

## *Wuthering Heights*—the Song of Rebel

WU Cai-yun<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *Wuthering heights* is the masterpiece by Emily Bronte. This paper aims to analyze the rebellious spirit in this novel. Almost every character in this novel is filled with rebellious spirit. The author will first analyze the protagonists' rebellion. Then the minor characters' rebellion will also be talked about. They rebel against different people. However, to some extent, they are rebelling against the society, the moral system, the authority and so on. During their life journey, they are pursuing the self. Several questions will be answered in this thesis: What are they rebelling for? Why do they want to rebel? What do they get from their rebellion? What does the author want to express through this novel? The thesis systematically presents the character's rebelling behaviors and the causes; it even tries to probe into the influence of Emily Bronte's personality on this novel. This paper will, to some degree, widen the research area.

**Key words:** *Wuthering Heights*; rebel; feminism

*Wuthering Heights* is the representative as well as the striking work of the English author Emily Bronte. It occupies a shining and outstanding position in the English and even the world literature. The author of *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte, was born in Thornton, Yorkshire, but of Celtic blood. When her mother died, her aunt came to care for the children. But her aunt was no substitute for their mother. The children grew up wild, independent. They devoted to each other, yet were suspicious of outsiders. Emily and her sisters were taught at home. The home teaching was sketchy, but the children read widely and wrote cycled stories set in lands of their imagination. Emily was introverted, but wild and rebellious in her inner world. *Wuthering Heights* is a novel about the love story between passionate Catherine and her savage lover Heathcliff. Their love lasts through their lives beyond their death and burial in the quiet churchyard in the moors. The story is full of rebellion. In order to pursuit the self, Catherine and Heathcliff rebel against the society, the moral system, the authority and so on. So in this sense, *Wuthering Heights* is the song of rebel.

### 1. HEATHCLIFF'S REBELLION

#### 1.1 The tool of rebellion—fortune and social status

Heathcliff was picked up by the old master Mr. Earnshaw in the street. However, he was considered as the invader and the depriver of his father's attention and love by Hindley. After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Heathcliff was bullied by Hendly, the young master, by being deprived of the right education. He was even

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<sup>1</sup> Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, Hubei, China. Wu Caiyun is a postgraduate student of Zhongnan University of Economics and Law. Her research area is comparative literary. Email: melissau@yahoo.cn.

\*Received 14 July 2010; accepted 18 September 2010

treated as a servant. In addition, Hindley tried all his efforts to separate him and Catherine and even forbade the conversations between them. Therefore, Heathcliff hated Hindley so deeply that the idea of revenge came out as early as childhood. Yet Heathcliff was not desperate because he had Catherine to understand him and love him. Nothing could be more important than his true and sincere love for Catherine. Heathcliff would never betray his love for the pursuit of the fortune and social status. He can even sacrifice everything for it. He bore all the unfair things and maltreatment he has received. When Heathcliff overheard the conversations that Catherine decided to marry Linton, he turned to be outraged. He felt as if he was deserted by the whole world. And in his deep mind, he realized that the only reason for Catherine's betrayal was because that he was poor and he had lower social status. So, after three years' absence, he came back with large fortune and looked like a gentleman. When he found that Catherine had married Linton, he began his revenge against Hindley.

And it is satire that the tool he used to rebel is still the higher class's value measure: fortune and social status. He tried to revenge against Hindley by means of making him poor and lost his social positions. He gambled and drunk with Hindley at the Heights, making Hindley finish drinking himself to death after mortgaging all his property to Heathcliff. After Hindley was dead, he was in charge of the heights. And he owned a large number of fortunes, enjoyed the high status and continued his control on to Hindley's son Hareton. He kept Hareton as a bemused dependent, ignorant that Heathcliff was his father's enemy. Hareton was as rude as he used to be. He owned neither the fortune nor the social status. This also can be seen from what he did towards little Cathy. By arranging the marriage between little Cathy and little Linton, he at last got the Thrushcross Grange. From these facts, we can get a clear idea of how greatly Heathcliff values the fortune, which is also an important criteria for people in that time to measure whether a man succeeds or not. So in this sense Heathcliff has succeeded. He defeated his unfair fate and became a wealthy person who enjoyed a higher social position.

