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## ***Wuthering Heights: A Study through the Lens of Gender Bias***

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### **Abstract:**

Emily Bronte was an ardent critic of the patriarchal society she was living in. She bravely fought against patriarchy through her mighty pen when women were less encouraged and believed to be 'the angel in the house'. Her magnum opus novel *Wuthering Heights* asked people to re-examine women's values, roles and functions in the culture characterized by male chauvinism and misogyny, which objectively pushed forward the later world feminist movement. The paper aims to show the influence of Emily Bronte's experiences on the novel by stating the opinion of various critics and biographers. Besides showing the language used by her as female-oriented, it aims to show how female characters in the novel are represented as stout-hearted, quick-witted, free willed, resolute and powerful and reply to male characters with grit and courage. The paper also endeavours to illustrate her concerns towards the various realistic problems related to women like the problems of property ownership, the attraction of social comforts, arrangement of marriage etc

**Keywords:** Patriarchy, Magnum opus, The angel in the house, Feminist, Male chauvinism, Misogynism, Female-oriented.

*Wuthering Heights* is the supreme achievement of Emily Bronte in English fiction. It is the masterpiece of an imaginative mind, in touch with elemental forces of nature and society and has deeper symbolic value. The heartbreaking tale of thwarted love, of adoration and rejection, has touched millions since its publication in 1847. Its innovative narrative style and gripping story have made this a classic of British literature. *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* although written a long time ago evoke great interest even today. These two books have almost become a passion for most readers. One of the reasons of their popularity was that the two young sisters attacked the concept of patriarchy and it is artistically reflected through their novels. Hence one may study their works from the feminist perspective and know their thoughts about gender conflict. They wrote novels because novel was the most popular form in Victorian literature and the novelist's role was that of a preacher; imparting moral knowledge. During Victorian age novel became popular for first time. Various types of novels like Bildungsroman, Political and Detective novels were written. Although Victorian age is mostly known for fiction much of the elegiac and dramatic monologue type of poetry was also written. The Poets of the age were concerned with man's relationship with God whereas novelists dealt with man's relationship with man. Victorian Novelists depict the tension between surrounding social conditions and the aspirations of the hero or heroine, whether it relates to love, social position or a life adequate to his or her imagination. It is this tension that in turn portrays a woman's struggle for self-realization in opposition to the

constraints imposed upon her. Emily had an unusual character. She was extremely unsociable and different from others. She preferred the company of animals to people and always yearned for the freedom of Haworth and the Moors.

If *Jane Eyre* shook the early Victorian reader, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte was forceful like a hurricane. Some of the Victorian readers found the book shocking and inappropriate in its depiction of passionate, ungoverned love and cruelty. Someone said that she hardly knew of a more gnarled, painful story; another called it a tale set against granite. In 1847 *La Belle Assemblee, the British magazine* had a notice under the heading of literature:

There has come out a new edition of *Wuthering Heights* and *Agnes Grey*, with its new powerful and pathetic preface, prefixed to the prose by the one survivor of the sister authors, who, as Currer, Ellis and Acton bell, made such a stir in the coteries a couple of Winters ago. That three ladies, living retired lives in a moorland Yorkshire parsonage, should have broken into utterances so fiery, vigorous and uncouth in their vigor, as the novels in question, seemed like a fairy tale to those who have but lightly considered what a mysterious thing is Genius, and who have not sufficiently remembered how it sometimes receives alimnt and impulse from the very circumstances which would seem the most calculated to narrow and bind it. (qtd. in Dunbar 131)

*Wuthering Heights* became popular amongst all and it also became an object of lively discussion with academia. It pleases and inspires and also provokes and offends all kinds of readers. A casebook entitled *Emily Bronte: Wuthering Heights* edited by Miriam Allot (1920-2010) talks about various contemporary Reviews of *Wuthering Heights*. Paterson's Magazine, March 1848 says, "We rise from the perusal of *Wuthering Heights* as if we had come fresh from a pest-house. Read *Jane Eyre* is our advice but burn *Wuthering heights* . . ." (50). While in the same book an unidentified review of 1847-48 says:

This is a work of great ability, and contains many chapters, to the production of which talent of no common order has contributed. At the same time, the materials which the author has placed at his own disposal have been but few. In the resources of his own mind and in his own manifestly vivid perceptions of the peculiarities of character – in short, in his knowledge of human nature – has he found them all. An antiquated farm-house, a neighboring residence, of a somewhat more pretending description, together with their respective inmates, amounting to some half a dozen souls in each, constitute the material and the personal components of one of the most interesting stories we have read for many a long day. (47)

