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IN THE NAME OF GOD



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A Study of  
Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*  
Based on Julia Kristeva's Psychoanalytic Ideas

By

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### *Abstract*

This research aims to study Emily Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights* based on a modern psychoanalytic perspective. In order to fulfill such a purpose, the researcher intends to make beneficial use of Julia Kristeva's theories of language and subjectivity. Her ideas are important in that they are effective in opening up new horizons in order to develop new concepts of the formation of the assumed self. In addition, the subject's intermittent wrestling with different social, historical, cultural and other repressive systems is also an important part of Kristevan discussion. On the basis of Kristeva's ideas, Brontë's characters and their responses to these formative repressive forces will be fully developed. The first step, of course, would be to focus on Catherine Earnshaw as the central character. Since a subject is always in progress and never apart from the others, all those involved with her will be explored in their multiplicity as well. The research continues regarding various considerations like the formative role of the language as a fundamental element in bringing forward such a situation. Later, by comparing and contrasting different ideas regarding the roles of different characters and settings, the impossibility of the decision making with respect to the text is discussed. In this regard, the active role of Emily Brontë herself as a formulated subject and her use of language as a means of articulation would be taken into consideration. Semiotic and symbolic motility and the dialect between these two inseparable features would also be taken care of. Brontë is said to deal less seriously with social issues of the time. However, by noticing her maneuvering on the perception of the readers, it seems that her novel is a fertile ground for inquiries on the subject's situation in the society. Taking the role of her body play through images and metaphors in the text into consideration will better clarify this concept.

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***Chapter One: Introduction***

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### *General Background*

Emily Brontë was born on 30 July 1818 in Thornton, Bradford, Yorkshire, England. She was the fifth child of the six children of Maria Branwell and Patrick Brontë. Emily had four older siblings: Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, and Patrick Branwell. Brontës were in fact Irish. Their father was a scholarship boy who had tried many professions like blacksmith, linen-weaver and schoolmaster. Later, he aspired for a position in Cambridge and got a taste for holy orders. After Emily's youngest sister Anne was born, the Brontës moved to the village of Haworth, a poverty-stricken little town at the edge of a large tract of moorland in 1820. There, Patrick the father had been appointed rector perpetually. This profession would guarantee the economy of the family as lower middle class. (Eagleton 125)



The Brontë children did not experience a happy childhood. In 1821 Maria Branwell died of cancer, leaving her children motherless. Emily was three at the time. A short time after this loss, Emily's aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, moved in to the Parsonage to help nurse the six young children. Nothing around would encourage the children to have many social connections. Patrick Brontë's life was barren of social contacts. He and his family often kept to themselves. The moors became the companion of young Brontës among whom Emily developed a passionate love for the moorland which was no more than "a somewhat bleak northern parsonage on the edge of the moors" (Daiches 8). While at home, the children learned to develop their senses for the natural and for the unspoiled. In these surroundings, however, their literary imagination flourished. Despite the fact that the Brontës, Emily in particular, spent much of their time at home, their imagination would take them far away. From early childhood, they would create their stories of imaginary lands and countries in full detail. It is believed that Mr. Brontë's bringing a box of wooden soldiers home as souvenir from a trip to Leeds triggered the commencement of such fertile imagination. At any rate, reading and writing became an indispensable habit of little Brontës later bringing up the opportunity of involvement in the real career (Daiches 6-8).

In 1824, Emily, Charlotte, Maria and Elizabeth were sent to Cowan Bridge Clergy Daughter's School, where they suffered greatly from the harsh situation, cold and insufficient food. The bad conditions caused Maria and Elizabeth to be sent home with the tuberculosis that killed them in 1825. In the same year, Emily and her other sister, Charlotte, were ultimately taken away from the school to be largely educated at home. As they grew, more reading chances came to their sight. The children entertained themselves reading the works of William Shakespeare, Virgil, John Milton, and the Bible and played

the piano, did needlepoint, and told each other stories. Their father's bookshelf offered a variety of reading material: the Bible, Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron, Scott and many others. The children also read articles on current affairs and intellectual disputes in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, *Fraser's Magazine*, and *Edinburgh Review*. They would grasp all books and magazines within their reach. This made their imagination grow along with their general information of everyday events. Furthermore, their aunt's hymns were also a great source of imaginary power for them. Through such strategies, the children could seek shelter from the sense of loneliness (Daiches 8).

