

## Variations on Mother Figures through the Misogynist Lens in *Wuthering Heights*

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### I

The education of females to become an ideal wife/mother was becoming a major concern in the mid-eighteenth century and the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Many historians are in agreement that the concept of the ideal motherhood—good, self-sacrificing, devoted—was created during the period, and “The British under Queen Victoria’s reign are often thought of as exalting motherhood” (Thaden 3-5). The concept of the new idealization of motherhood and the importance of childcare was established mainly by male scholars and philosophers, which lead to the confinement of married women to the role of childrearing at domestic spheres. Chief among them are William Cadogan and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The former emphasizes the necessity of maternal breastfeeding for children’s health in his book *An Essay upon Nursing, and the Management of Children, from Their Birth to Three Years of Age* (1748), and the latter does so for the enhancement of family bond in *Emile or On Education* (1762).

It seems, however, very strange that we find few idealized mother figures in the nineteenth century’s masterpieces, not only by male authors but also by the female authors including Jane Austen, Charlotte Brontë and Emily Brontë, whose works instead depict vividly an ineffective, powerless or bad mother, or mother-substitute.<sup>2</sup> The mother or mother-substitute sometimes tries to impose traditional and male-dominant moral values on a heroine or sometimes hinder a heroine’s happiness. We can reasonably assume that the ideal motherhood is not featured in their novels because they were not mothers themselves or some of them lost their mothers in their early life. But the more significant and general reason for that seems that the male-centric ideology of motherhood was not in keeping with the real circumstances surrounding women in the nineteenth century. As Thaden states, such a definition of motherhood “was not accepted as natural especially for middle-class Victorian families, until the mid-twentieth century” (6). Children born in this class were generally looked after by nurses.

Moreover, according to Tony McMichael, even in the late nineteenth century the excessive fertility imposed “biological and social penalties” upon women in Western society:

. . . in medieval times there was widespread infanticide, especially by maternal overlying (which in England attracted a punishment of three years penance, or two years if it was deemed unintentional).

In pre-industrial Western Europe, . . . Various forms of infanticide and abandonment

also occurred, especially during 1750-1850 with the crowding and privations of the early industrial revolution. (209) <sup>3)</sup>

The fertility rate was very high until the twentieth century in Western Europe, and “family size peaked during the nineteenth century when women would often have ten or more children” (McMichael 207). Several reasons underlay the excessive fertility, such as high rates of infant mortality, an unavailability of contraception and compulsory sex by a husband. In addition to this, maternal deaths as a result of pregnancy or childbirth were not so uncommon.<sup>4)</sup> Indeed, Charlotte Brontë herself died during pregnancy. But as Asa Briggs remarks that “Women had to be ‘pure’: chaste before marriage and ‘modest’ after marriage. . . . and annual pregnancies . . . guaranteed their dependence” (284), the excessive childbirth was often associated with the ideal wife/mother. Thus those problems probably cast a negative shadow on the maternal image, and the absence of the positive image of motherhood in the nineteenth century’s classical literature reflects to some extent the situation.

The protection of mothers by birth control was one of the central concerns of First-wave feminism that occurred in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Susan Kingsley Kent gives a comment on this point.

The marriage contract, buttressed by the laws of England, gave husbands complete possession of their wives’ bodies. Feminists charged that the rights of husbands to force sexual intercourse and compulsory childbearing on their wives established a condition of ‘sex-slavery.’ For many, this issue stood at the center of the feminist movement. (92)

Thanks to the efforts of first feminism movement, several Acts defending the rights of a married woman/mother were passed such as the Infant Custody Act of 1839 and of 1873 and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 and of 1878. As a result, the circumstances revolving women were gradually but dramatically changed towards the end of the nineteenth century.

It is, then, unnatural to think that the literate female authors, who were writing at such a dynamic time with various arguments over women and mothers developing, would have no interest in adding to the controversy. Rather, we can assume that their interests in the controversial matter for motherhood might be paradoxically represented in the motherless plot principally of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Needless to say, this motherless plot where an evil mother-substitute persecutes a heroine is characteristic of the literary convention of fairy tales, akin to the Grimm brothers’ tales. Since *German Popular Stories*, a selected and translated version of Grimm brothers’ fairy tales by Edgar Taylor was first published in England in 1823, their tales enjoyed a wide circulation throughout the century.<sup>5)</sup>

Maria Tatar points out in her book which examines the Grimms’ stories, “The vast majority of the Grimms’ stepmothers actively persecute not their stepsons, but their stepdaughters, who consequently take on the role of innocent martyrs and patient sufferers” (141). Also, according to Marina Warner, a good mother is already dead at the beginning of the popular tales featuring

a heroine such as *Cinderella* and *Snow White* whereas a plethora of “monsters in female shape,” that is, “wicked stepmothers,” “ugly sisters,” “bad fairies,” “witches,” and “ogresses” strides through the stories (201). Among the stories by the Victorian female novelists cited above, the plot of *Wuthering Heights* has more close affinities with that of the fairy tales. This is showcased through the utter absence of biological mothers, contrasted with the existence of a vivid mother-substitute, that is, Nelly, the acute tension between her and Catherine Earnshaw, and an old maid storytelling style. What does this tension mean in a novel which incorporates the fairy-tale convention? Elliott B. Gose, Jr. illustrates brilliantly that *Wuthering Heights* is full of fairy-tale motifs. Catherine, for instance, “cannot decide which kind of fairy tale she is participating in,” or “she cannot decide which kind of identity to choose, the easy one of material comfort, or the difficult one of sympathy with an outcast.” As a consequence, Heathcliff, unlike Hareton or the beast in ‘the Beauty and the Beast,’ remains untransformed (62-5). Despite his insightful reading, it hardly treats the question above with the seriousness it deserved.