One should not forget that *Wuthering Heights* was written when Emily Bronte was a mere child. Therefore its faults are to be forgiven as one forgives the mistakes of one's childhood. But at the same time Emily Bronte needs to be acknowledged for the intellectual greatness she has displayed in this work– the work which seizes the reader at the first moment, at which they meet, holds him thrilled, entranced and terrified in a grasp which never relaxes and leave

him shaken and exhausted after the end of the story. Angus Mackay talks about Emily Bronte that, “. . . if we look only to the quality of the imagination displayed in *Wuthering Heights*—its power, its intensity, its absolute originality— it is scarcely too much to say of Emily that she might have been Shakespeare’s youngest sister” (qtd. in Allot, “The Brontes: The Critical Heritage” 446 ).

Victorian age was dominated by men and women were not given enough freedom. Men got respectable jobs and took all the decisions and were patriarchs. Among the working classes, women usually worked to help the family and men worked in order to be respectable. Middle-class Victorian women looked forward to marriage, which could provide them with a better social position and economic security. The middle class Victorian boys received education for better prospects in future. Women were expected to stay at home to take care of their children and their husbands, while men worked in public spheres to sustain the family. The relationship between men and women was simply hierarchal. A Victorian woman was dependent on her father in her girlhood and had to take all decisions according to his wishes. She can marry a man of her father’s choice. In the absence of the father she depended on her brother. And after marriage she depended on her husband. She was subordinate to a man. Marriage was the only way to lead a decent life and for women marriage was a release from the threat of poverty. As a Victorian novelist, facing the ideology of women’s proper sphere prescribed by convention, Emily Bronte was contemplating her vocation and her heroine was also doing the same in her own way. She wanted to be away from society to be free from all restrictions and Victorian morality, especially concerning women’s position. She wanted her characters to live freely. Q. D. Leavis comments thus:

Emily Bronte was as independent artistically as she was intellectually. She didn’t take her form from other authors: she made it up herself, as she made up her philosophy of life. With the result that, judged by the standards established by other authors, her form is hard to follow. (qtd. in Allot, “The Brontes: The Critical Heritage” 141)

The dominant impetus in Bronte sisters lives was the concept of love for which they fought through out. Hence love has been one of the dominant themes of the three Bronte sister’s novels and love is the central theme of *Wuthering Heights* as well. According to May Lamberton Becker:

She [Emily Bronte] knew in her solitary heart that love is not always gentle, not always happy: she knew that it can be cruel and remorseless, that it can tear through life like a hurricane through a forest. But she knew that it can transfigure, that love itself can be greater, grander than those who love. (8)

We see most of the characters fall in love with each other. Through these relationships Emily tries to clear the wrong notion that women are physically and mentally weak and are only capable of indulging in sexual games or adopt fashions. The relationship of love that exists between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw is quite relevant. Every event of the novel is linked to it. Emily Bronte deals with the unconventional love story between Catherine

Earnshaw and Heathcliff. By doing so she tried to oppose the Victorian point of view. Their love story was not approved for different reasons. Heathcliff and Cathy come from two different social sections. Catherine comes from a decent and respectable family whereas Heathcliff is a, “dirty, ragged, black-haired” (Bronte 31) living in the streets of Liverpool, whose origin is not known to anyone. They might even be brother and sister that led to their downfall. So this relationship is not approved happily by society. Even Mr. Earnshaw fails to give his identification, “not a soul knew to whom it belonged” (Bronte 32). Heathcliff later on becomes one of the favorite children of Mr. Earnshaw. Their love is unconventional in many ways, as they rebel against the rules and norms of the period. They do not marry, there is no respectability at all and they try to spend all their time together in the company of nature. All this was not acceptable relating to a girl of the period who was supposed to stay at home. As a Victorian woman and the daughter of an obscure clergyman, Emily Bronte had very little power or control over the world she inhabited and the way of life she lived. She had her own style of presenting characters, and created very unconventional masculine heroes. Her female characters have versatile talents and are the embodiment of various abilities. For instance Catherine’s personality is reflected through the statement, “I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free, and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them!” (Bronte 113). Her female characters are physically and mentally alert and do not indulge in deception. They are both feminine and masculine in their assertions and their firm hold on love does not allow men to humiliate them. This reflects Emily’s natural and hidden desire for freedom.

