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Feminist Literary Criticism and *Wuthering Heights*

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Feminist criticism is the most outstanding discovery in the realm of theory as well as in the world of women. Feminist criticism comes in literary world in many forms and feminist critics have various goals. In them, some have been interested to rediscover the works of previous women writers who were over looked by male dominated society and others have started to review the books by male authors from a woman's point of view. Now a days a number of contemporary feminists have turned to topics as various as women in post colonial societies, women's autobiographical writings, lesbians and literature in the construction of feminine gender.

But a few years ago, however, feminist thought tended to be classified not according to topic but, rather, according to country of origin. Feminist literary criticism must be seen as a function of a political movement for women's freedom which spread in Europe and America in 1960s to revive political and social issues which are associated with women. This practice reflected the fact that during 1970s and early 1980s, French, American and British feminists wrote from somewhat different perspectives. However, it is not that the women have started protesting against male domination and the discrimination against women started in the second half of 20th century for the first time. The voices of protest were found in the 5th century

B.C. in *Lysistrata*, Aeschylus', *Agamemnon* and also in the works of Seneca, Euripides etc.

In Seventeenth century, Mary Astell wrote a book *Proposal to the Ladies for the advancement of their true and greatest interest*, which creates feminine consciousness in the society. But in 1792 appeared the very influential *essay A vindication of the Rights of women* by Mary Wollstone Craft's which is considered as the first major document of feminism which gives women some scopes to judge and think their own situation in society. Next, John Stuart Mill in his work *The Subjection of women* which was published in 1869 raised his voice against the injustice on women. It was Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928) which was not a theoretical work in a conventional sense but it serves as a point of departure for the study of women literature and he beginnings of feminist criticism. One of the Virginia Woolf's most significant contribution to feminist criticism is discussion on language.

The view of language becomes a topic of discussion in feminist criticism from French feminists and feminist critics. French feminists wished to focus the attention on language and analysing the ways in which meaning is produced. They concluded that language as we commonly think of it is a decidedly male dominated realm. According to psychoanalytic philosopher Jacques Lacan, language is a realm of public discourse. It is most surprising that a child enters the linguistic realm when it comes to grasp its separateness from its mother and identifies with their father, who is the family representative of culture. Thus, language learned reflects a binary logic. According to French feminists the structure of language is phallogentric. Moreover, Ann Rosalind in her book *Inscribing Femininity; French theories of the feminine. Making a difference; feminist literary criticism* says, 'Masculine desire dominates speech and posits women as an idealised fantasy fulfillment for the incurable emotional lack caused by separation from the mother'.

Language systematically forces women to choose; either they can imagine and represent themselves as man imagine and represent them. But some influential French feminist says that language only seems to give women such a narrow range of choices. In this connection early French feminist such as Annie Leclerc, Xaviera and Marguerite Duras suggested that there is something that may be called *l'écriture féminine*; women's writing. Recently Julia Kristeva has said that feminine language is semiotic 'not symbolic'.

The other French feminist Helene Cixous comments in favour of feminine language to describe women's bodily pleasure, According to Luce Irigaray, women's sexual pleasure can not be expressed by the dominant, ordered, 'logical', masculine language. So Irigaray comments that women's *Jouissance* is more multiple than male's unitary phallic pleasure because 'women has sex organ just about everywhere', so feminine language is more diffusive than its masculine counterparts. She says, 'That is undoubtedly the reason (...) her language (...) goes off in all directions and (...) he is unable to discern the coherence (Irigaray, p. 101-103). But other French feminist critics such as Christian Fauré and Catherine Clément said that too much emphasis on the body may reduce the essence of feminism.

American Feminist Critics of the 1917 and early 1918s, Annette Kolodny, Kate Millet, Carolyn Heilbrun and Judith Fetterley gave emphasis to analyze literary text rather than philosophising abstractly about language. Many critics want to review the great works by male writers examining the portrayals of women characters, exposing the patriarchal ideology implicit in such works and showing how clearly this tradition of systematic masculine dominance is inscribed in literary tradition. Another view of feminist criticism is found in Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980):

'The semantic rule which has been responsible for the manifestation of sexism in the language can be simply stated; there are two fundamental categories, *male* and *minus male*.

To be linked with male is to be linked to a range of meanings which are positive and good; to be linked with this minus male is to be linked to the absence of those qualities. (...) The semantic structure of the English language reveals a great deal about what it means to be female in a patriarchal order.' (Spender, P. 23)

Gilbert and Gubar, in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) concerned themselves with well known women writers of the nineteenth century, but they too found that general concern, images and themes recur, because the authors that they wrote about live in a culture whose fundamental definitions of literary authority are both overtly and covertly patriarchal.

An important stage in modern feminism was reached in Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970). She used the term 'patriarchy' (rule of the father) to describe the cause of women's oppression. In the earlier phase of modern feminist writings on literature (Kate Millett, Germaine Greer, Mary Ellmann) the emphasis was often quite political for expressing women's 'political' awareness of their oppression by men.

British feminists felt that the American opposition to male stereotypes that denigrate women often leads to counter-stereotypes of feminine virtue that ignore real difference of race, class and culture among women.

