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Social Containment in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*

Dr. Nayef al-Yasin*

Abstract

This paper is meant to be a contribution to the discussion about the social and economic aspects of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, both published in 1847. They are examined together on the grounds that they actually complement each other and can best be understood in relation to each other, especially in terms of the overall message they impart. The motivation for writing this paper is that most of the criticism written about the two novels, both in the past and the present, usually highlights the rebellious and sometimes 'revolutionary' nature of their protagonists, Heathcliff and Jane, and of their overall project. It is an attempt to further qualify statements made by literary critics, such as Arlene Young, asserting that the Brontë's "attempt to create protagonists … who rebel against accepted social norms."[1]

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1. Arlene Young, *Culture, Class and Gender in the Victorian Novel: Gentlemen, Gents and Working Women*, London: Macmillan, 1999, p: 46.

الاحتواء الاجتماعي في رواية إيملي برونتي "مرتفعات وذرينغ" ورواية شارلوت برونتي "جين إير"

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الملخص

لطالما لقيت روايتا "مرتفعات وذرينغ" لإيميلي برونتي و"جين إير" لشقيقتها شارلوت برونتي الإطراء من قبل بعض النقاد والتعريض من قبل بعضهم الآخر بسبب نزعة التمرد التي تسم الشخصية الرئيسية في كل منهما: هيثكليف في "مرتفعات وذرينغ" وجين في "جين إير". كما يسود اعتقاد بأن الروايتين تتضمنان نقداً للمؤسسات الاجتماعية، والاقتصادية والدينية في العصر الفيكتوري في بريطانيا.

يتم تناول الروايتين معاً هنا على أساس أنهما تكملان بعضهما بعضاً، وأن أفضل طريقة لفهمهما هي دراسة العناصر التي تربط بينهما، خصوصاً من حيث الرسالة الإجمالية التي توصلانها للقارئ. حاول هذا البحث الرد على حكم الناقد الإنكليزي تيري إيغلتون، الذي يرى أن الكاتبتين كانتا "متمردتين ورجعيتين في الآن ذاته". ويجد البحث أنهما كانتا في الواقع أكثر رجعية ممَّا كان يعتقد.

قام هذا البحث على افتراض أن الروايتين شكلتا إسهاماً مهماً في استراتيجية 'الاحتواء الاجتماعي' التي مارستها الطبقات العليا في بريطانيا في العصر الفيكتوري بهدف استمالة أفراد الطبقة الوسطى الصاعدة واستيعابهم، طبقاً للشروط التي تضعها الطبقات العليا، والتخلص من العناصر التي لم يكن بوسعها الاستجابة لتلك الاستراتيجية، أو رفضت الاستجابة لها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاحتواء الاجتماعي، الطبقة، التمرد، التغيير الاجتماعي، الامتثال.

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It is true that Heathcliff and Jane are rebellious figures, but the conclusion the reader is left with after reading *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* is far from endorsing rebelliousness. The paper will show that far from aiming at undermining the prevalent social, moral and economic order of her time, Jane's rebelliousness is meant as an assertion of her identity motivated by a desire to be accepted by, not excluded from, that system. Since she was a child, she yearned to be accepted as a member of the Reed family. She refers to her uncle Reed's death-bed request that his wife treat her as her own child, and aunt Reed's failure to honour that request. So, having a rebellious protagonist does not necessarily mean that *Jane Eyre* advocates rebelliousness, as some critics have concluded.

An example of the criticism *Jane Eyre* received upon publication is what Elizabeth Rigby, Lady Eastlake, an author and art critic, and the first woman to write for the *Quarterly Review*, wrote in 1848 in that periodical that, if the book was by a woman, "she had long forfeited the society of her own sex."[2] Most detractors followed a common theme, criticizing the novel for being vulgar, improper, anti-Christian, as well as politically inflammatory. Rigby condemned the book for its "coarseness of language and laxity of tone." Offended by unflattering depictions of the aristocracy, Rigby accuses the author of a "total ignorance of the habits of society." Additionally, Rigby explicitly compares the contemporary issues of civil unrest (the Chartists, a movement calling for extending the vote to all men) to the independent spirit of *Jane Eyre*'s titular character.

Rigby is not the only detractor to associate *Jane Eyre*'s independent heroine with civil unrest. Ann Mozley, writing for the *Christian Remembrancer* in 1848, writes: "Never was there a better hater. Every page burns with moral Jacobinism,"[3] referring to the French revolutionaries who aimed to abolish the monarchy and do away with

[2]- Elizabeth Rigby, "[A Review of *Vanity Fair* and *Jane Eyre*.]" *Quarterly Review* 167 (December 1848), Pp: 153-185.