Heathcliff, a typical Byronic hero is defiant and self-tormenting outcast, who rejects social norms. He is well-aware of his own frustration and like Milton’s Satan, wishes to become destructive. He seems to suffer for some unnamed sin. Heathcliff is arrogant but also a charismatic character. Emily makes his life and childhood harsh and cruel. Unlike any other boy in such circumstances instead of being infirm, Heathcliff becomes a very aggressive man. Emily Bronte shows that to acquire manhood one must learn to fight and resist to get a place in society. Emily Bronte has created this character to condemn the Victorian ideals. He is different from other men of his times. Unlike Rochester he remains the same from the beginning to the end. He is not in search of happiness and does not want to rectify his faults rather he continues to be cruel and destructive till the end. He is a brute who destroys Hindley. He does not care for his wife’s death and does not have any guilt consciousness regarding Hindley’s premature death. He uses Isabella to take revenge. He treats Linton and Hareton badly and enjoys Edgar’s death. He hangs Isabella’s dog and this marks the violence that exists in the two families. He never feels sorry for what he forces others to do and blames them for it. For instance after three years of long break from *Wuthering Heights* he blames Catherine for being miserable after his arrival and cares not for her dilapidated condition, Heathcliff says to her:

You teach me how cruel you’ve been— cruel and false. Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of conflict. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry, and wring out my kisses and tears; they’ll blight you - they’ll damn

you. You loved me– then what right had you to leave me? What right– answer me– for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart– you have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine. (Bronte 145)

Heathcliff can be called as a typical Victorian hero. He is licentious and untamed. He is not like Victorian men civilized and refined. Emily Bronte being a free willed woman has deliberately created a new version of masculinity. Through Heathcliff she depicts the animality in human nature. He just follows his passions without any compromise with them or by admitting his faults. He has no compassion and even hurts his beloved Catherine. For the young members of the family he is no better than a monster who imprisons little Cathy Linton at the heights so that she will marry his son Linton. He even blows Nelly Dean. He never regrets when he humiliates people around him. He does not care for religion or the dead. We see that he opens Catherine's coffin years after her burial. Joyce Carol Oates in an essay entitled "The Magnanimity of Wuthering Heights" compares Heathcliff with Iago, Vendice and Edmund and says:

As for Heathcliff, with his diabolical brow and basilisk eyes, his cannibal teeth, his desperate passion for revenge, is he not a 'romantic' incarnation of Iago or Vendice (of the Revenger's Tragedy), another Edmund fired to destroy Edgar - a revenge - motive imposed upon a fairy tale of love and betrayal? He does not require Hindley to flog and beat him, in order to turn stoically wicked, since he has possessed an implacable will from the very first, having demonstrated no affection or gratitude for the elder Mr. Earnshaw, who had not only saved his life in Liverpool but (for reasons not at all clear in realistic terms) had loved him above his own children. (445)

In *Wuthering Heights* two female characters namely Catherine Earnshaw and Isabella Linton are introduced who try to act against the traditional role of women in society. Catherine Earnshaw is rude and refuses to obey her father and goes against his wishes. She does so in order to become more lady-like, as Nelly tells us:

His [Mr. Earnshaw] peevish reproofs wakened in her a naughty delight to provoke him; she was never so happy as when we were all scolding her at once, and she defying us with her bold, saucy look, and her ready words; turning Joseph's religious curses into ridicule, baiting me, and doing just what her father hated most, showing how her pretended insolence, which he thought real, had more power over Heathcliff than his kindness. (Bronte 36-37)

Catherine Earnshaw was unable to bear pain or put restraint on her and thus becomes uncontrollable. During Edgar Linton's last visit to Wuthering Heights, she loses self-control in a dispute with Heathcliff and slaps Nelly Dean; she shakes little Hareton and boxes Edgar on the ear. Wade Thompson in an essay "Infanticide and Sadism in Wuthering Heights" writes thus, "As a child Catherine is endowed with a kind of masculine power that only the

most hardened adults usually possess; she has most unchild-like resources for self-control, endurance and sustained rebellion; and she can easily cope with pain” (71). By indulging in physical violence, she challenges the social norms prevalent in society. She neglects the concept of patriarchy. Emily reflects on the role of a woman in society living at that time. She highlights reversal of human emotions— love, kindness and hatred. One has to be tough and rebellious in order to survive as Wade Thompson says that in *Wuthering Heights*, “Normal emotions are almost completely inverted: hate replaces love, cruelty replaces kindness, and survival depends on one’s ability to be tough, brutal and rebellious” (71).

