



‘Wuthering Heights’, the female version of the male form & ‘The Second Sex’ in it

Abhisek Chakraborty

M.A. (English), M.A. (Education), B.Ed, Asst. Teacher, Govt. Sponsored H.S. School, West Bengal, India

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Abstract— *The major purpose of this topic is to analyze the gender discrimination in Emily Bronte’s eminent novel ‘Wuthering Heights’. How, in this novel, the women characters are portrayed as mere meek, timid, and submissive, irrespective of their roles in the novel. How they have become ‘the second sex’, the weaker one, suppressed under the patriarchal system of the then society. Even, in the writing of a female novelist, they have never become bold enough to break the shackles of the stereotypical notion of women’s submissiveness, weakness, imperfection as the representative of the feminine gender; rather they are always treated as the weaker one, the second in rank in the society, only after men.*

Keywords— *Literary criticism, systematic literary review, analytic literary study, socio-literary discussion.*

The masculine gender in English has not only been stable, but also dominant. For example, we can cite words like mister-mistress; sir-madam; governor-governess; courtier-courtesan; wizard-witch etc. and can see that the feminine gender has a lesser value in each pair. Expressions like ‘*the proper study of mankind is man*’(Pope); ‘*the child is the father of the man*’(Wordsworth); ‘*man is the measure of all things*’(Pythagoras) etc. show that ‘man’ is generic. Even the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘him’ are generic in English as in the example, ‘*the behaviour of an individual and the conditions in which he lives...*’ and in the proverb ‘*a man is known by the company he keeps*’. All these are justifications enough to include the study of language in the study of relation between sexes.

“*Every woman is birth-defective, an imperfect male begotten because her father happened to be ill, weakened, or in a state of sin at the time of her conception.*”
— St. Thomas Aquinas.

Simone de Beauvoir’s influential work, entitled ‘*The Second Sex*’, made mainstream society aware of women’s rejection of the theories upon which her development and socialization are based. Through de Beauvoir’s eyes we are

privy to her perceptions of injustices facing women, especially as women attempt to make their way in male-dominated world. Her social criticisms range from the effects of socialization of female stereotypes and social norms to the imbalance of gender roles and patriarchal psychological theories on female development. The most essential and basic difference between men and women is perceived in psyche ‘in the relation of gender to the creative process’. It is shaped by the body, the growth of language and by ‘sex-role socialization’. The ‘difference factor’ between men and women begins with biological differences. Man’s dominance has secured an ideological climate of compliance: “*legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of woman is willed in Heaven and advantageous on earth*”. The patriarchal oppressive system imposes severe social and cultural restrictions on women, some directly and most of them in subtle manner, and any deviation from them is termed as ‘unnatural’ and ‘unwomanly’. Thus even what is natural is determined by men! In this context de Beauvoir observed that “*women have no separate history, no natural solidarity; they have not combined as other oppressed*

groups have. Woman is riveted into a lop-sided relationship with man; he is the one and she is other". Historical discourse so far has tended to play down the significance of women's role in that it projects them in the light of their expectations and interpretations. The feminist discourse itself reflects masculine conception. The entire history is strewn with stereotypes of women, genderist attitudes and role models of women that fail to project women's experiences, but only 'what men have thought women should be'. In most cases men's imagination so much dominated the history that women came to be portrayed as men wished them to be portrayed.

Hence, the problems of women writers are very critical. Women writers were imprisoned in the 'ideology of womanhood', the ideal of 'angel in the house' in addition the taboo about women talking about their passions prevented them from telling the truth about their experiences as a body. Similarly, woman as a writer places woman in the same position that is traditionally occupied by men authors whose viewpoints and portrayals have for long been responsible for shaping the social consciousness. It is no secret that the women have faced untold problems in getting themselves published, their creation, talents having been associated with woman's image as an 'inferior-to-men' idea. That is why those who wished to write had to adopt pseudonyms like Emily Bronte took the name 'Ellis Bell' for writing '*Wuthering Heights*'. Women's writing contains two voices simultaneously, it is double-voiced in which can be read two discourses, the dominant one representing the male voice and the muted one representing women's voice. One is enabled to see meaning in 'what has previously been empty space'. Feminists have largely to rely on the existing concepts and categories with which they may be at war consistently. The dilemma is between total rejection and partial agreement with them. Feminist critics have to examine the strong female characters and their oppression by and resistance to violent men. Referring to her book '*A Literature of Their Own*', Elaine Showalter says that the history of women's writings in the west can be divided into three phases:

- (i) A feminine phase (1840-1880) in which women writers imitated the male writers in their norms and artistic standards.
- (ii) A feminist phase (1880-1920) in which a different and often a separate position was maintained.

- (iii) A female phase which has a distinct female identity, style and content.