Thus, the French, American and British approaches have so thoroughly judged, influenced and assimilated one another that the work of most western practitioners is no longer easily identifiable along national boundary lines. Showalter detects in the history of women's writings a *feminine phase* (1840-80) in which women writers imitated dominant male artists norms and aesthetic standards; then a *feminist phase* (1880-1920) in which radical and often separatist positions are maintained; and finally a *female phase* (1920 onward) which looked particularly at female writing and female experience.

In this connection, Elaine Showalter described the change in the late 1970s as a shift of attention from 'androtexts'

(book by men) to 'gynotexts' (books by women). she coined the term 'gynocritics' meaning the study of gynotexts but gynocriticism is a broad and varied field, e.g., history, styles, themes, genres, structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution or laws of a female literary tradition.

Beauvior seems to propel the same confusion when she says: 'Woman is however the target to two mutually exclusive discourses ... hesitating between the role of 'object', 'other' which is offered her and the assertion of her liberty'.

Wuthering Heights is a good book for practical feminist criticism. There are some perspectives of feminism in *Wuthering Heights*, e.g., it's a fiction written by a woman on women's lives, their sacrifice, their suffering and social atmosphere.

Wuthering Heights may be examined through Feminist literary criticism to rediscover the novelist's obsession on the repetition of names Catherine and the sexual suppression, male revenge are also presented in such a way that women characters do not get enough scopes to be an individual figure. So the character Catherine was also in the minds of confusion to whom she will choose for her husband Edgar or Heathcliff. Catherine develops a double standard to accommodate her feelings for both Edgar and Heathcliff as Hindley degrades Heathcliff more and more, Ellen says she was full of ambition and was anxious to ingratiate herself with the Lintons.

The scene in his duality reaches its climax is her confession to Ellen that she has accepted Edgar. Dreams are used to convey meaning to the reader in *Wuthering Heights*, as has been suggested about Lock Wood's dream; here Catherine describes her dream of being in heaven.

I was only going to say that heaven did not seem to be my home; and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out, into the middle of the Heath on top of Wuthering Heights;

where I looked sobbing for joy. That will do to explain my secret, as well as the other. I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I how to be in heaven.

Being a woman novelist Emily Bronte is not able to show so much courage to break the contemporary social rules and regulations. Another most important event is related with torture on Isabella in her own house by her husband.

Catherine begins life as Catherine Earnshaw and Catherine Linton. Catherine's daughter, on the other hand, occupies each of the names in turn and traces back the route to her mother's first name. The novel thus begins and ends with Catherine Earnshaw. However, although the names circulate through the text, they create a pattern of asymmetrical repetition rather than of circularity.

The story of the first Catherine hinges – as do most novels of the period – on her choice between two men. Choosing the correct husband is the central moral task set for the heroine of most eighteenth and nineteenth century novels, particularly those written by women.

In Catherine's case, marriage is no the answer to the problem of her life, the resolver of all contradictions, as it usually is in domestic and romantic fiction. On the contrary, marriage compounds the problems of Catherine's case, marriage is not compounds the problems of Catherine's life and exposes its contradictions.

As a motherless, and subsequently fatherless, girl growing up in a geographically isolated and loosely organized working household, Catherine reaches puberty relatively untrammelled by parental notions of suitable feminine conduct. Her childhood is, on the whole, spent with Heathcliff in a private, unsocialized an ungended moorland world. Her encounters with adult authority, in the form of her brother's petty domestic tyranny and Joseph's rigid Methodism, develop here capacity for rebellion and resistance, and she thus becomes an assertive child associated with the realm of nature,

its freedom and power, rather than with the domestic and its constraints.

Emily Bronte's portrayal of Catherine's sudden and dramatic transformation into a genteel young lady during her stay at Thrushcross Grange focuses on the way in which the particular version of femininity involved in the ideal of female gentility is socially produced and reinforced, rather than derived from women's "nature." Catherine's transformation, described by Nelly as a "reform", is shown as, in fact, a process of formation or construction.

Catherine's story not only shows the limits of female power but also explores its problematic nature. Catherine's story also dramatizes the limits of female influence. She also becomes the object of a competitive struggle between two men, each of whom wants her to conform to his own version of her.

Catherine's final illness is, in effect, a withdrawal from both the world and the self. Her derangement (pp. 118 ff.) enacts here experience of self-alienation. Like so many women in Victorian fiction, Catherine dies in Child-birth and is thus not required to negotiate that other profoundly ideo-logical version of womanhood – "the mother".

If Cathy is a repetition of her mother, she is also a variation. Whereas the older Catherine's childhood prepares her for the role of Gondal's Quen, "half savage, and hardy, and free." Her daughter is the spoiled, wilful, and pert fairy tale princess, the empress of her walled momain and mistress of her father and his servants.

Thus, in another interesting variation on the pattern of the conduct book female and domestic romance heroine, Cathy is not made to pay the usual price for her feminine influence. Catherine also resuming control of her own life and defining herself a new. Cathy reconstructs both herself and Hareton. Whereas Catherine is destroyed by her inability to reconcile conflicting images of herself and the contradictory definitions of the feminine which confront her, Cathy negotiates them and ultimately constructs a new role for herself.

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