In 1835, Emily enrolled at Miss Wooler's school at Roe Head, Mirfield where Charlotte was teaching, but she could not be separated from her beloved moorland. She soon returned home because she had grown profoundly homesick and ill. In 1837, Emily spent some time teaching in Halifax. In 1842, after a few years as governess, Emily and her sisters Charlotte and Anne traveled to Brussels, Belgium. There at the Pensionnat Heger, they steeped themselves in the study of French, German and literature. Their aim at the time was to start their own school some day. When their Aunt Branwell died, Emily returned to Haworth for her funeral and stayed on there with her father. She helped around the home doing the house chores and simultaneously continued writing and editing her poems. By 1845 her sisters had also given up their dream of starting their own school and the three were together at Haworth again.

Emily spent much of her life at home in Haworth. Unlike Charlotte, she had few friends. Because of her habit of living a rather withdrawn and reclusive life, not much is known about her. The fascination with Emily Brontë's life and character that her early critics attest to follows Charlotte's lead. She characterized her sister "as a true eccentric,

happier in nature than society". Other critics, Bloom writes, notably Gaskell and Reid, broaden this representation with tales about Emily's strange affinity for animals and her almost complete withdrawal from the world (Bloom 127).

It was the discovery of Emily's poetic talent by Charlotte that led her and her sisters to publish a joint collection of their poetry in 1846, *Poems by Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell*. Emily's contributions in the collection contain many of the scenes set in the imaginary world of Gondal which she had created with Anne. These imaginary pictures reveal an intensely inward-turning imagination. To evade contemporary prejudice against female writers, the Brontë sisters adopted these pseudonyms. All three retained the initial letter of their first names: Charlotte became Currer Bell, Anne became Acton Bell, and Emily became Ellis Bell.

Emily wrote few letters and was interested in mysticism. In spite of her reclusive nature, she has proved a great observer of life and natural surroundings. Although she has generally been depicted as a recluse, she was, in fact, exposed to a cross-section of society through her father's congregation and their very diverse life experiences. In fact, the Yorkshire temperament, Eagleton believes, has often been characterized as somewhat passionate and vengeful, replete with blunt manners. The Brontë sisters' division between being Irish and English was doubled by the fact that they wanted the authority of authorship in a 19<sup>th</sup> century English society that would deny the right. Hence, they wrote under pseudonyms. The outrage in the novel would still be harsher to bear if people understood that a woman's mind was behind all that. Eagleton does not hesitate to give another clue of Brontës' lesser accessibility and acceptability to Victorian taste. All the three sisters were provincial novelists. They would record rural scenes but for rapidly improving English

society. It would obviously take some time for their readers to digest the material offered by such writers. The sense of solitude and isolation recorded in their novels stems for the most part out of such solitary surroundings as the moors would provide for them (Eagleton 125-8).

Their mother was a strict Methodist. Their family belonged to the Anglican establishment though from father and later their aunt, they got a "Dissenting, Evangelical strain" (Eagleton 125). Being born to the family of a lower-middle class person as their father was, the Brontës join majority of the petty bourgeoisie to fill the role of 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists of the English society. Presence in such a lower middle class family, on the other hand, provided them with a double vision. All three sisters became governesses. This went along with their social status in which they belong to neither set of the hierarchal order. They were neither too-high to be equal to wealthy aristocrats or at least to middle class nor too low to be accounted for as lower class. To be in a state like a governess in a luxurious house without the feeling that they could be a part of it, added much to the fire of their rebellious souls. The three sisters were hence after recognition to satisfy the need of their tumultuous hearts. Eagleton goes farther as to claim that the Brontës were affected certainly by witnessing the destruction of workers. They would also be witnesses to strikes of the age such as Chartism or struggles against the Corn-Law or factory reform. Their English county was also divided between large landowning and intensive manufacturing (Eagleton 125-8).

