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Middle Class Women Role in the 19th Century as Reflected in Bronte's Wuthering Heights

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to describe middle class women role in the 19th century in Bronte's novel, Wuthering Heights, and induce a deeper understanding of effect each role on two characters in society. This research is a qualitative descriptive method using sociological approach. By using sociology of literature, a literary work is seen as a document of social. The data of this research collected from the descriptions and utterances of the characters and narrator in the novel. The result in this research shows that the role of women from the middle class were represented by the characters of the novel known as Catherine Earnshaw Linton, the main female protagonist and the motherless child and also Catherine (Cathy) Linton, daughter of Catherine Earnshaw Linton.

Keywords: Middle Class, Women, Role, Sociology of Literature

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1. Introduction

Women have not been exhaustively discussed. There are a lot of things about women to talk such as women's right, independence, gender inequalities, freedom, discrimination and above all women's desire. People still the role of women is limited in certain areas. Koscher (2006:2) state that women's social conditions change from time to time. It is generally followed by the changing of women's role in society.

The 19th century, the fact changes the perception of women's nature. Women in this area faced difficult and confusing problems from the fallacy of what society proposed as their identity and social roles (Arnold, 2005:1).

In this research, the researcher has at least two reasons why it is interesting to study about middle class women role in the 19th century England. First, the story in the novel is focused on women and their lives and the researcher discusses in this study came from the middle class. Here, Bronte told us how the society and class influenced the lives of women at that time. Second, issues about women are always interesting to be analyzed and the

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problem faced by women in the novel will lead us to remarkable attention about women's social class and their qualities display in society today.

By using sociology of literature, a literary work is seen as a document of social. It reveals something useful and inspires community of readers. Again, Rahman and Weda even claim that literature has a high status in civilized community (2018: 149). From the reasons that mention before, the researcher attempt to analyzes the novel by using sociology of literature to reveal middle class women role reflected in Emily Bronte's novel

1.1. Women Role in 19th century: At a Glance

In 19th century England women were simply not afforded the same rights and privileges as men, including rights to education and jobs. Females were expected to submit to their father's (then husband) demands and could rarely be independent. In that era, Women were thought to be more pure, innocent, and morally superior to men; however, they were also more easily corrupted. Besides that, women's sexual desires of which they were not very troubled by sexual urges, it is when a husband had desires which as a wife women were contracted to fulfill. In that time, the women was expected to be limited to childbearing and housewife In addition, particularly for working-class women often had occupations to make ends meet, and to ensure family income in the event that a husband became sick, injured, or died. Some women were employed in heavy industry such as coal mines and the steel industry. Women traditionally did all the chief tasks in agriculture in all counties of England

1.2. Objectives of Study

By concerning through the phenomena existing in the novel of *Wuthering Heights* as the representation of the life in 19th century, In this study, the researcher aims to elaborate particularly the role of women in the 19th century as represented in Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*.

2. Method

Research is the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data in order to understand a phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). This research is a qualitative descriptive method using sociological approach. Qualitative research is also described as an unfolding model that occurs in a natural setting that enables the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences (Creswell, 1994).

The researcher collected the data and then wrote the data which related to role of women based on the source of data. In addition, the researcher used library research method to collect supporting data from several books, journals, articles and any information from internet related to this research.

The source of this research is a novel from Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* while the research data are the result of analyzing the middle class women role in the 19th in *Wuthering Heights* novel written by Bronte.

3. Findings

From the novel, the researcher found several data by analyzing the characters in order to gain the information related to the middle class of woman existing in the 19th century of England as follows:

Data 1: ... "You shall pay me for the plague of having you eternally in my sight – do you hear, damnable jade?" (Bronte, 1992 : 21).

The utterance above shows that there is a sense of control later spreads to Heathcliff who exclaims that to Cathy, his daughter-in-law. Cathy has no other option than to stay with a man who hates her because women could not support themselves.

Data 2: ... "The mistress visited her often in the interval, and commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery, which she took readily; so that, instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless, there 'lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit, which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in" (Bronte, 1992: 36).

This description shows that the goal of this transformation is to form Catherine to be an ideal wife. When she returns to Wuthering Heights, she returns to her old manners with Heathcliff. However, she displays her proper character whenever she is around Edgar. Catherine has to be what is expected of her in order to be considered as an option for a socially accepted bachelor.

The following data shows Catherine's struggles against society's expectation and her true desires. She described her conflict to Nelly.

Data 3: ... "And he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband", (Bronte 1992:55).

Data 4: ... "You love Mr. Edgar because he is handsome, and young, and cheerful, and rich, and loves you" (Bronte, 1992:56).