As stated above, in the mid-nineteenth century when *Wuthering Heights* was published, the male-dominant ideology of the feminine ideal was theoretically pervaded while First Wave Feminism was occurring in reaction to that. Those ideological conflicts might be manifested in the pattern in which the heroine resists the conservative ideology represented by an evil mother. According to this conjecture, this essay is to examine *Wuthering Heights* from the fairy-tale perspective referring to the historical situation of women in particular, which will prove effective in finding new aspects of the novel.

## II

In *Wuthering Heights*, there are almost no mothers throughout the story.<sup>6)</sup> Not only female characters in the novel—Catherine, Catherine II, Isabella and Nelly—but also male characters—Heathcliff, Hareton, Linton Heathcliff and Edgar—are all motherless like its author. Like many fairy-tales featuring a heroine, the novel depicts the growth process of a motherless heroine, who instead has a bad mother figure. In terms of this point, it also runs nearly parallel with the novels by Jane Austen and *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë in which the heroines’ biological mothers are dead, or if alive, ineffective. Unlike them, however, Emily does not end her story with a happy marriage of her heroine. She describes her heroine’s further life after marriage. Surely her readers are intended to be aware both of the similarity with the fairy tale pattern and of the deviation from it so that they see the author’s intention in representing them. To start with, let us examine the connection between Catherine and the mother-substitutes.

Hindley and Frances arrive at Wuthering Heights after the death of Mr. Earnshaw and begin to oppress Catherine and Heathcliff, and especially the arrival of Frances as a maternal-

substitute contributes substantially to Catherine's marriage to Edgar, culminating in the most critical event of the first part of the novel. When Catherine is injured by a dog at Thrushcross Grange and stays there for two weeks, Frances "undertook to keep her sister-in-law in due restraint, when she returned home; employing art" (Brontë 50; vol. 1, ch. 6) and "visited her often, in the interval, and commenced her plan of reform" (51; vol. 1, ch. 7). Indeed, Frances's plan succeeds and finally Catherine decides to accept Edgar's proposal, which Heathcliff as well as the readers gets to know through Catherine's famous confession to Nelly in the kitchen scene.

"I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven: and if the wicked man[Hindley] in there had not brought Heathcliff so low, I shouldn't have thought of it. 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." (80; vol. 1, ch. 9)

Aware of Heathcliff's overhearing her speech, Nelly doesn't tell Catherine of his presence, and then he leaves the kitchen at the worst moment when she says "it would degrade me to marry him" (80; vol. 1, ch. 9). It is not until a few pages later that Nelly finally tells her that he was also in the kitchen and heard a good part of her speech. On knowing this fact, Catherine goes out to seek him, and continues to wait for him in the storm until midnight, and Nelly, knowing it is vain to beg her to remove the wet clothes, leaves her drenched and goes to bed, which results in her first delirium. Nelly, for some reason, does not explain Catherine's condition in detail to Lockwood, only saying that "I shall never forget what a scene she acted, . . . It terrified me—I thought she was going mad" (87; vol. 1, ch. 9), and never gives the slightest indication of worrying for her despite Doctor Kenneth's pronouncement that Catherine is dangerously ill. Catherine's life is saved by Mrs. Linton, her future mother-in-law, and this is the first time a good mother figure emerges in the novel. Nelly states:

Old Mrs. Linton paid us several visits, to be sure, and set things to rights, and scolded and ordered us all; when Catherine was convalescent, she insisted on conveying her to Thrushcross Grange, for which deliverance we were very grateful. (88; vol. 1, ch. 9)

Soon after that, however, Mrs. Linton and her husband die from contracting Catherine's fever. Surprisingly, Nelly narrates this tragic incident by spending only a few lines despite its seriousness: "But the poor dame had reason to repent of her kindness; she and her husband both took the fever, and died within a few days of each other" (88; vol. 1, ch. 9). Three years after their deaths, Catherine gets married to Edgar. Little is said about this period of three years from Heathcliff's disappearance to Catherine's marriage, so the readers are offered few hints about Catherine's feeling of that time. Given that the loss of Heathcliff causes the mortal grief to Catherine, her marriage to Edgar may at first seem betrayal both of her heart and the readers' expectations. It is, however, reasonable to think that Catherine might suffer pangs of guilt not only for his disappearance but also for the deaths of the Lintons, though Nelly never mentions such a thing. Nelly always talks against Catherine as if Emily challenged her

readers to perceive some significant meaning beneath the surface of Nelly's story. Nelly's effort succeeds to such an extent that Lockwood wonders how Edgar could fancy "my idea of Catherine Earnshaw" (66; vol. 1, ch. 8). Even though Nelly describes her as "saucier, and more passionate, and haughtier" after the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Linton and tries to turn away our sympathy for Catherine, we cannot deny the possibility that the tragic incident may finally contribute to Catherine's marriage decision.