[3]- Ann Mozley, "Article IV. *Jane Eyre - An Autobiography*," *The Christian Remembrancer* 15 (January – June 1848), p: 397.

class distinctions, as well as instituting a universal vote, an idea abhorrent to upper class, Anglican Britons.

Wuthering Heights was given a much worse reception. *The Spectator* of 18 December 1847 found that the incidents of the novel are "too coarse and disagreeable to be attractive, the very best being improbable, with a moral taint about them, and the villainy not leading to results sufficient to justify the elaborate pains taken in depicting it."[4] *The Examiner* found the book "wild, confused, disjointed, and improbable."[5] Douglas Jerrold's *Weekly Newspaper* wrote that "the reader is shocked, disgusted, almost sickened by details of cruelty, inhumanity, and the most diabolical hate and vengeance."[6] *Atlas* wrote: "We know nothing in the whole range of our fictitious literature which presents such shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity."[7]

It is true that *Wuthering Heights* later became one of the most widely read novels worldwide and acquired the status of a classic,[8] but the issue of its 'rebelliousness' stuck with it. As with *Jane Eyre*, there is no question of the rebelliousness of its protagonist, Heathcliff, but the argument here is that its overall message is highly conformist.

In modern literary criticism, Arnold Kettle is surely right when he writes that "the rebellion of Heathcliff [is] a particular rebellion, that of the worker physically and spiritually degraded by the conditions and relationships of … society."[9] Yet, it is difficult to agree with Kettle's

[4]- Unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights*, *The Spectator.* (18 Dec. 1847), Pp: 1217–1218.

[5]- Unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights* [excerpts], *Examiner* (Jan. 1848), Pp: 21–22.

[6]-Unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights* [excerpts], *Douglas Jerrold's Weekly Newspaper*, (15 January 1848).

[7]- Unsigned review of *Wuthering Heights* [excerpts], *Atlas*, (22 January 1848).

[8]- In 2013, *The Guardian* newspaper gave it No. 13 among the 100 best novels in English. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/16/emily-Brontë-wuthering-heights-100-best. Jane Eyre was given No. 12. Last seen, April 15, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/dec/09/100-best-novels-jane-eyre. Last seen, April 15, 2017.

[9]- Arnold Kettle, *Introduction to the English Novel*, Vol.1. New York: Harper Torchbook, 1960, P: 154.

conclusion that "All that is involved in the Catherine-Heathcliff relationship, all that it stands for in human needs and hopes, can be realized only through the active rebellion of the oppressed."[10] For *Wuthering Heights* does not show that Heathcliff's "needs and hopes" are realized through his active rebellion. On the contrary, his rebellion is shown to be totally and utterly destructive and serves no end whatsoever, unless we concur with Kettle's assertion that "The deaths of Catherine and Heathcliff are indeed a kind of triumph because ultimately each faces death honestly, keeping faith."[11] But Kettle does not explain how their death is a triumph when Catherine dies in torment and wishing her lover the same, and Heathcliff precipitates his death by fasting after losing hope of finding any happiness or even satisfaction in this world.

Wuthering Heights and *Jane Eyre* are not usually read as social-problem novels; yet, this paper argues that they both made a significant contribution to the debate about class relations and social and economic change.

Zoe Brenan rightly observes that around the time of *Jane Eyre*'s publication, "mid-Victorian England was involved in a great deal of discussion about social reform."[12] For instance, the Chartists published a 'People's Charter' in 1838 calling for universal male suffrage and Karl Marx and Frederich Engels completed the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1850) in which they urged the working class to seize power. A number of texts known as the 'Condition of England' novels engaged creatively with social and political change.[13] However, and despite Brenan's citation of a letter Charlotte Brontë wrote to her publisher in

[10]- Ibid., P: 155.
[11]- Ibid., P: 144.
[12]- Zoe Brennan. Brontë's Jane Eyre: *A Reader's Guide*. London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010, P: 28.
[13]- The category includes novels such as Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854), Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854-55) and *Mary Barton* (1848), Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil, or the Two Nations* (1845), Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849), Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1849). Ian Ousby, *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, P: 212.