Isabella and Catherine grow up in a male dominated society represented by the inmates of Thrushcross Grange and *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine Earnshaw is drawn to Edgar Linton of Thrushcross Grange, which represents happiness and beauty and is introduced as joyful and genuine. On the other hand *Wuthering Heights* serves as a contrast to Thrushcross Grange. As the novel opens *Wuthering Heights* is represented as dark, creepy and cold on top of a hill, “On that bleak hilltop the earth was hard with a black frost, and the air made me shiver through every limb” (Bronte 6). This shows the dark nature of the inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights*. Thrushcross Grange also represents patriarchal ideology and *Wuthering Heights* represents repressive patriarchy. Catherine an orphan grows up at *Wuthering Heights*, whose father is a rebuke and brother resentful. Soon after the death of her brother, it is her brother Hindley who takes command of the house and becomes even more cruel and harsh. Catherine being aggressive tries to escape from the clutches of her brother and decides to marry for it is the only solution of her problem. And Emily Bronte makes her heroine fight her husband with amazing will power and great courage. She decides to marry Edgar Linton for her own benefit although she loves Heathcliff. She believes that marrying Edgar Linton will grant her political, social and economic power for which she yearns. Secondly Catherine being a domineering person wants to take her own decisions. Catherine herself decides to marry the man she likes, she says, “And he will be rich and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband” (Bronte 69). Through Catherine Emily Bronte reflects the role of women in Victorian England. They were bound to follow the command of the males. The women at *Wuthering Heights* were confined to their homes and Catherine also did so. Catherine’s love for Heathcliff is deep rooted. It is clear when she says:

It 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; and Linton’s is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire. (Bronte 71-72)

Both Catherine and Heathcliff love each other profoundly. Cathy loves Heathcliff as part of her existence. Their love exists on a higher or spiritual plane; they enjoy union of souls. Heathcliff’s love for Catherine Earnshaw is infinite. It is sea deep without any bottom. Heathcliff repeatedly calls Catherine his soul, “I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without you my soul!” (Bronte 150). Heathcliff’s love for Catherine remains constant and what redeems him in our eyes is his deep and passionate love for Catherine. It is the apparent

loss of Catherine's love that leads him to the decision to marry Isabella. He also decides to marry her for her fortune and to take revenge from Hindley and Edgar. Nevertheless, he does not intend to hurt Catherine:

I seek no revenge on you, that is not the plan. The tyrant grinds down his slaves and they don't turn against him; they crush those beneath them. You are welcome to torture me to death for your amusement, only allow me to amuse myself a little in the same style, and refrain from insult as much as you are able. Having leveled my palace, don't erect a hovel and complacently admire your own charity in giving me that for a home. If I imagined you really wished me to marry Isabella, I'd cut my throat. (Bronte 101)

Emily Bronte reveals the emotional and passionate realities of a woman's heart and psyche. Passion is like a magnifying glass that makes her see things with deeper intensity. It is the passionate character of Catherine and Heathcliff, which keeps the reader spell bound throughout the novel. It is this relationship that builds the novel and is probably why this novel has come to be well loved by everyone. Their love was so deep and passionate that Heathcliff believes they are united in one, "Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy?" (Bronte 145). Their love knows no bounds, and they speak of oneself as the other as Catherine says, "I am Heathcliff" (Bronte 73). This shows their existence without the other is impossible. After Catherine's death Heathcliff says, "I believe—I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always – take any form – drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I can't find you!" (Bronte 150). This suggests that a world without Cathy is empty and terrifying for him. Despite her inclination towards Heathcliff, she decides to Marry Edward when Heathcliff leaves and stays away for three years. She remains firm and steadfast and gives no sign that the universe is lost to her. On the contrary she marries Edgar Linton, a man who comes from a higher social status, with the hope that he could provide her better life than Heathcliff and declares her love for Edgar, "I love the ground under his feet, and the air over his head, and everything he touches, and every word he says. I love all his looks, and all his actions, and him entirely and altogether" (Bronte 69). Catherine knows Heathcliff lacks riches, sophistication and education and is extremely boorish having no surname or a real name whereas Edgar is a well-mannered gentleman who lives in a more refined Thrushcross Grange. Moreover he is rich and likely to enhance her position in the neighborhood. She wants to honor her family by marrying Edgar whereas marriage with Heathcliff would bring disgrace to the family. Catherine is a woman who likes power and the only way a woman could gain power at the time was to marry a rich man. Cathy is well aware of the fact that their love is anti-social as Heathcliff is a pickup boy and there are no traces of his parenthood. His ancestry is a complete mystery, as Nelly says, "Who knows but your father was Emperor of china, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors and brought to England" (Bronte 50).