Frances, as one of the Earnshaws, encourages the match to the Lintons which would bring honour to her family. But Nelly, an outsider like Heathcliff, even though she calls herself Hindley's "foster sister" (65; vol. 1, ch. 8), does not seem to desire Catherine's social elevation like the female villains in fairy tales, whose aim is "to banish the heroine from hearth and home and to subvert her elevation from humble origins to noble status" (Tatar 144). When Catherine confesses her acceptance of Edgar's proposal to Nelly, she obviously objects it. Unlike Jane Eyre whose purpose is self-reliance, and obtains employment by herself, Catherine tries to gain her power by another man's economic power to escape from Hindley's tyranny. Nelly, who seemingly has conservative ideas about a marital duty akin to male authors of conduct books, criticizes severely Catherine for her intentions of marriage by saying, "you are ignorant of the duties you undertake in marrying; or else, that you are a wicked, unprincipled girl" (Brontë 82; vol. 1, ch. 9). Nelly's attitude to her marriage obviously involves a sardonic overtone: "Edgar Linton, as multitudes have been before, and will be after him, was infatuated; and believed himself the happiest man alive on the day he led her to Gimmerton chapel" (88-9; vol. 1, ch. 9). Here we can perceive the distinct difference between Frances and Nelly as the mother-substitute of Catherine. In addition to Nelly's cold attitude towards Catherine, she shows the same kind of attitude of similar extent to other women of Catherine's generation. Nelly's first comment on Frances is a vicious one: "she was half silly" (43; vol. 1, ch. 6). Moreover, when Nelly mentions Frances' death, her only comment is that "the child Hareton fell wholly into my hands" (65; vol. 1, ch. 8). Indeed by Frances' death, Nelly can secure a firm position in the Earnshaws as the maternal-substitute for Hareton. James Hafley addresses this point and affirms that Nelly is a "magnificent villain" (212) throughout the story with detailed documentations to demonstrate how guilty Nelly is. Gose argues against Hafley's view of her by remarking that "In the fairy-tale pattern, Nelly takes the role of helpful provider, the good fairy" because "she always acts from good motives," then "cleared Nelly of being a witch" (Brontë 64; vol. 1, ch. 8). But while their reading holds merit in some aspects, similarly flaws are held. Her characteristics seem to require more profound examination. Nelly, just like Heathcliff, is neither so much utterly wicked nor innocent.

### III

Nelly's attitude toward the male characters is rather generous. One instance brilliantly

illustrates this point. After Frances' death, Hindley grows so desperate that "the servants could not bear his tyrannical and evil conduct long: Joseph and I[Nelly] were the only two that would stay." Nelly gives the reason for this: "I had been his foster sister, and excused his behavior more readily than a stranger would" (65; vol. 1, ch. 8). However, a few lines later, she also betrays her feeling toward Catherine.

At fifteen she was the queen of the country-side; she had no peer: and she did turn out a haughty, headstrong creature! I own I did not like her, after her infancy was past; and I vexed her frequently by trying to bring down her arrogance. (65; vol. 1, ch. 8)

Nelly is, as James Kavanagh says, both "narrator and participant," and as a storyteller, she narrates, in her words, "my narrative" (108; vol. 1, ch. 11) to Lockwood. According to Warner, the traditional feature of the genre of fairy tales is its orality, and even after it was recorded in writing, the orality remains a central claim "by the postulation of a narrator, a grandmotherly or nanny type" (25). Through this voice, fairy tales can comfort bereaved children; that is one of the important functions of the genre: "Fairy tales play to the child's hankering after nobler, richer, altogether better origins, the fantasy of being a prince or a princess in disguise" (210). Indeed, in chapter 12, there is the most symbolic scene where Nelly's narrative plays as the function. When Heathcliff confesses that he envies Edgar's handsome face and his wealthy parentage, she tells her original narrative to counter his pessimism and make him feel valuable.

"You're fit for a prince in disguise. Who knows, but your father was Emperor of China, and your mother an Indian queen, each of them able to buy up, with one week's income, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange together? And you were kidnapped by wicked sailors, and brought to England. Were I in your place, I would frame high notions of my birth; and the thoughts of what I was should give me courage and dignity to support the oppressions of a little farmer!" (Brontë 56; vol. 1, ch. 7)

The change of his looks reveals her narrative effect: "Heathcliff gradually lost his frown, and began to look quite pleasant" (56; vol. 1, ch. 7). Here we can find her doubled aspect of femaleness. She seems to be able to identify herself with Heathcliff—both enter the house of another as an outsider and do not belong to the Earnshaws or the Lintons—more easily than with Catherine.

Significantly, her good conscience is almost always aroused by the suffering of the male characters. Warner focuses on the effects of female storytelling in fairy tales, and her comments on this point will help to understand Nelly's overt partiality: "The voice of the old nurse lends reliability to the tale, stamps it authentic, . . . More deeply, attributing to women testimony about women's wrongs and wrongdoing gives them added value" (209). Following this she explains the meaning of the structure where women narrate misogynic tales.