Brontë might have had personal experience with the type of people she characterized in *Wuthering Heights*. Emily was undoubtedly exposed to the darker side of human behavior. Her first exposure to the type of emotional cruelty might have taken place during her stay at the Haworth school. Domestic problems are also worthy of attention. In

addition to the bitter memory of mother's loss at an early age, their two sisters' early tragic deaths infected them with pain and sorrow. Furthermore, Patrick's change from a happy boy with full imaginary potential to a drunkard changed their lives permanently. Their brother Branwell gradually turned to a dissolute figure, addicted to both alcohol and drugs. He became famous later in life but for drinking. He tried excessively to poison himself. He also tried painting in which he was again the most miserable. As for writing, he tried to 'scribble' some thirty literary works between ten and seventeen. This was the time his three sisters also accompanied him. His damnation came to a tragic end "in his father's arms, wasted and bronchitic" (Eagleton 123-4).

*Wuthering Heights*, Emily's only novel, was published in December of 1847. Emily's pseudonym, Ellis Bell, appeared on the book. The book did not gain immediate success and was not well received. There was much controversy over who could have written the book. People thought it was excessively morbid, violent and outrageous. On the other hand, its innovative structure somewhat puzzled the critics. *Wuthering Heights* is structured as a story within a story. Different points of view embedded within the multiple small narratives held together by the main story declare the difficulty and simultaneous necessity of concentration to understand the novel.

"What distinguishes *Wuthering Heights*," Eagleton believes, "is its refusal to compromise its desire, to strategically negotiate it" (133). Her contemporaries were not quite ready for the outrageous realistic story which transgressed the conventional Victorian attitudes. DeRosa indicates that Victorian era is famous for its repression. While industrialization and rapid development impressed peoples' lives at an unbelievable speed, they grew more and more conservative. Sexual pleasure and death became forbidden issues

that would not be talked of unless the speaker would take the blame of being a trespasser and an outlaw. DeRosa continues that certain terms like pleasure or death were also put away since language was unable to express their nature in words (27).

Though her novel did not obtain much success in the beginning, *Wuthering Heights* has come to be much famous later on as one of the most intense novels written in the English language. Daiches believes: "The originality and intensity of her imagination, which led her to produce a novel unique in English literature, provide a fascinating subject for critical inquiry and psychological speculation" (7). After Brontë's death, the novel's reputation began to grow. The book subsequently became an English literary classic later lauded as an original and innovative tragic romance. In 1850, Charlotte edited and published *Wuthering Heights* under Emily's real name and a preface written by Charlotte herself. By the twentieth century it was generally considered a masterpiece by critics.

In contrast to Charlotte and Anne's novels that are represented in the form of autobiographies written by reliable narrators, Emily's creation tends to be more distant from her real person. As a girl to die at an early age, she did not experience a romantic intense love like the one she pictures in her novel. To design her plot differently from her peers at home, Emily introduced an unreliable narrator, Lockwood who constantly misinterprets the reactions and interactions of the inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights*. Nonetheless, Emily's plot is thoroughly conveyed to the reader through Nelly Dean who is a more reliable narrator. As the housekeeper, who has lived for two generations with the novel's two principal families, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, she manages to put the pieces of the puzzle together for the reader to pick up.