## **1.2 The weapon of rebellion — marriage**

Edgar Linton was the hero of a typical Victorian novel, and he had all the qualities, such as constancy and tenderness. He was from the severe family, very wealthy and gentle. His extraordinary temperament and gentleness attracted Catherine, and the wealth in property and the family superiority made Heathcliff jealous. However, the direct reasons for Heathcliff's rebellion are Linton's marriage with Cathy. Heathcliff considers Edgar's version of love to be selfish. So when he came back three years later, finding that Catherine had married Linton, he began his rebellion against Linton.

The weapon of his rebellion against Linton was marriage. The first target is Isabella. When Catherine told him that Isabella was in love with him, he was excited. He dated the pure girl, lured her and eloped with her. He married Isabella although he didn't love her. After Isabella died, Heathcliff turned his focus to little Catherine and little Linton. He brought his son Linton home from the grange, terrorized him into slavery, and arranged a marriage between him and little Catherine. Heathcliff succeeded for a second time. He defeated the authority, whose typical representative was Linton. Heathcliff didn't get the happy marriage with Catherine although they should be happy. So he paid these back. If he didn't own the happy marriage, nobody could.

## **1.3 The causes of rebellion**

On one hand, Heathcliff was maltreated in his childhood. Heathcliff was a gipsy waif of unknown parentage, and he was picked up by the old master Mr. Earnshaw in the street. During his childhood, Heathcliff was treated unfairly by the society. After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Heathcliff was bullied by Hindley. He was deprived the right of receiving education and even reduced to the position of a servant. However, the mark of the capitalism was that money determines everything. And the society Heathcliff lives in was just a society of money. In this society, poverty was shameful. No matter why you were poor and what had you done towards it, as long as you did not have money, you would be insulted. And just because Heathcliff was poor, everybody looked down upon him. At last, even Catherine, to whom Heathcliff gave all his love, betrayed Heathcliff. It was the thing that Heathcliff could not accept. So he decided to rebel.

On the other hand, it was because of his nature—nurtured personalities. Napoleon has ever said: if there is someone laughs at my height, I will cut his head off, and then he is as tall as I am. Perhaps this thought is also fit for Heathcliff: if there is no dignity in life, it is better to rebel. Heathcliff's life experience and servant status makes him do not have either the dignity or money. This situation makes him stubborn and crucial. And just as the India saying goes: sow the character, get the fate. Heathcliff's these characteristics decides his rebelling behaviors.

In addition, it was due to his endless love to Catherine. Heathcliff was in deep love with Catherine. Catherine could share his sorrow and suffering, so if he is with Catherine, all the other unhappy things were not really important at all for him. And Catherine was the only person whom Heathcliff can turn to for his sorrow and complaint. Catherine was his sole support. He fell in love with her so crazily and unselfishly that she was the only hoe of his life, she was the whole world, and she was the dream. So latter on, when he know Catherine was going to marry Linton, Heathcliff lost himself. He went away and rebelled.

## 2. CATHERINE'S REBELLION

### 2.1 The target of rebellion

Catherine was born in the heights, and she grown up with Heathcliff wildly. They loved each other by the nature. However, was this her destiny? Could she live the rest of her life with this servant? No. Catherine was not satisfied with the currant situation. Despite her nature, she was attracted by the culture. During Catherine's whole life, she was rebelling against her destiny between the primitive and the civilization. She rebeled against the religion oppression, patriarchal society and the moral system.

#### 2.1.1 The religion oppression

In Victorian age, the England became "the workshop of the world"; however, the society was filled with unrest, alarm, and misery, which contrast with the growing prosperity and general good feeling of the succeeding. So there were a series of reform. The results of the reform were that the personal liberty was settled, and democracy became the established order; it became an age of popular education, of religious tolerance, of growing brotherhood, and of profound social unrest. (*History and Anthology of English Literature*, 1988)

The spirit of religious rebellion was well illustrated in the novel *Wuthering Heights*. In the book, the heroine, Catherine, embodied the rebellion spirit against the religion oppression in that age vividly. As a child, Catherine was willful and perverse. She couldn't bear anybody's control. In *Wuthering Heights*, Joseph was the honest servant in the Heights, and every Sunday he arranged the children to the church and read the bible, even in the rainy day, the children had to get up the congregation in the garret. He was responsible for this duty. This can be seen from the following:

"I (Catherine) had just fastened our pinafores together and hung them up for a curtain, when in comes Joseph in an errand from the stables. He tears down my handiwork, boxes my ears and croaks: "'T' maister nobbut just buried, and sabbth no o'ered, und t'sound o't' gospel dtill I' yer lugs, and ye darr be laiking! Shame in ye! Sit ye down, ill childer! There are good books enough if ye'll read'em!" (*Wuthering Heights*, 19)

From what Joseph had said, we can get the impression that he was staid, strict and rude. For the words he used was almost old words which were not popular until that time. And the manner was very bad, although he was only a servant in the heights while Catherine was, to some extent, his master. However, Catherine never compromised to his religious oppression. Catherine just hurled the book into the dog kennel, vowing she hated a good book. From Catherine's behavior, we get the idea that she was deeply rebellion against Joseph, in other words, the religious oppression. As the young generation of the time, due to the development of the science and technology, Catherine had disillusioned. She loved freedom. She needed religious emancipation. However, Joseph turned to be the spokesman for the controlling force. They thought and behave habitually in the traditional puritan way. They had high moral standard and viewed

pleasure-seeking as the symptoms of sin. So there was no doubt never ending deep contradiction between them. As for Catherine, she neglected his power and rebelled against him. She loved freedom, and wanted to shake off the shackles of the bible. This phenomenon in turn reflected the spiritual frustration of the Victoria age.

### 2.1.2 The patriarchal society

At the beginning of the 19th century, England was a typical patriarchal society. Women, as well as the proletarian, were oppressed: no matter in which class the women born, legally they were equal to the men criminals, madmen and minors. And this background influences the *Wuthering Height* a lot.

Catherine's rebellion against the patriarchal society can be seen from her rebellion against the two men. The first was her brother Hindly. After the death of her father, Catherine's brother Hindley inherited all the family fortune, and became the master of the Heights. On the contrast, Catherine got nothing. This is just the product of the patriarchal society. Since then Catherine had to rely on her brother and live under his control. For example, on Sunday evenings they used to be permitted to play, if they did not make much noise; now a mere title was sufficient to send them into corners. In fact, as a master, Hindley was a tyrant. Catherine was hurt deeply by this tyrant, she wrote that: "how little did I dream that Hindley would ever make me cry so!" (20) "my head aches, till I cannot keep it in the pillow; still I can't give over." (20) In Hindly's eyes, Catherine should be an obedient, lovely and gentle lady rather than a stubborn and wild savage who spent the whole day with the underbred servant. And he insisted that Catherine should marry an upper class gentleman just like Linton who intended to be the representative of the civilization. Through this kind of marriage, both the family fortune and social status should be improved greatly. However, Catherine couldn't agree with his view very much. She had her own choice and decision. She would like to pursue her true love, to be directed by her nature, and to be her real self. Catherine clung to Heathcliff and they promised to grow up together as rude as savages. The other was her husband, Linton. In that age, marriage was an economic necessity for women, and a wife was looked on only as her husband's housekeeper and her children's nurse and teacher. The life of the married women was dull and unbearable. Catherine couldn't bore this boring life, though it seemed to be happy. So when Heathcliff was back for her, she wavered. She even tried to find the balance between the two men, which was totally prohibited by the patriarchal society.

Indeed, both Hindly and Linton are typical representatives of the patriarchal society. So in this sense, Catherine rebellion against him was indeed the rebellion against the patriarchal system. She can't bear the unfair treatment towards men and women and tried to find the resolution.

### 2.1.3 The moral system

In this novel, *Wuthering Heights*, an important clue was the love between Heathcliff and Catherine. Catherine knew how deep she loved Heathcliff, as she said:

"My love for Linton is like the 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: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being."  
(*Wuthering Heights*, 74)

From the quotation, Catherine and Heathcliff were soul twins, similar get independent. Heathcliff was the other self of Catherine. They grew up together, they have the same experience, and both of them belong to nature. However, their love was not allowed by the moral at that time. As there was tremendous disparity between them, they did not belong to the same class.

