THE FEMALE VOICE IN "WUTHERING HEIGHTS" BY EMILY BRONTE

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Abstract. Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte is regarded as one of those foundational works that upended patriarchy. The paper examines the book from a feminist perspective, highlighting the strong female characters who bravely oppose the restrictive laws and circumstances that were placed on women in the 19th century. From the fervent and impetuous Catherine Earnshaw to the quiet and contemplative Isabella Linton, the female characters in Wuthering Heights are portrayed in a multitude of ways. At several moments in the story, these female characters stand up for their freedom and individuality. The tragic union of Isabella Linton and Heathcliff, as well as Nelly Dean's narration, highlight the patriarchal aspects of their culture. At certain points in the story, every female character in the book has spoken out against patriarchy, as well as the societal mores and restrictions that were placed on women in that era. Each of them is fully conscious of their own freedoms.

Key words: gender roles, female voices, female conscious.

Introduction. Everyone knows that every great artist incorporates a little bit of himself into their creations. While some of them conceal this fact more skillfully than others, it is evident to a committed reader that the artist leaves behind portions of their work that serve as reflection on their surroundings around them. There has been a negative trend towards Wuthering Heights ever since it was published. Everyone felt it was weird, and many found its representations of cruelty and defiance of conventional morality unpleasant, even though some of its early commentators commended its strength and originality.

Feminist literary criticism is a critical approach that seeks to interpret and study literature through the lens of feminist theory. It aims to understand and challenge the ways in which literature reinforces or challenges societal norms and power structures, particularly those related to gender. This approach has significantly influenced how we read and interpret literature, expanding the literary canon to include more diverse voices. Feminist literary criticism's foremost objective is to highlight and honor the rich heritage of women's writing, which is frequently disregarded or underappreciated. It also strives to put forward the male-centric readings of classic texts that have dominated literary criticism by reinterpreting them from a feminist standpoint. Some critics see Emily Bronte as one of the literary pioneers of feminism because of her wit, independence, and persistent determination, all of which are visible in her writings. Emily shows bravery by proving that even in the restrictive Victorian era, a woman

might strike a balance between a humble, timid, angelic Victorian image and a self-aware, powerful soldier.

The objective of the paper is to demonstrate the extent to which Emily has captured female characters who, although living in a society where women were not treated equally to men, are conscious of their rights and fight for their freedom.

Status of women in Victorian age. The Victorian period, in which she was writing, was hard for women. The Victorian feminine ideal was a woman who was 'the angel in the house'; a feminine figure that ensured hospitality and a moral guide, and also a paragon of virtue. Women were seen as delicate, fragile, and immature persons who weren't suited for intellectual tasks. Despite having their own families, these women had no influence over decision-making at any level in their households.

But, why would being a woman of virtue necessarily mean that they do not have a sense of self? Gilbert and Gubar explain that women's role was not to think for themselves nor of themselves: "she has no story of her own but gives advice and consolation, listens, smiles, sympathizes". (Gilbert and Gubar, 2000:22) The patriarchal society was built on such criteria. Mary Eagleton explains it in Feminist Literary Criticism: "Under patriarchy, Method has wiped out women's questions so totally that even women have not been able to hear and formulate our own questions to meet our own experiences. Women have been unable even to experience our own experience". (Eagleton, 2001:5)

Since men were the only ones who could make decisions in the home, women were expected to conform to the demands of the men who acted as their guardians. Women could not own independent property apart from their husbands' holdings when they married, therefore their husbands assumed management of their property. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women in England were not granted any legal standing in society and were not permitted to vote in elections, with the exception of their fathers or marriages. Primogeniture was the system of property inheritance whereby, upon the death of his father, the eldest son inherited all or most of the property.

Critics at the time did not think highly of the writings by women. In the biographical notice for Wuthering Heights, Charlotte Bronte says, 'Averse to personal prominence, revealed our names under those Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women.'

To counter Heathcliff's plans to control both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, Edgar Linton decides not to leave the land to his daughter Cathy, but rather to put it in the hands of trustees for her to use during her life, and for her children if she had any after her. Of course, Heathcliff counters Mr. Linton's goal by bribing the

attorney until Mr. Linton dies without having made such a will. Further, in the novel Heathcliff imprisoned both Cathy and Nelly Dean for which he is not ashamed because he treated both of them as his subjects.

Each of the women in the book is depicted with a certain amount of strength and protest against the patriarchy, which supports Emily Bronte's feminist beliefs, despite these limits due to age and social constraints.

Conclusion.   Emily Brontë had shaken the image of Victorian women by introducing female characters of the upper class that defy the social norms of the period, her heroines are not passive house angels who conform to the men in their lives. They are strong individuals who choose how to live their life and desire the power men have. In addition to being at odds with their dads and brothers, Emily Bronte's heroines also struggle against the social mores that repressed women in the Victorian era. Bronte depicted people that contend with unusual, even unpleasant, needs and obstacles that were rarely handled in the literature of her period, in contrast to the Victorian image of women as idealized domestic figures.

By presenting upper-class female characters that fearlessly violated the social mores of the time, Emily Bronte successfully destroyed the preconceived notion of Victorian women. These women emerge as strong, independent individuals who take responsibility for their actions and want to achieve the same level of autonomy and influence that males generally possess. Importantly, the female characters in Bronte's work particularly in Wuthering Heights are far from being mere victims. Without a doubt, Bronte's female characters are strong and capable at overcoming the challenges posed by their own lives.

This book serves as an introduction to women's rights and a call to action for all women to discover their own needs and desires, to be aggressive, and to never lose sight of the fact that true feminist qualities also include compassion and compromise.

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