. . . imagining that the teller speaks instead as an older woman, as herself a grandmother or a mother-in-law, we can then discover in the tales the fear she feels, the animus she harbours against her daughter-in-law . . . when the mother disappears,

she may have been conjured away by the narrator herself, who despatches her child listeners' natural parent, replaces her with a monster, and then produces herself within the pages of the story, as if by enchantment, often in many different guises as a wonder-worker on their behalf, the good old fairy, the fairy godmother. . . . This structure underlies the classic Cinderella story; this ancient tussle has contributed to the misogyny in such tales. (227)

Thus the misogyny of fairy tales mainly reflects the fact a mother-substitute such as a mother-in-law "had to strive to maintain her position and assert her continuing rights to a livelihood in the patrilineal household" (Warner 227).<sup>7</sup> Such interpretation leads us so far as to say that *Wuthering Heights* is also, in a sense, a story of misogyny narrated from a woman's view which constitutes its unique feature. If we see the story in terms of this perspective, Nelly's merciless attitudes toward women of her own generation suggest her strong hostility or envy toward them. Of course she is not actually a mother-in-law, but she in fact serves as a mother-substitute, an outsider of the two families. Despite varying social backgrounds, Nelly, Frances and Catherine are all alike in depending financially on the male characters, and Nelly's narrative voice—with little exception—sounds severe when she talks about her female competitors, especially Catherine. Catherine, however, like the heroine of *Little Snow White*, does not seem to notice her antagonist's animosity and never accuses Nelly of not telling her Heathcliff's presence during her confession in the kitchen scene. Nelly herself is well aware of Catherine's innocence: "I vexed her[Catherine] frequently by trying to bring down her arrogance; she never took an aversion to me, though. She had a wondrous constancy to old attachments" (Brontë 65; vol. 1, ch. 8). Those episodes cited above show a young woman's vulnerabilities due to the absence of a good mother figure.

#### IV

Isabella's marriage is another example of the case. She might not have eloped with Heathcliff if her parents or at least, her mother was still alive at the time. She is attracted to Heathcliff soon after his return, and convincing that Catherine tries to thwart her love with him, she has a furious quarrel with Catherine. Isabella herself must be fully conscious of the difference of the marriage motives between Catherine and herself when she says to Catherine, "I love him more than ever you loved Edgar; and he might love me if you would let him!" (102; vol. 1, ch. 10) Catherine, an orphan with only a helpless brother and no property of her own, chooses Edgar as her husband as most of middle-class women of the time would do, and is now pregnant by Edgar. Isabella, on the other hand, whose brother is a magistrate, brought up in comfort and luxury, has a romantic notion of marriage and fancies Heathcliff as a Byronic hero. "Mr. Heathcliff is not a fiend; he has an honourable soul, and a true one, or how could he remember her[Catherine]?" (103; vol. 1, ch. 10) Isabella's remarks when objected by Nelly to

marry Heathcliff, “What malevolence you must have to wish to convince me that there is no happiness in the world!” (104; vol. 1, ch. 10) ironically contrast well with Catherine’s confession when she decides to marry Edgar, “I’ve no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven” (80; vol. 1, ch. 9).

As if to demonstrate that Isabella’s marriage to Heathcliff shows a serious parody of fairy tales, their marital life falls into misery right from the start. After two months since their elopement, Isabella asks to Nelly about him in her letter, “Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil? I shan’t tell my reasons for making this inquiry; but I beseech you to explain, if you can, what I have married” (136; vol. 1, ch. 8). Heathcliff seems to enjoy destroying his wife’s romantic illusion, and remarks to Nelly cynically; “She is tired of trying to please me, uncommonly early” (150; vol. 1, ch. 14). As mentioned in the first section, the ideology of feminine ideal had aroused contradictory discourses throughout the mid-eighteenth century and the nineteenth century. Rousseau asserts that “woman is made specially to please man. . . . If woman is made to please and to be subjugated, she ought to make herself agreeable to man instead of arousing him” (358). Mary Wollstonecraft attacked such a view severely: “When the husband ceases to be a lover—and the time will inevitably come, her desire of pleasing will then grow languid, or become a spring of bitterness” (31). Thus pleasing a man had a significant meaning in Heathcliff’s time.<sup>8)</sup>

A few lines later, Heathcliff adds with full consciousness of their acting a fairy-tale-like marriage parodically: “She abandoned them [the elegancies, and comforts, and friends of her former home] under a delusion, . . . picturing in me a hero of romance, and expecting unlimited indulgences from my chivalrous devotion” (Brontë 150; ch. 14). Then he asks Nelly to deliver his message to Edgar, “tell him, also, to set his fraternal and magisterial heart at ease, that I keep strictly within the limits of the law—I have avoided, up to this period, giving her the slightest right to claim a separation,” and asserts that as Isabella’s “legal protector” (151-2; vol. 1, ch. 14), he must retain her in his custody. Indeed, his remarks are supported by the historical record. Although the Matrimonial Causes Act was passed in 1857 which meant that divorce was no longer a total impossibility,<sup>9)</sup> it was not until 1878 that the Matrimonial Causes Act which could allow women victims of violence in marriage to obtain separation orders passed. That means both in Isabella’s time and in Emily’s time, women did not have the right to divorce, even if she suffers violence from her husband. Moreover, although the first Infant Custody Act passed in 1839, the father having absolute power over his children was upheld until the passage of the Infant Custody Act of 1873.