1852 saying, "I *cannot* write books handling the topics of the day; it is no use trying,"[14] in *Jane Eyre* she definitely addresses issues much broader than the contemporary issues Brenan believes to be the subject of the novel, like "the abuse of children and the role of the established church in Christian faith."[15]

In his book, *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, Terry Eagleton describes the social and economic context in which the Brontës wrote:

> The Brontës' home, Haworth, was close to the centre of the West Riding woolen area; and their lifetime there coincided with some of the fiercest class-struggles in English society. The years of their childhood were years of ruination for thousands of hand-workers dispersed in hill-cottages around the region - men and women who drifted, destitute, to the villages and towns. … Their childhood witnessed machine breaking; their adolescence Reform agitation and riots against the New Poor Law; their adulthood saw the Plug strikes and Chartism, struggles against the Corn Laws and for the Ten Hours Bill.[16]

So, despite the fact that the two novels do not address the above issues directly in the way they are addressed in the 'Condition-of-England' novels, they are definitely informed by these conditions and arguments. This paper will go a step further and attempt to show that *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* present two sides of the same argument, and in that sense are actually complementary. *Wuthering Heights* shows the futility of an individual effort, obviously representing a larger social and economic group, attempting to violate the established social and economic order of Victorian England. Conversely, *Jane Eyre* shows that

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[14]- Kathleen Tillotson, *Novels of the Eighteen-Forties*, 1954, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, P: 115.

[15]- Brennan, P: 28.

[16]- Terry Eagleton. *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1975, Anniversary Edition, 2005, P: 3.

an individual, even a woman, can climb the social ladder and get accepted if s/he follows the appropriate routes sanctioned by society.

In this sense, the two novels will be read as an illustration of the persistence and resilience of the traditional aristocratic order and its ability to 'contain' the emerging social and economic forces, perceived at a certain point in history as a threat. This is part of an ongoing debate in British social, political and economic history. The debate, started in the 1960s, has been between those who maintained that the rising bourgeoisie gained incremental economic power at the expense of the aristocracy, and consequently was increasingly asserting its new culture and value system over British society. On the other side of the argument were those who believed that the aristocracy has always managed to co-opt and 'contain' the middle classes and consequently maintained its hegemonic power.[17]

Novels that proposed inclusion, absorption or containment, such as *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, have fictionalized concepts articulated by the influential Victorian intellectual Matthew Arnold in his book *Culture and Anarchy*. Arnold acknowledged the rigidities of the British class system; hence, he figures his state as an individual whose different capacities had to be harmonized. Thus, a "hard middle class"[18] that tended toward machinery (work and money) and fanaticism ("the one thing needful")[19] needed the complementary aesthetic virtues of the aristocracy – "beautiful" ease, serenity, and politeness and their more "sublime" "high spirits, defiant courage, and pride of resistance."[20] For its part, the aristocracy needed the complement of ideas, lest its serenity degenerate, as it had under current conditions (in Victorian England), to futility and sterility. The role of supporters of culture is to "hinder the

[17]- For an overview of this debate, see Nayef al-Yasin, "The Enduring Compromise: Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* and E. M. Forster's *Howards End*," Damascus University Journal for Arts and Humanities, Vol. 31, No. 1+2, 2015, Pp: 71-77.

[18]- Matthew Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869, edited with an Introduction and Notes by Jane Garnett, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, P: 61.

[19]- Ibid., P: 107.

[20]- Ibid., P: 63.

unchecked predominance of that class-life which is the affirmation of our ordinary self and seasonably disconcert mankind in their worship of machinery."[21] As supporters of culture, the Brontës advocate containing the rising middle classes and taming them in order to achieve the objectives outlined by Arnold above.

The economic and social issues reviewed briefly above formed the context for Victorian novels, which they either fictionalized or were at least informed by. The fact that such issues do not figure prominently in the plots and narratives of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* does not mean that they do not constitute the overall message the two novels impart to their readers.

The two novels lend themselves to different kinds of critical approaches, which are not the subject of this paper, but some of the most influential literary criticism of the works of the Brontës was written by Terry Eagleton, especially in his *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*. In this book, Eagleton provides important insights to the social and economic context of the two novels. However, it is striking that although Eagleton is probably one of the most, if not *the* most, prominent living Marxist critic, he fails to pin down and clearly articulate the main issue that both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* address, which is social containment. This, despite the fact that the major British Marxist historians have again and again insisted on the centrality of the containment strategies pursued by British political and economic elites throughout the nineteenth centuries.[22]

The rest of this paper will examine the texts of the two novels in order to show that they narrativize the argument advanced above: both novels advocate social containment rather than social change. In this respect, it can be said that the main sharp difference between *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* is that the latter is more traditional and less innovative – or shocking to Victorian reviewers - than the former. The advice of the

[21]- Ibid., P: 81.
[22]- See note No.17 above.

reviewer for *Graham's Lady Magazine* was: "Read *Jane Eyre* is our advice, but burn *Wuthering Heights*."[23]