Her novel is set in 18th century England when values, either social or economic, were changing. The world she depicts is the one in which patriarchal values rule. These are in utter contrast to natural elements and feelings. Brontë penetrates deep down into the human psyche bringing about issues of revenge, religion, contempt, love and identity crisis. These issues are of course of much interest to critical taste. Critics have been consistent, Bloom indicates, in some of their appraisals of Emily's style, strengths, and shortcomings. He adds that most critics admire the vigor of her prose, and many compare her tragic vision to Shakespeare's like Smith, Swinburne, and Ward. Emily Brontë's ability to describe nature has also been a powerful stimulus repeatedly invoking critical praise. "The unconventionality and the boldness of her language inspire simultaneous critical awe and censure." (139)

Brontë was not to live long after *Wuthering Heights'* publication. She tended her brother, Branwell, while he was dying from alcohol and drug abuse. Patrick died in 1848 and while at his funeral Emily caught a cold which developed into tuberculosis. In November 1848, Emily's health was poor. Charlotte Brontë writes that her sister had difficulty breathing and pains in her chest. She died soon after at 2 o'clock in the afternoon on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1848, turning her back on all sorts of care or medical attention. She was 30 years old at the time. On 22 December she was laid to rest in the family vault in Haworth church.

### *The Argument*

*Wuthering Heights* has proved to be a matter of incessant controversy among a variety of critics. While some have lauded it for its strong emotion and imagination, others have

rushed to condemn it for the abuse and violation of the conventional codes. More prejudiced critics have divided into groups either for or against it. Among these critics, Eagleton refers to famous Heights critics deployed in rows against the Grange critics. The latter group tends to hit on the logic of the novel's attitude and character formation. From a Grange viewpoint, Eagleton states, the couple's relationship is 'an infantile, imaginary symbiosis' which can survive only 'by shutting out the social world'. Height critics, however, defy what is likely to deem all the tension unnecessary and childish. They applaud characters like Heathcliff as at once 'too much the outsider and too much the insider'. The second step of this group is to justify the fact that it is the right of an outsider like Heathcliff to revolt if he is dissatisfied with the way the community treats him. From this point of view, not only Heathcliff's but also Catherine's harsh reactions find enough premises (134-7).

However, there is more to the novel than that. Disregarding the existent bias, this thesis tries to trace the grounds for psychological interpretations of how the characters in *Wuthering Heights* are basically formed and later handled by or react to the surrounding social forces. In addition, the extent to which language, as a formative factor, shares in this shaping process is important. To deal with such concepts and notions, Kristeva's modern psychoanalytic theories seem to be of great help. Her theories consist of essential psychological notions starting from the subject's early formation as the subject in process up to the end of its living period. The Kristevan subject is multi-dimensional responding to many surrounding forces. This subject is prone to change. It is always at the mercy of the symbolic structures. Its reactions, or better to say, its choices bring about the next step. This process continues until the last moment when the subject, weary of struggle, gives way to



dissolution. Kristevan psychoanalysis is true not only in case of the subjects in the world, but also in connection with the characters such subjects create. These characters' responses are like those of the real entities that they symbolically represent. At the same time, they exhibit the writer as the creative subject in process. Hence, establishing an argument under the light of such psychoanalytic features is helpful in finding and founding solutions to all the existing controversies.

Though Brontë has apparently dealt less seriously with social issues of the time, it seems that her novel is a fertile ground for inquiries about the human situation in the society. Her novel displays the psychologically solitary man very well. More investigations may reveal the causes of depression and loneliness. In a deep survey, characters can be found to suffer from either mental or physical breakdown. Identity crisis inflicted upon them through the realities of living in the symbolic, cultural community defines their personalities as subjects in process prone to surrounding changes and influences. The characters have tenuous identities. There are those who are uncertain of their identity: where did they come from? What are their true origins? Lack of identity, makes them hesitant about the role they are set forward to play in the society. Regarding this novel, such conceptions need to be fully developed. To this purpose, the following questions are to be taken into consideration:

- How can the characters' uncertainties be analyzed? How are they subjected to socio-cultural factors?
- What psychological breakdowns are these lonely characters suffering from?
- What makes them experience loss? What are the sources and the results of this loss in the character's experiences?
- How do these characters try to make up for the lost object or person? What results from negotiating or inability to negotiate this loss?