Data 5: ... "He is rich now; and I have only to do with the present. I wish you would speak rationally" (Bronte, 1992:56).

Data 6: ... "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, 1992 : 57).

Although Catherine truly loves Heathcliff, his position in society causes her to choose self-preservation. To choose Heathcliff would mean choosing complete isolation and degradation.

One of the main roles of women in the 19th century was to provide an heir. Shortly, after Catherine gives birth to Cathy, she passes away. In essence, Catherine failed to the most important role.

Conditions continue to worsen for Cathy. Linton has died and Heathcliff harbors total control over Wuthering Heights, Thrushcross Grange, and Cathy. The obtained data can be seen below:

Data 7: ... "However, Mr. Heathcliff has claimed and kept them in his wife's right and his also: I suppose legally; at any rate, Catherine, destitute of cash and friends, cannot disturb his possession", (Bronte, 1992: 213).

Ellen describes Cathy's situation that she cannot run away because she has no money and cannot obtain a job as a women. Her only feasible option is only to marry again. Nelly attempts to force Lockwood to love and winning Cathy over; however, Cathy does not accept the nelly's wants. The data is as follows:

Data 8: ... "What a realization of something more romantic than a fairy tale it would have been for Mrs. Linton Heathcliff, had she and I struck up an attachment, as her good nurse desired, and migrated together into the stirring atmosphere of the town!", (Bronte, 1992 : 221).

The fact that women need to rely on men to save them from poverty demonstrates the patriarchal society and the helplessness of the women within it. It is well known in that era that when the husband became sick, injured, or died, the family will be unable to pay the rent and anything to save livings. Therefore, some women were employed in heavy industry such as coal mines and the steel industry. Although in that era women traditionally did all the chief tasks in agriculture in all counties of England but because of agricultural work was not paying well, the women should turn into industrial employment.

As *Wuthering Heights* wraps up, Bronte reveals an unexpected happy ending for young Catherine. She overcomes her prejudice against Heathcliff's ignorance and falls in love with him. The two close and eventually marry. Catherine marriage provides an example of the only girl power moments in the novel. Although she previously allowed Edgar and Linton's views of social status dictate her life, she finally forms a sense of independence against Heathcliff. It can be seen though the following data.

Data 9: ... "You shouldn't grudge a few yards of earth for me to ornament, when you have taken all my land!" (Bronte, 1992 : 232).

Catherine finally discovers what she wants and refuses to let a powerful man block her happiness. This independent streak works to her advantage because her relationship with Hareton reminds Heathcliff far too much of Catherine and ceases his desire for revenge. Despite a long trial and error process, Catherine succeeds in accomplishing what her mother never could. She chooses the love she truly desire, a love that does not involve a masochistic relationship.

4. Discussion

Based on the analysis above, the researcher found that there are two middle class women roles in the 19th century as they have performed in Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. The first middle class women's role is represented by Catherine Earnshaw Linton, the main female protagonist and the motherless child. She grew up with Hindley and Heathcliff (a gipsy child, rescued and adopted by her father. He is raised with the two children, as a member of the family). She loves Heathcliff but chooses social advancement instead of true love. It is her betrayal (in marrying Edgar Linton) and the act of abandonment that is at the heart of the other acts of barbarity and cruelty that we see through the course of the novel (Heathcliff vows that he will enact revenge upon her and entire family. For the first middle class women role is generally to become an

ideal wife and behave properly particularly around the upper classes whenever she was even she had to display her character and to provide heir as well.

The second middle class women's role is represented by Catherine (Cathy) Linton. Cathy Linton is daughter of Catherine Earnshaw Linton, who dies offering very little input in her life and Edgar Linton, who is very protective. She shares more than just her name with her illustrious mother. Like her mother, she's passionate and stubborn. She pursues her own desire. Unlike her mother, she inherited something that could be seen as a greater measure of humanity or compassion (perhaps from her father). In that era, the women cannot support themselves as can be seen from the novel when Heathcliff exclaims that to Cathy, his daughter-in-law. Cathy has no other option than to stay with a man who hates her.

4. Conclusion

Wuthering Height is a novel that tells about romantic love and revenge. It is about two families known as the Earnshaw who live in the Heights, at the edge of the moors and the Linton who live at the Thrushcross Grange. From the novel, it can be seen that there are two middle class of women's role known as the first middle class who was represented by Catherine Earnshaw and the second middle class who was represented by Catherine (Cathy). From the novel it can be seen that, the women in that era particularly in middle class cannot support themselves.

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