The first phase i.e. the feminine phase is marked by a desire and effort on the part of women writers to measure up to male writers and the social-moral compulsions forced them to write under male pseudonyms. In this period they internalized the dominant male culture and ethos about female character, nature and position. Emily Bronte's '*Wuthering Heights*', written in 1846 and published in 1847, can be discussed in the light of that phase. But, at the same time, we have to keep in mind that it is natural for women to be 'female' but there is no surety that they will be 'feminine'. Because, the patriarchal norm of femininity is an enormous web of numerous concepts, thinking, ideology, behaviour patterns of roles, art, literature and dress codes. The representation of women in literature, in the 19th century, was felt to be one of the most important forms of socialization, since it provided the role models which indicated to women and men, what constituted acceptable versions of the feminine and legitimate feminine goals and aspirations. Feminists point out, for example, in the 19th century fiction, the focus of interest is on the heroine's choice of marriage partner, which will decide her ultimate social position and exclusively determine her happiness and fulfillment in life, or her lack of these. The heroine of '*Wuthering Heights*', Catherine has to face that problem and this ruins her completely. According to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, the novel '*Wuthering Heights*' is about a girl's growth to womanhood which is described as a process of 'anxious self-denial' and 'social castration'. Gilbert and Gubar use the idea of 'social castration' which amounts to the same thing, for this term signifies women's lack of social power, this being represented by means of the word 'castration', as a male possession, though not as in any sense a male attribute.

Now, as it is said earlier, the novel '*Wuthering Heights*', written by Emily Bronte, can be read as a document of the feminine phase of literature. Here, in the novel, we can see that the 'second sex' - the women characters are portrayed in a way as the mind set-up of the patriarchal society permits them- they are oppressed and dominated by violent men in many ways. We should judge that matter elaborately. In the 19th century, middle class women who wanted to write were hampered by the conventional image of ladies as submissive, pious, gentle, loving, serene, domestic angels; they had to overcome the conventional patronizing, smug, unempowering, contemptuous sentimentalizing of women. A few women like Emily Bronte who overcame the limitations

of their social roles and did write, found it more difficult to challenge or reject society's assumptions and expectations than their male counterparts. Then, there raises a question- what subversive values and taboo experiences does Emily Bronte express with her passionate heroine Catherine? The subversion is in Bronte's acceptance of the cruel as a normal, almost an energizing part of life. Gilbert & Gubar in their book *'The Madwoman in the Attic'* point out how female feelings of powerlessness and anger are portrayed in the novel. They show how Catherine leaves behind the instinctive preferences signified by the 'Heights' and enters 'Thruscross Grange' which symbolizes castration and an alien land of 'concealment and doubleness' in order to achieve acceptability and femininity. In their view, Heathcliff signifies Catherine's rebellious alter-ego and Edgar the patriarchal principle and the ruthless employment of social and sexual powers and manliness. Catherine's return symbolizes the true self desires but without the relinking of her former powers. To find out portrayal of womanhood in the novel, we have to study the case histories of the major female characters- their superficial expressions and suppressed emotions.

The nature of Catherine's love for two men Heathcliff and Edgar is evident in the novel. The following statement is particularly noteworthy:

"My love for Linton is like 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."

So, we can see that Cathy certainly likes Heathcliff to remain her own exclusive property. Cathy would like to remain married to Edgar but she would also like to retain Heathcliff as a friend and a lover, a position which is not acceptable to the decent and self-respecting Edgar. Edgar gives Cathy an open choice- she can either have him or Heathcliff. Cathy gives no reply to this, saying only that she wants to be left alone. She even begins to dash her head against the sofa and to grind her teeth furiously and Edgar also leaves her. We can experience how helpless Cathy is now. Her marriage to Edgar serves only to weaken her and the open break between Heathcliff and Edgar finally destroys her completely. She resorts to 'senseless, wicked rages'. The girl, who could once hold off a whole household of angry adults, now loses all self-possession. Catherine is now 'in the throes of her self-induced illness'. When asking for her husband, she is told by Nelly that Edgar is 'among his books', she bursts into loud

cry. While Catherine is making a scene and crying, Edgar is in the library handling Catherine's death in the only way he knows how, in a mild mannered approach. He lacks the passionate mood and remains indifferent to her. Catherine discovers that she would never belong to Edgar's society:

"The Linton's are alien to her and exemplify a completely foreign mode of perception."