*Wuthering Heights*, a social novel tells us about class structure in society and is also a treatise on the role of women. Emily Bronte reflects on class mobility which does not always move in one direction. Catherine represents a lower class and for her social class plays a



major role in terms of marriages. Hence she does not marry Heathcliff and agrees, instead, to marry Edgar. She is aware that Linton has had more social standing than Earnshaw. She is torn between her love for the poor and rough Heathcliff and the desire for a better life with more educated man. However all her hopes are shattered. She comes to know how much difficult it is to deal with the hypocritical ideologies of Edgar Linton and the harsh male dominated society. She goes on hunger strike but no attention is paid to her. The continuous hunger strike affects her state of mind and makes her deliriant. She says:

. . . the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank! I did not recall that they had been at all. I was a child; my father was just buried, and my misery arouse from the separation that Hindley had ordered between me and Heathcliff. I was laid down, for the first time, and rousing from a dismal dose after a night of weeping, I liften my hand to push the panels aside; it struck the table top! I swept it along the carpet, and then memory burst in; my late anguish was swallowed in a paroxysm of despair. (Bronte 112)

Catherine Earnshaw marries Edgar in order to be in consonance with normal social behavior, but in her heart of hearts she wants Heathcliff. Choosing Edgar over Heathcliff shows the way society viewed marriage during her lifetime. Although her marriage with Edgar makes Cathy privileged and wealthy, yet her life and marriage have been nothing but an imprisonment. She never respects the institution of marriage as she openly demonstrates that she still and always will love Heathcliff. Nelly suggests to her:

I see no reason that he should not know, as well as you,' I returned; 'and if you are his choice, he'll be the most unfortunate creature that ever was born! As soon as you become Mrs. Linton, he loses friend, and love, and all! Have you considered how you'll bear the separation, and how he'll bear to be quite deserted in the world? (Bronte 72)

To this Catherine replies, "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" (Bronte 73).

Catherine displays her determination which she feels in her love for Heathcliff just before her death. Cathy says her body has belonged to Linton, whereas her soul will be free on the hilltop with Heathcliff after her death. She says thus, "What you touch at present you may have; but my soul will be on that hilltop before you lay hands on me again. I don't want you, Edgar . . ." (Bronte 115). Emily Bronte through the character of Catherine reflects on the tragedy of being caught between socially incompatible cultures. Katie Swim in an essay entitled "Feminism in Wuthering Heights" is of the opinion that, "She [Catherine] represents the female as victim– the feminine energy that is being repressed." Catherine is a chivalrous girl who tries to face Edgar Linton with courage and assert herself. Edgar was afraid of her and says, "Can I stay after you have struck me?" (Bronte 63). He further says, "You have made me afraid and I am ashamed of you, I'll not come here again" (Bronte 63). Thus Catherine Earnshaw is portrayed as a girl with strong power in her relationship with Edgar.

Edgar is the subordinate in the Catherine-Edgar relationship. Isabella is raised at Thrushcross Grange; a special symbol of patriarchal ideology where she completely lives under male dominion. Her parents instruct her to observe discipline in life. Soon after her parent's death, Edgar is given the power to enforce the rules of Thrushcross Grange instead of Isabella Linton. Edgar Linton who is a spoiled and cowardly man and "possessed the power to depart, as much as a cat possesses the power to leave a mouse half killed, or a bird half eaten" (Bronte 64), also proves callous. When Isabella elopes with Heathcliff he never tries to get her back and solve her problems. He says, "She went of her own accord; she had a right to go if she pleased. Trouble me no more about her. Hereafter she is only my sister in name, not because I disown her, but because she has disowned me" (Bronte 119-120).