Children born in wedlock had always, under common law, been the legal property of their fathers in England, and child custody remained a problematic issue and a key target of feminist reform efforts throughout the nineteenth century. (Thaden 10)

The custody of Linton Heathcliff mirrors those historical facts faithfully. After Isabella’s death, Edgar brings Linton with him hoping to make him live in the Grange, but at the same night Heathcliff sends Joseph for his son. Edgar, as a magistrate, knows well that “we shall now have



no influence over his destiny” (Brontë 204; vol. 2, ch. 6 ), and deliver Linton to Wuthering Heights next day. For Isabella, it is only her death which is able to end her fairy tale under the patriarchally-favoured law, by which her son is also doomed tragically.

## V

Undeniably, Catherine’s marriage composes another parodied version of fairy-tales. Edgar is a wealthy and handsome young gentleman with “great blue eyes and even forehead” which Heathcliff envies (56; vol. 1, ch. 7), and the only one who can save Catherine from “an infernal house” (65; vol. 1, ch. 8) with the malicious mother figure. As with the case of Isabella, her fairy-tale marriage can be ended by her death. Little wonder why Catherine dies directly after childbirth considering that Frances also dies soon after giving birth, and further, her case is not the only one which shows the biological mother’s fragility in the novel. As we have seen, becoming a mother involves a negative image and the mother-death equation seems to be represented in the novel. It has generally been pointed out that Catherine is killed by patriarchy. Certainly, for instance, not only Catherine but also Isabella and Frances die before fulfilling their role as mothers in devoting their affection and watching over their children’s growth, as if they were excluded after achieving only one function of bringing forth the inheritors of their husbands’ fortune. Gilbert and Gubar interpret Catherine’s self-starvation during pregnancy as her desire to rid herself of the child because it has been fathered by Edgar, who “she defines as a stranger,” referring to the psychoanalytic notion about “excessive morning sickness”<sup>10</sup>) and see Catherine’s attempt to escape maternity which brings death to her as her rebellion against patriarchy (286). Their comments on Catherine’s death are very persuasive and suggestive themselves, but at the same time they hardly describes Catherine’s real image as both a wife and a mother since their interpretation is based on a metaphorical and psychoanalytic level. It seems that a more specific reason involves her death. To make this clear, we will consider it from her early pregnancy period, starting with the scene of Heathcliff’s return to see what directly triggers Catherine’s self-starvation and madness.

Heathcliff returns in September and Catherine gives to birth “a puny, seven months’ child” in March (Brontë 164; vol. 2, ch. 2), and that means Catherine gets pregnant almost at the same time as Heathcliff returns after his three years’ absence. In his return, she is full of joy with delight. Perhaps she believes that she gains the opportunity to mend the relationship with him after three years of separation, and that the misconception between Heathcliff and her is completely removed when “they were too much absorbed in their mutual joy to suffer embarrassment” (96; vol. 1, ch. 10). As we will know soon, however, Catherine’s happiness does not last long. Knowing Isabella’s attachment to him, Heathcliff asks Catherine, “She’s her brother’s heir, is she not?” to which Catherine replies: “Half-a-dozen nephews shall erase her title, please Heaven! Abstract your mind from the subject, at present—you are too prone to

covet your neighbour's goods: remember *this* neighbour's goods are mine" (106; vol. 1, ch. 10). The Lintons' estate will be inherited by Isabella after her brother's death unless Catherine has a son,<sup>11)</sup> and her remark here sounds more significant with the knowledge of her pregnancy. Catherine, along with Heathcliff, slanders Edgar and Isabella, while at the same time trying to protect her family from him. If she really wanted to escape from maternity, she could have eloped with Heathcliff. Three years ago, she despaired of marrying Heathcliff because it would degrade her, but now his wealth would not be degrading, even for Catherine's standards. Contrary to readers' expectation, however, she never shows such intention. Her ambivalent attitude can be explained by the fact that she, as a mother, needs to secure the Lintons' fortune, that is, her child's. From this event above, we can perceive some change in the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff, and the difference of their interest will be most clearly revealed in the subsequent action.

Catherine has kept her superiority to Heathcliff from their early days, which is well demonstrated by Nelly's recollection of their childhood that Catherine had "more power over Heathcliff than his[old Earnshaw's] kindness: how the boy would do *her* bidding in anything" (41; vol. 1, ch. 5). Still convinced of her power, Catherine explains their relationship to Isabella to dispel her fancy about him; "I never say to him 'let this or that enemy alone, because it would be ungenerous or cruel to harm them,' I say 'let them alone, because *I* should hate them to be wronged'" (102; vol. 1, ch. 10), and soon afterward Catherine actually says to Heathcliff, "I like her[Isabella] too well, my dear Heathcliff, to let you absolutely seize and devour her up" (106; vol. 1, ch. 10). Despite Catherine's request, Heathcliff intends to seduce Isabella at Thrushcross Grange, and this event leads to the second famous kitchen scene in Chapter 11. Informed of what he did to Isabella by Nelly, Catherine argues with him in the kitchen: "Don't vex me. Why have you disregarded my request?" but his answer is an unexpected one for her;

"I want you to be aware that I *know* you have treated me infernally—infernally! Do you hear? And, if you flatter yourself that I don't perceive it you are a fool—and if you think I can be consoled by sweet words you are an idiot—and if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged, I'll convince you of the contrary, in a very little while! Meantime, thank you for telling me your sister-in-law's secret—I swear I'll make the most of it—and stand you aside!" (112; vol. 1, ch. 11)

Catherine's mind then is well expressed by Nelly's words: "The spirit which served her was growing intractable: she could neither lay nor control it" (113; vol. 1, ch. 11). His remarks above would make her realize that he never forgot her confession three years ago. If he had listened to her speech to the end, or Nelly had acquainted Catherine with his presence earlier, the situation would have changed.