On her journey of self-discovery she realizes that she attempted the impossible which was to live in a world in which she does not belong. This, in the end, leads to her death. Cathy is unable to conceive why she can not have both Edgar and Heathcliff and torn between them, she dies in a state of mental agitation. At this point Gilbert and Gubar say that, *"what Catherine, or any girl, must learn is that she does not know her own name, and therefore cannot know either who she is or whom she is destined to be."* In order to achieve acceptability and femininity, Catherine has to lose the power which men take for granted, namely power over their destiny. This is symbolized by the phallic guard-dog *"purple tongue being half a foot out of its mouth"* which bites Catherine's foot as she enters the Grange, a symbolic castration. She then undergoes the initial ritual of imprisonment at the Grange. Here she learns, as Bronte says, *"to adopt a double character without exactly intending to deceive anyone"*, that is, say Gilbert and Gubar, she must learn to repress her own impulses, must girdle her own energies with the iron strays of reason. Catherine has learned correctly that if it is degrading to be a woman, it is even more degrading to be like a woman.

Next important character who becomes the victim of male-dominated society is Isabella, Edgar's sister. Heathcliff uses Isabella as a medium of taking revenge with Lintons. Being unable to identify the false love of Heathcliff, she elopes with him. But after few days Heathcliff comes out of his shell and shows her his brutal nature. In her letter to Nelly, Isabella writes that Heathcliff devises every method to hurt her feelings and in this way to make her hate him. She has now begun to feel terribly afraid of that man. Heathcliff also tells Isabella that he would make her suffer as much as Edgar has made Cathy suffer. So we can see that Heathcliff never really loves Isabella and he must have induced her to run away with him with ulterior motives (namely, to acquire her money if she has any, and to take revenge). This is how Isabella sums up the situation regarding Heathcliff's treatment of her:

"He is ingenious and unrelenting in seeking to gain my abhorrence...A tiger or a venomous serpent could

not rouse terror in me equal to that which he wakes...I do hate him-I am wretched-I have been a fool”.

Though she is treated so violently, she does not support Hindley in his conspiracy to kill Heathcliff. This shows that the common female weakness- the lack of courage to be desperate is in the nature of Isabella. Being refused by Isabella, Hindley has stuck to his plan. He attacks Heathcliff with his knife, but fails and Heathcliff is able to overcome him. Heathcliff then turns on to his wife Isabella and says she has conspired with Hindley against him. He shakes her and throws her on the ground. Here we can realize that the common fate of woman- how she, being true and loyal to her husband, is blamed falsely for treachery.

Of all the principal women characters, little Catherine, the daughter of Cathy is projected in a very favourable light. At first she shows much spirit, and hurls defiance at Heathcliff. But when she finds the defiance is futile, she appeals to him for pity. It shows that how much powerful a woman tries to be, she has to surrender herself near the power of man. Catherine too has no objection for marrying Linton, Heathcliff's son, if it can be done without causing undue anxiety to her father in his critical state of health. So, a girl's emotions and desires are always secondary in respect of men's. Catherine is a character of her own right, but, she becomes imprisoned by Heathcliff. This symbolizes that women should be kept within boundary and they have no right to enjoy complete freedom as men have. Young Linton also shows his dominant nature when he says that Catherine, now his wife, would not be allowed to go to the Grange, no matter how much she cried. Later, once Heathcliff becomes so indignant at little Catherine's insolence that he catches hold of her by her hair and threatens to kill her.

Nelly is also an important character in the novel. The main story of the Heights and Grange is revealed through her narration. Nelly separates herself from the family at the Heights and declares allegiance instead to the Grange:

“Hareton is the last of them, she says of the Earnshaws, as our miss Cathy is of us- I mean of Lintons”.

But if Nelly relocates herself rejecting 'Earnshaw' in favour of 'Linton', it may be because she feels that the Earnshaws have rejected her. Especially at that moment when Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw forced Nelly to go to the Grange with Cathy, Nelly was to some extent humiliated. This is also a weak, submissive nature of a female, as we see it in the character of Nelly- to be remained silent without any protest, when anything wrong is going on.

Now, we can take a look at the main or rather the central character of the novel- Heathcliff, an outsider who becomes the center of the novel. Bronte portrayed him as the power representing all masculine forces, a man who can easily be a powerful dominating character, symbolizing the social patriarchal pattern. Heathcliff dominates the plot from the beginning to the end of the novel and he largely determines the course of the story. Heathcliff is the central character of the novel and even Cathy comes next to him. This is also a clear-cut example of social mind set-up that men should be given more importance, even in characterization, in writings by female writers also. If we take Heathcliff away from the novel, the story falls to pieces. If we examine his role in the novel, we see that he is a catalyst, i.e. he changes all the other characters. In the novel we can see that Heathcliff is not much impressed by Nelly's praise of Edgar and mocks at her remark about Edgar's humanity and sense of duty and also rebukes Isabella for defending her brother. He told Nelly of how he has in Isabella's very presence, hanged her little dog and shown no consideration at all for Isabella's feelings. Thus, female emotions and desires are strangled and killed by brutal masculinity. We can see the coarse inner-self of Heathcliff:

“I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teaching; and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain.”