*Wuthering Heights* was written during the nineteenth century when the position of a woman in society was weak. Women were considered second class citizens and were perceived as domestic, dependant and weak whereas men were seen as worldly, independent and powerful. Women being submissive tend to glorify the men they admire, even if those men are not worthy of their praise. Their only aim was to get married and look after their family and the household. Outside their homes they were always neglected and fewer opportunities were available to them. Like a typical Victorian Woman Isabella wants to get married and have children. She wants to leave Heathcliff forever because she gets no love and attention from him. The love Heathcliff had for her was merely deceptive for he hates Isabella. Though conscious of her social status yet Isabella had accepted him to enjoy the freedom of a married woman. She thought Heathcliff will rescue her from a dull life. Isabella is fascinated by this mysterious man, regardless of the fact that he is beneath her social standing. Hence she lost everything dear to her. She utterly fails to recognize the degree to which Heathcliff is using her. Isabella though stubborn is very well recognized by Heathcliff and makes ill use of her obstinacy. Catherine advises her to be cautious regarding the diplomacy of Heathcliff but Isabella replies, "For shame! For shame! You are worse than twenty foes, you poisonous fiend!" (Bronte 92). Nelly also advises her to give up a man like Heathcliff who is unreliable. But she doesn't want to listen to anyone and remains steadfast in her decision. Her imprudence leads her to misery. Like a fool, she yearns to be with Heathcliff and confesses to Catherine, "I love him more than ever you loved Edgar, and he might love me, if you would let him!" (Bronte 91)

Isabella falls into a category known as Gothic Virgin, Gothic Virgin believes in the best in everyone that they meet. She believes that Heathcliff is a good man because the only men that she had been exposed to during her life were good, honest and kind. This is why she is easily persuaded into thinking that Heathcliff is in love with her even after Catherine's warning. Isabella does not allow social prejudice to ruin her love for Heathcliff as Cathy does; she elopes and is isolated from her family, home comforts and social protection. After marrying Heathcliff things become worse. Heathcliff always treats her with contempt. Isabella believed he loved her and would be a traditional husband. But Heathcliff does not treat her as a woman and a wife rather he treats her as a means to reach his end. He does not care at all for her sex and status. As soon as Isabella comes to know about the hypocrisy of Heathcliff, and recognizes his fierce, pitiless and wolfish nature who says:

Picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion. I can hardly regard her in the light of a rational creature, so obstinately has she persisted in forming a fabulous notion of my character, and acting on the false impressions she cherished. But, at last, I think she begins to know me— I don't perceive the silly smiles and grimaces that provoked me at first, and the senseless incapability of discerning that I was in earnest, when I gave her my opinion of her infatuation and herself. It was a marvelous effort of perspicacity to discover that I did not love her. (Bronte 135)

Isabella could not believe this. She would like to undo what she has done but was helpless. She says with a broken heart, "He's not a human being and he has no claim on my charity. I gave him my heart, and he took and punched it to death, and flung it back to me" (Bronte 154). However Isabella remains firm. She does not feel afraid to call him a 'fiend' and describes his eyes as "the clouded windows of hell" (Bronte 162) and tries to start the new chapter of life. Isabella talks about her past experience at Wuthering heights in a letter to Nelly and writes thus, "How did you contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature when you resided here?" (Bronte 122). And adds further that, "Is Mr Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (Bronte 122). Isabella courageously talks about her wicked husband Heathcliff that he is, "Ingenious and unrelenting in seeking to gain my abhorrence! I sometimes wonder at him with an intensity that deadens my fear: Yet, I assure you, a tiger, or a venomous serpent could not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakens" (Bronte 130-131). There was no one to help her, her brother had abandoned her and Heathcliff was always there to increase her miseries. As a husband Heathcliff had every right to imprison her within the house and to have access to her body, whether she wishes or not. That is why she decides to escape from Wuthering Heights during her pregnancy to protect her child and herself from a rude husband. Thus she manages to escape from the oppression of both the houses, playing the role of the mother and the father and by bringing her son all by herself. Hence Isabella appears as a strong female character who leaves Heathcliff, unlike a typical Victorian woman. Even after being victimized and deserted by Heathcliff who says, "I never, in all my life, met with such an abject thing as she is. She even disgraces the name of Linton; and I've sometimes relented, from pure lack of invention, in my experiments on what she could endure, and still creep shamefully cringing back!" (Bronte 136). Isabella remains firm and wants to gain independence. We see a big change in her character. When she eloped with Heathcliff she was an emotional, weak and impractical woman. But after her marriage she becomes experienced, mature and confident. She also becomes independent mentally and financially. She like Emily Bronte "had the wisdom to accept her limitations and convert them into strengths" (Guerard vii). The constant strain that she felt from being betrayed and oppressed by the man who she thought that loved her was enough for her to abandon her positive and naive outlook on life and embrace the same attitude as her fellow housemates at the Heights. She no longer now wants to remain dependant on her brother Edgar and says, "Edgar has not been kind, has he? And I won't come suing for his assistance; nor will I bring him into more trouble" (Bronte 153). Isabella thinks she does not possess the worst traits of the Linton family like any physical or emotional weakness. Isabella's decision

to reject the rigid norms of society is certainly a bold step on her part. By leaving Heathcliff, she shows an amazing will power and courage. As David Cecil puts it, “Emily Bronte’s attitude to human emotion is equally different from that of her contemporaries. Her characters have extremely intense emotions, the most in English fiction” (124).