During their quarrel in the kitchen, Nelly sneaks out to inform Edgar of the matter. When Edgar and Nelly arrive at the kitchen, Catherine is scolding Heathcliff. Although Nelly does not let us know what they are talking about, we can assume it from Catherine's remark in response to Edgar's accusation in which he questions her "propriety": "I was defending you, and

yours; and I wish Heathcliff may flog you sick, for daring to think an evil thought of me!" (114-5; vol. 1, ch. 11) It would be appropriate to think that "yours" means "your property" rather than "your sister" (Isabella). As both Mrs. Linton and a mother, Catherine exerts all her remaining power over Heathcliff to protect the Lintons', but her real intention does not seem to be understood by Edgar, and it is Nelly, once again, who creates this fatal incident. As Nelly herself concedes: "My heart invariably cleaved to the master's, in preference to Catherine's side" (107; vol. 1, ch. 10), she identifies herself with Edgar more easily than she does with her foster sister, Catherine, and then spies on Catherine after Heathcliff's return as if to serve as mother-in-law of Catherine, or, we may go further to say that she does so with the purpose to supplant Catherine's place as a mother of the heir of the Grange.

On the night of his appearance, Catherine and Edgar have a quarrel about Heathcliff and her admiration to him makes Edgar cry in bed. Leaving Edgar to sulk, she wakes Nelly up and expresses her heart: "The event of this evening has reconciled me to God and humanity! . . . I can afford to suffer anything, hereafter! . . . and, as a proof, I'll go make my peace with Edgar instantly—Good night—I'm an angel!" (99; vol. 1, ch. 10) Her resolution seems to be fulfilled because the following day Edgar permits her to visit Wuthering Heights with Isabella, and "she rewarded him with such a summer of sweetness and affection, in return, as made the house a paradise for several days" (100; vol. 1, ch. 10). Some critics assert that Catherine conceives her child with Edgar during those several days as a consequence of her resolution to be an angel.<sup>12)</sup> Among them is Thomas Moser, who affirms that Heathcliff, according to him, "the embodiment of sexual energy" (4), is literally "a symbolic father" of Catherine II (17). Such supposition is convincing given the fact that Catherine conceives her child around the time of his return. But at the same time the fact gives another possibility. It is certainly surprising that the readers are not informed about her pregnancy until about two or three weeks before childbirth. That no characters—Nelly, Edgar, Isabella, Heathcliff and Catherine herself—mention it during her seven months' pregnancy is very strange. The silence has generally been overlooked by critics. The pregnancy of the lady of Thrushcross Grange should be worth celebrating, but there seems to be no such mood. All this unnaturalness is linked together by a single thread, and leads to the probability that Catherine II's conception might be attributed to Heathcliff.

When we think of the ideal image of women created mainly by men in the novel's time, Dr. Johnson's famous words will help to understand it: "Consider of what importance the chastity of women is. Upon that, all the property in the world depends" (Boswell 168). Also, Sigmund Freud says, maternity is most certain while paternity is always uncertain (239). In the nineteenth century, the collective conscious believed that a mother's chastity is much more important when we think about the assurance of the father's identity and the succession of his property to his legitimate child. This does not mean that Heathcliff is Catherine II's biological father. What is important here is that for a woman, especially in nineteenth-century England, only the doubt for chastity should be a crucial matter. So it is natural that Catherine hysterically reacts when her husband questions her "propriety" and takes Heathcliff for "a

moral poison” (Brontë 113-114; vol. 1, ch. 11). Indeed, that Catherine gets pregnant almost at the same time as Heathcliff returns and she often meets him must be scandalous enough, which explains the narrator’s—Nelly’s—silence on her pregnancy. The fact is more significant especially when we think about what triggers Catherine’s self-confinement and self-starvation which leads her to death.

After the kitchen scene cited above, Catherine goes to the upstairs parlour, and exclaims to Nelly:

“You are aware that I am no way blameable in this matter. What possessed him to turn listener? Heathcliff’s talk was outrageous, after you left us; but I could soon have diverted him from Isabella, . . . Now all is dashed wrong by the fool’s-craving to hear evil of self that haunts some people like a demon! Had Edgar never gathered our conversation, he would never have been the worse for it. Really, when he opened on me in that unreasonable tone of displeasure, after I had scolded Heathcliff till I was hoarse for *him*, I did not care, hardly, what they did to each other.” (116; vol. 1, ch. 11)

Her acute tone in reproaching Edgar for overhearing reminds us of the first kitchen scene where Heathcliff listens to her speech in the Heights’ kitchen. She asks Nelly to inform Edgar of her being seriously ill, but Nelly doesn’t obey her direction. Ignorant of her condition, Edgar aggravates her illness by saying, “Will you give up Heathcliff hereafter, or will you give up me? It is impossible for you to be *my* friend and *his* at the same time; and I absolutely *require* to know which you choose.” His remark provokes Catherine’s “wicked rages” (118; vol. 1, ch. 11), which leads to her self-confinement in her room.