Another evidence can be found from Catherine for her rebellion against the moral system was her betrayal to her marriage with Linton. Catherine's five-week-stay at Thrushcross Grange made the end of Heathcliff and Catherine's time of happiness and perfect understanding. She was attracted by the freedom and civilization in the Thrushcross Grange. And under Linton's influence, Catherine had moved partly into a

different sphere of genteel Linton's, and Heathcliff couldn't follow her. This time, in Catherine's deep mind she thought: "It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now" (72). She did not want to live as it would be. She should be a great lady and be rich. She would change her destiny. So at last she married the gentle Linton. However, soon Catherine was tired of such meaningless freedom and the so called civilization, So when Heathcliff came back three years later, She was as happy as an angel. She realized her wrong decision and awaked. She knew that she was still in love with Heathcliff. She even tried to persuade Linton to accept Heathcliff. However, Catherine failed to create a harmonious relationship between these two men. Suffering enough from the painful love, Catherine choosed death as her last rebellion. In Victorian age, it was a typical patriarchal society. While men were the centre of the society, women were just the appendix of love. The value of woman was to be honest with love, and adhere to the man. As for Catherine, she should be honest to her husband Linton after her marriage as far as the traditional moral concerned. So in this sense, Catherine is strongly rebellious against the traditional moral.

## 2.2 The core of rebellion

According to the description of Catherine's rebellion against the religious oppression, the patriotic system and the moral system, Emily Bronte vividly expressed her view of the rise of feminism. Under the patriotic society, women can't make their own decisions about their marriage. All of their fate was controlled by their parents. If the daughter refused the husband that their parents choosed for her, it was common that she would be held in captivity and strapped, which would not surprise anybody at all. At that time, marriage was none of love's business; instead it was about the family's future. Influenced by the patriotic system, Catherine made the wrong choice and married the rich Linton. However, when she was dying, she met with Heathcliff. They criticized each other angrily, while they reached the soul's agreement at last. Through this Bronte proofed that women were desired for true, and at the same time, they valued the idea that the spirit and the soul should be conformed.

At the same time, Emily Bronte insisted that women were not the appendix of the marriage; they had the right to pursuit their own happy. They also hade their own conscious; they didn't want to be the victim of the patriarchal system. This can be seen from Catherine's betray to her marriage. Somebody had said that: *Wuthering Heights* is a great novel which refuses the heroines compromise on the predicament and social custom. It was really true, Catherine was a typical woman Bronte created to be a great feminist.

Through Catherine, Emily expressed her view of feminism. There should be three important factors for women to be free from the patriotic society. Firstly, women should have independent personalities. Women should no longer be one of men's libs; instead she should enjoy the half sky. Secondly, women should own free individuality. Women should not be commented as angel or evil just according to men's judgment. They need to live in accordance with their own will. At last, the foundation was the fair between men and women. And this was on the basis of independent personalities and free individuality.

In conclusion, Catherine's choice about her marriage and the intension of her emotion embodied the value of love of the new women in Victorian age. They are pursuing the unification of their physical body and the soul.

## 2.3 The causes of rebellion

In Catherine, the women's weakness and stubborn personality of fancying for beauty mixed together. She had all thoughts of freedom and spirit of revolt and vanity and class prejudice. Just because of these personalities, Catherine became a rebel. She rebelled against the religion oppression, patriarchal system, and her destiny. Then, Catherine's living experiences also contributed to her rebellion. Though born in a rich, noble family, Catherine was not a lucky girl who enjoyed the noble and happy childhood. After the death of her father, Catherine was maltreated by her brother Hindley and got a little warmth of the family. She was often punished by standing at the corner of wall and was not allowed to eat and was given numerous scolding by Hindley. This miserable life experience made her rebels against Hindley, the typical reprehensive of the patriarchal system. And she was pursuing freedom; she couldn't bear Joseph's religious oppression. After she grew up, she couldn't balance her love between Heathcliff and Linton. She loved Heathcliff in her soul, but at the same time she can't give up the civilization offered by Linton. At last, she

died as her final rebellion against her destiny. In addition, her unhappy marriage was another important factor contributing to her rebellion. After her marriage, she was disillusioned about the so called civilization. She was tired of that kind of life which made her deprive from her soul. So she rebelled at last.

