son.

The two fairy tales, Beauty and the Beast and Wuthering Heights, have remarkably similar story lines and both reject the stereotypical depiction of women in fairy tales. Beauty and Cathy rely on their education rather than their looks to succeed in their intended goals. By not focusing on appearances or social position, they achieve their own true happiness with beasts who other women would normally reject. This rejects the idea that women are forced into relationships they do not want, or they only care about money, social class, and appearances. Fairy tales portray men as being dominant and forcing themselves to be in charge as can be seen through Heathcliff and Linton. They use power and cruelty to push women down to keep their social positions. In Wuthering Heights, both monstrous male characters end up dying; Brontë shows that power and money mean nothing without love. Hareton, who has nothing, lives and falls in love with Cathy so he becomes wealthy in a different way. Brontë helps to create a new kind of fairy tale by questioning and rejecting previous fairy tale values and ideals. She revises the fairy tale to show that choices determine who deserves a happy ending.

Works Cited

The citation system used in this essay is MLA 8th.