Catherine has confined herself and fasted since the quarrel with Edgar about Heathcliff, and on the third day she unbars and asks Nelly about Edgar. Considering that she enters her fifth month of pregnancy at this point, hunger strike of three days is obviously dangerous. She risks not only her life but also her child to protest Edgar. But Nelly leaves her to fasting and refuses her plea to tell Edgar that she is on hunger strike despite “the doctor’s injunction that she should not be crossed” (121; vol. 1, ch. 12) although she tries to persuade Heathcliff eagerly to eat something when he fasts shortly before his death. Nelly ignores Catherine as if to penalize her for not behaving in a way fitting of her status as Mrs. Linton instead of Edgar. Nelly pretends that Edgar is indifferent toward her condition, and the notion of “Mr. Linton’s philosophical resignation” (122; vol. 1, ch. 12) puts her into delirium in the end.

“Nelly, if it be not too late, as soon as I learn how he feels, I’ll choose between these two—either to starve, at once, that would be no punishment unless he had a heart—or to recover and leave the country. Are you speaking the truth about him now? Take care. Is he actually so utterly indifferent for my life?” (121; vol. 1, ch. 12)

But Nelly’s great concern here is Edgar’s reproach about her fault, not Catherine’s illness worsened considerably by her. Upon Edgar entering the room, Nelly begins to explain the unusual situation occurring in her favor, and says: “it is nothing” (127; vol. 1, ch. 12), despite Catherine’s apparent insanity. Edgar accuses Nelly, saying “You knew your mistress’s nature,

and you encouraged me to harass her. And not to give me one hint of how she has been these three days! It was heartless!," but she continues to defend herself "thinking it too bad to be blamed for another's wicked waywardness!" (128; vol. 1, ch. 12) Edgar's ultimatum—"The next time you bring a tale to me, you shall quit my service, Ellen Dean"—makes Nelly so desperate to prove her innocence that she ends up saying that Catherine is poisoned against him by Heathcliff in front of her. It is not until this time Catherine realizes that Nelly is her real antagonist, but it is too late: "Ah! Nelly has played traitor, . . . Nelly is my hidden enemy—you witch! So you do seek elf-bolts to hurt us! Let me go, and I'll make her rue! I'll make her howl a recantation!" (129; vol. 1, ch. 12) Finally Catherine longs to escape from her body, that is, to die, as is shown in her remark: "the thing that irks me most is this shattered prison, after all. I'm tired, tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there" (160; vol. 2, ch. 1).

In *Jane Eyre*, Jane wonders whether to commit suicide by hunger strike or to escape when confined to the red room in her early time. Indeed Catherine practices both hunger strike and then an escape from a prison, that is, her body to vindicate herself. For helpless women, such as Catherine and Jane, who have no power and property of their own in her social context constructed by patriarchy, hunger strike might be the only means of proving her innocence or escaping from the absurdity of society. At her first delirium, Catherine is saved by Mrs. Linton, her short-lived mother figure, but this time there is no mother figure who saves her life. Moreover, Catherine chooses to live as a wife of Edgar to the end of her life and bear the heir by which she tries to prove her chastity. But she gives birth to a girl not a boy, which means all the property of the Lintons will be inherited to the outsider, Heathcliff. At the patriarchal level, we may assume she dies in despair to know she could not fulfill the most important duty of a wife nor regain her honor. Although Isabella's death is rather convincible with her weakness and the image of a typical Victorian heroine, in light of what we know of Catherine, strong and full of energy, her immediate and accidental death means that only the doubt for her chastity can be fatal for a married woman. Even more important is that it is not her husband but Nelly who punishes her.

## VI

Emily Brontë tries to show how vulnerable women are if they have no good mother or mother-substitute in her time and the theme of motherhood (including that of mother-substitutes) suffocates throughout the novel due to the complete absence of motherhood. Unlike *Wuthering Heights*, *Jane Eyre* and Austen's novels represent the possibility that a woman can have a happy marriage in return for overcoming formidable obstacles and hardships without any good mother figures like the heroines of fairy tales. In this respect, *Wuthering Heights* depicts women's life more realistically than those novels through the variant form of fairy tales it

adapts, and this reality arises from “Conflicts and tensions” between the female villain and the heroine which “reflect nothing more than the observable realities of human life” (Tatar 144). Although Nelly has an enormous impact upon Catherine’s death, she is not a truly wicked woman but just the fictional representation of a woman in the nineteenth century who has to be dependent on male protectors for survival. Emily criticizes severely the male-centric society and the ambiguity of women’s status in the midst of the period when the contradicting debates over women were developing. What constitutes the riveting feature of the novel is that she does it through the peculiar style where a woman narrates misogynic story intrinsic to the structure of fairy tales.