### 3. THE REFRAIN OF THE SONG OF REBEL

The novel *Wuthering Heights* was a song of rebel. Besides the protagonists, other characters were also filled with the rebellious spirit, which constitutes the refrain of the song of rebel.

First, Isabella. Isabella's rebellion was well arranged in her two escapes. When Heathcliff came back three years later, Isabella Linton evinced a sudden and irresistible attraction towards the tolerated guest. At that time, She was "a charming young lady of eighteen; infantile in manners, though possessed of keen wit, keen feelings, and a keen temper, too, if irritated." (91) However, her brother didn't accept this fact at all. This can be seen in the work, *Wuthering Heights*:

"Leaving aside the degradation of an alliance with a nameless man, and the possible fact that his property, in default of heirs male, might pass into such a one's power, he had sense to comprehend Heathcliff's disposition: to know that, though his exterior was altered, his mind was unchangeable and unchanged. And he dreaded that mind: it revolted him: he shrank forebodingly from the idea of committing Isabella to its keeping. He would have recoiled still more had he been aware that her attachment rose unsolicited, and was bestowed where it awakened no reciprocation of sentiment; for the minute he discovered its existence he laid the blame on Heathcliff's deliberate designing." (*Wuthering Heights*, 91)

From the quotation, Linton was opposed against his sister's marriage with Heathcliff. Because Heathcliff was nameless, and he did not want to risk the fact that his property might pass to Heathcliff's power. So, in order to pursue her true love, Isabella had her first escape with Heathcliff. However, after her marriage, Isabella was not as happy as she had imagined. The reality destroyed her dream. Heathcliff was marrying for her legacy, but not for love. Though, he had married Isabella, Heathcliff still loved Catherine. Isabella couldn't accept it. She realized that: "He's not a human being, and he has no claim on my charity. I gave him my heart, and he took and pinched it to death, and flung it back to me." (158) she rebelled again and arranged her second escape. From Isabella's rebellion, we could again see the rebel against the patriarchal system. She escaped from Heathcliff's control and went for the freedom.

Despite Isabella, the next generation was also rebels. Young Catherine was one of the rebellious figures. When her father was ill, while she was controlled by Heathcliff, she escaped from the heights to see her father. Later on, after young Linton was dead, she fell in love with Hareton and neglect Heathcliff's objection. So did Hareton, another rebellious figure. Although at the beginning he was fooled by Heathcliff, he was disillusioned at last. He learned from little Catherine, fell in love with her and at last married her.

### CONCLUSION

*Wuthering Heights* was the only novel created by Emily Bronte. In this novel, Emily Bronte successfully created a fantastic story of love and hatred. The story was the product of the time. In Victorian age, the society was filled with unrest, alarm, and misery, which contrast with the growing prosperity and general good feeling of the succeeding. The realists criticized capitalist society from a democratic viewpoint and delineated the crying contradictions of bourgeois reality. The greatness of the English realists lied not only in their satirical portrayal of bourgeoisie and in the exposure of the greed and hypocrisy of the ruling classes, but also in their sympathy for the laboring people. These writers create positive characters who are quite alien to the vices of the rich and who are chiefly common people. Also, it was the reflection of the writer, Emily Bronte. Emily Bronte was the most solitary member of a unique, tightly knit, English provincial family. Though she looks introverted, it is wild and rebellious in her inner world. In Emily Bronte's short

lifetime, she is always being pursuit freedom and rebel against the unfair society. Just as she wrote in her poem:

Riches I hold in light esteem/ And Love I laugh to scorn/ And lust of Fame was but a dream/That vanished with the morn-/ And if I pray, the only prayer/That moves my lips for me /Is-"Leave the heart that now I bear /And give me liberty." Yes, as my swift days near their goal /Tis all that I implore /Through life and death, a chainless soul /With courage to endure!

In this poem, Emily Bronte expressed her strong desire for liberty, which was reflected in both Heathcliff and Catherine. In this thesis, the author mainly analyzed the main characters' rebellion. Then the minor characters' rebellious behavior was also discussed. They are rebelling against the patriarchal system, the authority, their unfair fate and the society. And there are several reasons cause them to rebel. Among them are their characteristics, the social environment and their endless love. All in all, during their life long time, they are pursuit the self.

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