Heathcliff speaks of his dead wife bitterly, which is quite natural because, as we know, he never loves her. He tells his son Linton:

“What a shame of your mother, never to waken your filial regard for me!...your mother was a wicked slut to leave you in ignorance of the sort of father you possessed.”

So, it is clear that, Bronte provides a man a free access to every kind of abusive words for anyone, even for his wife. The devil in Heathcliff shows when he is denied fulfillment of his love. The destructive Heathcliff remains an awe-inspiring figure. Not only is his revenge fascinating in its ruthlessness, but Emily Bronte also manages to win for him a measure of sympathy. Yet, we are horrified by his brutalities as he commits them. We judge them, but we do not judge him.

Even it is revealed that Edgar does not represent an image of effeminacy in contrast to the manliness of Heathcliff; on the contrary, in his ruthless employment of social and sexual power, he is an embodiment of the patriarchal principle.

What shocks us is that, Emily Bronte presents the women as merely mediums of gaining power. Heathcliff marries Isabella to get into the Linton family and to take his revenge smoothly. Heathcliff's relishing determination to employ the rules of inheritance and class superiority is clearly visible in the novel. Heathcliff compels young Catherine to marry his sick son Linton in order to gain her property. So everywhere they are used like things, rather than human beings.

The absence of mothers in *'Wuthering Heights'* has a profound effect on the identities of the orphaned children, and certainly the book is full of orphaned and abandoned characters seeking fulfillment through union with others. Heathcliff is a foundling, taken to home by Mr. Earnshaw. Linton Heathcliff loses his mother and is raised by a father who despises him; Hareton's mother dies shortly after his birth, and the death of his alcoholic and abusive father leaves him penniless and at the mercy of Heathcliff. Likewise the second Catherine is born only hours before her mother's death, and the death of her father leaves her 'destitute of cash and friends'. So, we can interpret these issues in another way- we can say that the absence of mother spoils the child's destiny in each case. This is also demeaning of women by representing their short presence and long absence, resulting spoiled future of their children, in the novel.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) declared:

"the female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities...we should look upon the female state, as it were, a deformity, one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature. On account of this weakness it quickly approaches its maturity and old age since inferior things all reach their end more quickly."

The practical implementation of this speech is also realized in the novel. We can see that Cathy, Isabella, Frances- they all die prematurely. They can not tolerate a little pain- they surrender themselves to death, before fulfilling their dreams and desires. Many hopes remain unachieved for them. In Greek mythology, victory is granted by Athena to Apollo's male-oriented argument which holds that the mother is no parent to her child and asserts the supremacy of patriarchy over matriarchy. We can see that Hindley, Edgar and Heathcliff live much longer than their wives. They suffer a lot, but do not leave life like their wives. These things substantiate the fact that men are always stronger than women.

Culturally, women have been taught how to lose, they've been sent to the school of losing. But, men have come out victorious, even transforming their loss into blessing. In the

novel also Edgar wins Cathy by marrying her and beats his rival Heathcliff, Heathcliff also becomes successful in taking his revenge against the Earnshaws and the Lintons. But women in the novel always lose unlike men. Cathy loses her love, her life; Isabella, being disillusioned, loses her faith in her love- Heathcliff whom she thought earlier to be a complete husband; Nelly loses confidence to protest against wrong things in most situations.

We can discuss also the role of the narrators in the novel. We have two narrators in the book- Lockwood and Nelly. The novel closes with Lockwood as a narrator, just as it began with Lockwood as the narrator. But, the major portion of the story, the entire history of the two families is narrated by Nelly. Therefore, the pattern of the appearance of the narrators in the novel is Lockwood- Nelly- Lockwood (male-female- male). So, how much powerful character Nelly may be, her narration is kept within the boundary of Lockwood's narration. It is identified clearly that Bronte has deliberately deprived women of superior positions.

Literally, a novel which is concerned mainly with 'upbringing' or education and which is an account of the youthful development of a 'hero' or 'heroine', is called a *'Bildungsroman'*. It describes the process by which maturity is achieved through the various ups and downs of life. James Joyce's *'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'* is a finer example of it; Emily Bronte's *'Wuthering Heights'* may be classified as this kind of novel. But, there is a subtle difference in the presentation of the above-said two novels. In Joyce's novel *'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man'*, the hero's growth is traced as a process of 'triumphant self-discovery'. But for the heroine of *'Wuthering Heights'*, things are different. This novel is about the growth of Catherine to womanhood which records a process of 'anxious self-denial', this being the ultimate product of female education.

Actually Emily portrays the problem of being female in the patriarchal culture of the early 19th century- the same picture of women's portrayal as we see in men's writings. Being a woman, without any alteration, Emily also portrays women as meek, timid and submissive. So, in a true sense, we can call *'Wuthering Heights'* a female version of the male form- where women have no right to surpass or overcome men or to be the victorious; rather they are born to lose and destined to be 'the second sex'.

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