- How stable or unstable are the characters in their treatments of themselves and others?
- How well are their needs and desires shown in the language they use?
- What are the terms of the definition of Otherness, of being a foreigner?
- Why can a certain character like Heathcliff never be accepted within the family or within the community?
- How is the idea of entrapment stressed? What textual evidences support the idea of entrapment?
- How does Brontë play for and against the set institutions?

### *Thesis Outline*

This study aims to read *Wuthering Heights* under a fresh psychological perspective namely Kristevan psychoanalysis. To make the process applied in this study clear, a concise summary of what is to be done in each chapter is helpful.

The first chapter of the thesis is the introductory section which consists of five phases. The first part of this chapter deals with a brief explanation of Brontës' life and her short career as a novelist. The following sub-sections introduce the main argument which forms the premises of the research. The third part gives a concise summary of what procedure the thesis will follow. This section is in turn followed by the introductory steps of the particular methodology and approach to be used in the following main chapters. The last step will of course provide the reader with some probably unfamiliar terms frequently used in Kristevan psychoanalysis which are taken into consideration within the scope of this research.

In the next chapter, Kristeva's ideas concerning the formation and development of the subject under symbolic influences will be put into discussion. The study in this chapter

will be mainly concerned with the relevance of the application of Kristevan notion of the subject in process and the trend of the character design in Brontë's novel. That whether or not the theory and practice comply is of great interest to the thesis. The characters will be studied through the steps they make within their limits. Their success or failure will be indicated in symbolic terms and the reasons for each will be fully examined.

In the following chapter, the relation of language acquisition with psychic development during the subject's movement from semiotic to symbolic will be studied. Since the two phases, the subject development and the language acquisition, are closely related, the third chapter will be a complementary to the discussion put forward in the second. This notion will be meticulously handled in case of the male, female language acquisition illustrated further in the manner the characters use the language and are controlled by it.

Chapter Four studies the writer's body inscription in writing. In this chapter, the notion of the relationship of the writing subject to her/his production, which is one of the foremost factors in Kristevan theory, will be analyzed. The generative mind will be then discussed as a productive facility like the womb. Having established such an analogy, the research will go on to discuss the similarities of the two symbiotic relationships. The first of such connections is the original mother child symbiosis. The latter is the artificial connection a writer can set up with her/his text as the result of her creative mind. Then, different features of Brontë's bodily impressions will be surveyed. To this purpose, metaphors used by the writer to sublimate the unconscious drives for the aim of becoming speakable will be discussed. The last subtitle will focus on the justification or refusal of the necessity of return of the writing subject to the safe house of the symbolic.

The fifth and in fact the last chapter of the research will necessarily be a concluding one. In this chapter, which is put forward within the range of three subtitles, a concise summary of what has been accomplished in the research will be brought to the attention of the reader under the subtitle of summing-up. The following step will consist of the results of the study and the discoveries made. Ultimately, some suggestions for further research will be put forward for the next research projects.

### *Approach and Methodology*

This research consists of five chapters. It is mostly library based. However, some electronic sources have also been used. Three of the chapters deal exclusively with the application of Kristevan theory to Emily Brontë's novel, *Wuthering Heights*. To begin with Kristeva's theories, of course, one should have a primary perception of the critic. Julia Kristeva is one of the major feminist critics of the third generation. Her innovative ideas are of course in contrast to the first generation of feminists who tried to join men in the social order. They would still be different from the ideas of the second generation in that they wanted a complete overturn of the existing order to establish a harsh one of their own. The third generation of feminists consists of critics that emphasize the necessity of accepting one's sex as different. They believe if women accept their presence as a different sex, they would be able to accomplish much. Through their capabilities and position, both sexes can gather to cooperatively redefine the social order. Theorists like Kristeva hope to guarantee a better future in this manner. What they are concerned with is the notion of the individuals. In this regard, Kristeva can still be more successful than her peers in that her psychoanalytic theories widen the range of her experiences. It can be said that the most significant