Needless to say, the marriage of Catherine II and Hareton makes Nelly secure a more solid position as a mother-substitute for them—“my children” (Brontë 322; vol. 2, ch. 19). Nelly modifies her narrative to her advantage when she talks to Lockwood, who by her intentions would be the future husband of Catherine II and her new master, and her art of narrative works so well that he finally imagines that “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 [Nelly] desired” (304; vol. 2, ch. 17). We could easily imagine that she will continue “my narrative” about their parents’ generation to Catherine II and Hareton after moving to Thrushcross Grange with them, and her story would function to implant the negative image of her mother in Catherine’s mind, as is the case with fairy tales where a storyteller eliminates a natural mother and replaces her so that she could insinuate herself into the story to be “the good old fairy, the fairy godmother” (Warner 227).<sup>13</sup>

There is, however, the most fairy-tale like moment when Catherine’s maternal concerns are represented beneath the surface of Nelly’s story in the last chapter. On Catherine’s death, Heathcliff shouts: “I believe—I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always—take any form—drive me mad!” (Brontë 167; vol. 2, ch. 2) Contrary to his wishes, he can sense her apparition yet cannot see it, and her obscure presence distresses him for eighteen years. He explains the way she torments him:

“You know, I was wild after she died, and eternally, from dawn to dawn, praying her to return to me—her spirit—I have a strong faith in ghosts. . . I felt her by me—I could *almost* see her, and yet I *could not*! . . . It was a strange way of killing, not by inches, but by fractions of hairbreadths, to beguile me with the spectre of a hope, through eighteen years!” (291; vol. 2, ch. 15)

A few days before his death, Heathcliff finally seems able to see Catherine’s ghost. He describes “a strange change,” which makes him hardly remember to eat and drink, to Nelly:

“I have a single wish, and my whole being and faculties are yearning to attain it. . . . I’m convinced it will be reached—and soon—because it has devoured my existence—I am swallowed in the anticipation of its fulfilment.” (323-5; vol. 2, chap. 19)

Perceiving that he does not have long to live, he means to prepare his will, exerting all his last strength, in order that his property will not pass into the descendants of his generation: “When

day breaks, I'll send for Green. . . I wish to make some legal inquiries of him while I can bestow a thought on those matters, and while I can act calmly" (332-333; vol. 2, ch. 20). But on the following day, he dies. John Sutherland comments on his death:

He would have written his vengeful will dispossessing Hareton and Catherine [II]. Why then does Cathy return from beyond the grave at this specific moment? To forestall Heathcliff making his will, I would suggest. (25)

As he points out, it is reasonable to think that Catherine kills Heathcliff to enable her daughter to inherit the Grange. His sudden death saves the social system and the traditional customs of the old family. Catherine, who was certainly a rebel against the system, lover and ally of Heathcliff, has now fulfilled her role as a mother and the descendant of the Earnshaws. She follows the path of mothers in fairy tales— principally of the variant versions of Cinderella in which mother's ghost returns from the grave to save her daughter,<sup>14)</sup> and it is not until the end of the story that we can perceive her maternal affection, of which Nelly would never tell her daughter.

#### Note

- 1) According to Janet Todd, "Between 1760 and 1820, almost a hundred books were published on female education which became the site of many of the philosophical and political discussions of the day" (xix).
- 2) Thaden examines this theme, and mentions Dickens and Thackeray as among those who present few portraits of the good mother. See Thaden 4.
- 3) McMichael also adds a supplementary explanation for this reason: "This surge of infanticide in Europe included the overlying of babies by mothers, and their drowning, abandonment (half the babies in foundling hospitals perished within several months), and wet-nursing with either neglect or deliberate (paid) murder (typically induced by a slug of gin or other spirits)" (388).
- 4) For details regarding the high rate of maternal death and birth rate in Nineteenth century England, see also Perkin esp. 126-9 and 282-287.
- 5) Stephen Prickett 8.
- 6) Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar point out that Mary Shelley as well as the Brontë sisters lost their mothers when they are very young, and therefore, they are "metaphorical orphans in patriarchal culture," and show the suggestive discussion from a feministic point of view. See Gilbert and Gubar 249-252.
- 7) Tatar gives relevant comment to this point; "the struggle between Snow White and her mother could well be motivated in psychological terms by rivalry for the love and admiration of an absent husband and father" (154).
- 8) The famous poem of Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825) titled 'To A Lady, with painted Flowers' (1773) also shows how this notion was pervaded. The poem ends with the line: "Your best, your sweetest empire is—to please" (Barbauld 97). Wollstonecraft criticized Barbauld for writing such a poem. See Wollstonecraft 57-8.
- 9) The Matrimonial Causes Act 1857 makes divorce proceedings transferred from Parliament to a court of law, but it is almost inoperative for women, as Gail Cunningham explains; "Whereas a husband could sue for divorce simply on the grounds of his wife's adultery, a wife could petition only if her husband had been guilty of 'incestuous adultery, or of rape, or of sodomy or bestiality. . .'" (5).
- 10) Gilbert and Gubar explains, "Excessive ("pathological") morning sickness has traditionally been interpreted as an attempt to vomit up the alien intruder, the child planted in the belly like an incubus" (286).

- 11) See Brontë, esp. 100, 107, 164.
- 12) For further analysis of the timing of Catherine's pregnancy, see esp. Moser 16-7 and Torgerson 161.
- 13) See also Warner 240.
- 14) Among them is 'Rashin Coatie,' the Scottish version of Cinderella. According to Warner, "Variants on the tale from all over the world give the mother's ghost some kind of consoling and magical role in her daughter's ultimate escape from pain, and it was this aspect which drew Angela Carter. In her version, called 'Ashputtle', . . . the mother's ghost returns in the form of one animal after another to give back life to her child" (205).

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