Often women are shown to be intelligent, diligent and possessed with tremendous amount of will power. Also they are portrayed in a negative way, acting in an immature and childish way. Here Emily reflects her own views on femininity. Often women are bound to follow the rules of their husbands, though they know how to free themselves. Katie Swim says, “Much like Jonathan Swift suggested that we eat children, Emily Bronte asks that we disrespect women to show them their place.” Frances Earnshaw strives to be a great hostess and wants to dispel any tension between the residents of the Heights before it can boil over. She is obedient to her husband and bound to follow his orders. She never makes any attempt to go against any of his wishes. She cannot fulfill her wishes, after she dies an untimely death, which leads Hindley into living his life in a drunken stupor. Through Nelly who is the confidante of so many people in the novel, Emily Bronte highlights the society of her times when women were given the task to take care of the children and throughout the novel we see she appears as a motherly figure. It is housekeeper Nelly Dean who recounts the story of *Wuthering Heights* to Mr. Lockwood. It is she who cares for Heathcliff, Catherine, Hareton and Cathy when they were small. As a servant she always receives rude response from her masters. Nelly is twice sent away from *Wuthering Heights* for example when Heathcliff first arrives as a child; she leaves him on the landing of the stairs and tells Lockwood, “Inquiries were made as to how it got together; I was obliged to confess, and in recompense for my cowardice and inhumanity was sent out of the house” (Bronte 32). She had a strong grudge against Heathcliff as she confesses, “Hindley hated him, and to say the truth I did the same” (Bronte 32). Heathcliff is never able to get Nelly’s affection. She categorically calls him a villain when little Cathy gets “a shower of terrific slaps on both sides of the head” (Bronte 241) from Heathcliff, after her demand to give the key of the room in which she was locked, as Nelly tells us, “At this diabolical violence, I rushed on him furiously. “you villain!” I began to cry, “you villain!” (Bronte 241). Thus Heathcliff according to Nelly is a diabolical character and capable of apparently motiveless cruelty. He commits innumerable atrocious activities and disregards the feelings of others. He enjoys being able to control other people’s life and like Satan is relentless in his destructive pursuit of revenge. Nelly is eager to learn and enhance her knowledge. She thinks she has learned some wisdom from the books in her master’s library. She considers herself superior to Mr. Lockwood and tells him, “I have undergone sharp discipline, which has taught me wisdom; and then I have read more than you would fancy, Mr. Lockwood, you could not open a book in this library that I have not looked into and got something out of also” (Bronte 55). The language used by Emily Bronte through the characters like Catherine, Isabella, Nelly etc clearly shows that through *Wuthering Heights* strong voice against patriarchal authority is raised. Melissa Fegan in a book entitled *Wuthering Heights: Character Studies* says:

Nelly’s language, in particular, marks her out as different; apart from the odd ‘provincialism’ which would only be noted by Lockwood’s southern ear, she

speaks standard English, like the children she was brought up with, rather than dialect, like her fellow servant Joseph. (26)

Little Cathy Linton is treated as a commodity by Heathcliff during his plan of revenge on her father. Edgar could not take away Cathy from the grip of Heathcliff. Besides this through Cathy, Emily Bronte also highlights the main issue of the Victorian age that after the death of Edgar it is Linton who inherits the Grange and not Cathy, as women didn't have the right to own property. Besides this Heathcliff makes the young Cathy marry his invalid son in order to take control of Wuthering Heights after his son dies as it were the males who took control of the wife's possession at the time of marriage. Thus in *Wuthering Heights* Emily Bronte shows how males are given the property rights to land and women are only entitled to it once they marry and from there it falls into their husband. Cathy's marriage to Linton was short-lived; thereafter her position in society and within the household of Wuthering Heights deteriorates rapidly. The influence that Cathy gains over Hareton is remarkably shown in the course of the novel. They together oppose Heathcliff. While comparing young Catherine with her mother Catherine and the villain Heathcliff, Joyce Carol Oates considers young Catherine more daring and rebellious than others and says:

Young Catherine, however has not inherited her mother's predilection for the grave. She soon exhibits an altogether welcome instinct for self-knowledge and compromise— for the subtle stratagems of adult life — that have been, all along, absent in her elders. Where Heathcliff by his nature remains fixed and two dimensional, a character in a bygone drama, until his final “change” draws him so unresistingly to death, Catherine's nature is bound up with, and enforced by, the cyclical motion of the seasons: her triumph over him is therefore inevitable. (447)

Cathy hardly knows anything about the outside world and for her Wuthering Heights does not exist. Emily Bronte uses Catherine Linton to explain the injustices and show the restrictions that were imposed in these households. The Moors, where Catherine Linton grows up and the nature that she is constantly surrounded by exemplify her internal struggles against the limitations that are placed on her simply because she is a woman. Her father does not allow her to leave the Grange although she is curious to know about the external world. Like her mother she is curious about everything new but wishes to follow her own rules and way of life and is very domineering. She learns how to be self-willed rather than submissive. When Lockwood first meets her she snaps at him, when he attempts to help her and flings the tea back when she discovers that he was not invited, “I don't want your help, I can get them for myself” (Bronte 8), she repeatedly says, “Were you asked to tea? Were you asked?” (Bronte 8). When Heathcliff locks her in, she remains self-confident and strong. She courageously tells him, “I am not afraid of you!” (Bronte 240). When Linton informs Cathy about the cruelty and brutality of Heathcliff and his fear of his father, Cathy replies thus, “Oh well! Keep your secret, I'm no coward— save yourself; I am not afraid!” (Bronte 238). She ridicules not only Heathcliff but also Hareton and calls him, “Nonsense! Foolish, silly boy” (Bronte 237). Cathy has a strong grudge for Hareton, who according to his own father Heathcliff “is not worth a farthing” (Bronte 260). Hareton is wrecked by Heathcliff and is made brutal,

uneducated and uncivilized. He makes efforts to improve himself so that he may be acceptable to Cathy. But Cathy repeatedly and cruelly snubs these efforts of Hareton. Yet a touch of love gradually brings about a change in Cathy who tells Heathcliff in his face, “Hareton and I are friends now and if you strike me, Hareton will strike you!” (Bronte 285). Cathy has great strength and preserverence. While Catherine plays the more subservient role when she was with Linton, her portrayal changes when she is in the presence of Hareton. It is she who soon after her marriage with Hareton redeems him and makes him civilized and educated. Catherine improves her mind through extensive reading which gives her leverage over Hareton. Like her mother Catherine she hates Heathcliff and had regard for her ailing husband Linton Heathcliff. She takes very good care of him and says:

I’m a woman– and I’m certain Linton would recover quickly if he had me to look after him I’m older than he is, you know, and wiser, and less childish, am I not? And he’ll soon do, as I desire him, with some slight coaxing– he’s pretty little darling when he’s good. I’d make such a pet of him, if he were mine. (Bronte 216-17)

Catherine Linton like her mother Catherine Earnshaw posses the same stubborn will. Therefore despite her father’s warning she goes to Wuthering Heights and defies Nelly and deceives her by continually meeting Linton Heathcliff there. Thus Emily Bronte shows her female characters as free willed, firm, obstinate and powerful who challenge the patriarchal conventions and live an independent life. However some female characters have been depicted negatively for being imprudent, heedless, naive and deluded. They are made so by society.

Hence Emily Bronte took a pen to speak for the oppressed woman at that time when her status in the society was very low and meek. Her uncompromising pursuit for self-esteem in her masterpiece *Wuthering Heights* leaves a deep impression on every reader of it. It proved to the world of the mid nineteenth century that a woman beating the odds to become independent and successful on her own was not as far-fetched as it may have seemed. Emily tells us that in a male-dominated society, a woman should strive for the decency and dignity. She should be chivalrous enough to face the hardships of life and raise a staunch voice against it. Charlotte bestows her female characters intellectual superiority over male characters and believes in what Mary Wollstonecraft says in her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, “A man, when he undertakes a journey, has, in general, the end in view; a woman thinks more of the incidental occurrences, the strange things that may possibly occur on the road; the impression that she may make on her fellow-travellers” (60-61).

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