Eagleton finds too rigid a contrast between the "'politics' of Emily's text, and those of Charlotte's" and asserts that Charlotte is a "compromiser and canny strategist, in contrast with the unflinching absolutism I discern in *Wuthering Heights.*"[24] Eagleton's judgement is certainly true if what is meant by Emily's absolutism is her total rejection of individuals like Heathcliff, or groups the reader might associate with him. It is not entirely clear in Eagleton's book that he favours such an interpretation. Heathcliff vanquishes his immediate enemies, Hendley and Edgar, by pushing them to an early death and acquires their property. He then imagines a triumph in death, with an uncertain union with Catherine. His son dies before him; and consequently his progeny is obliterated with him. Although Jane is similar to Heathcliff in terms of her obscure origins and the fact that she was not liked as a child, she manages, with a great deal of diligence, perseverance and willingness to compromise, to achieve victory by being assimilated into the upper classes and having children who will insure the endurance of the settlement she succeeds in making.

Heathcliff's tragic flaw, however, is his mistaken assumption that acquiring wealth is enough to endow him with the social status necessary for survival in a society willing to accept upstarts only on its own terms. Heathcliff acquires wealth but no status. He uses his wealth for revenge and destruction. Even after he returns from his three-year journey, during which he amassed his dubious wealth, he acquires Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, which are both seats of traditional power, but never gets socially accepted. He remains in the same position he was allocated upon his first arrival at Wuthering Heights. When he was first brought to the Heights by Mr Earnshow, he was not willingly accepted neither by the family nor even by the servants; and his acceptance by Catherine

[23]- www.wuthering-heights.co.uk. Last seen, March 12, 2017.
[24]- Terry Eagleton, *Myths of Power*, P: xxiv.

would prove fateful. Being his partner in the rebellion against social, economic and moral norms, she drives herself to a premature death.

Unlike Jane, Heathcliff challenges all forms of Victorian modes of authority: social, religious and moral; and consequently he is perceived as a threat from beginning to end. Catherine thinks that she will use her husband's wealth to raise Heathcliff from his low social and economic status. Then, she wrongly assumes that her husband, Edgar, will accept her continued friendship with Heathcliff in violation of social norms. Her strong headedness does not help her get what she wants. On the contrary, it only exacerbates her condition and precipitates her death.

The central event in *Wuthering Heights* is Catherine's decision to marry Edgar Linton and abandon Heathcliff. Her decision is based on Edgar's social superiority. Despite Catherine's protestations to Nelly that her marrying Edgar does not, in any way, reduce her attachment to Heathcliff – "He'll be as much to me as he has been all his lifetime." (64) - the fact remains that she made the choice expected of her, fully aware of the advantages such a marriage would bring her: "I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband."(61) Her tragic mistake was that she expected Heathcliff to accept a marginal social role in her life and Edgar to accept a marginal emotional one. Heathcliff, for his part mistakenly thought that a boost to his financial position would enable him to compete more favourably with Edgar and reclaim Catherine from him.

Heathcliff's ignorance of the nuances of the structure of English society and how it functions makes him come to the wrong conclusion: that money, on its own, gives power. He thinks that those around him do not respect or value him simply because he is poor. That is why his immediate reaction after he hears Catherine say that it would degrade her to marry him was to leave Wuthering Heights and seek to acquire wealth. He succeeds in doing so. Not only that. He embarks on a carefully planned scheme to rob all those who were above him socially of their wealth. He also succeeds. But his tragedy is that he finds that not very much has changed in terms of his social standing. He became possessed

of their property, but did not achieve anything in terms of relating to society. He remains a complete stranger.

It was obvious that a compromise was not possible, and a course of destruction ensued. Emily Brontë enabled Heathcliff to make a powerful emotional plea condemning Catherine's choice:

> *Why* did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. Yes, you may kiss me, and cry; and ring out my kisses and tears: they'll blight you – they'll damn you. You loved me - then what *right* had you to leave me? What right - answer me - for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, *you,* of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart - you have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine. (126)

Catherine suffers the consequences of her choice and is ultimately ruined, blaming both Edgar and Heathcliff for her destruction: "You and Edgar have broken my heart, Heathcliff! And you both come to bewail the deed to me, as if *you* were the people to be pitied! I shall not pity you, not I." (124)

At the end of the novel, the 'legitimate' heirs of the traditional society triumph not as a result of their efforts but as a consequence of the restoration of the 'natural' course of history. Heathcliff is pushed out because he does not belong to the social system into which he was forcefully thrust. His collaborator, Catherine, is severely punished and suffers a premature death. Heathcliff represents the unaccommodating section of the rising middle classes. He is convinced that Catherine chose Edgar simply because he was wealthier, and concluded that he only needed money in order to become Edgar's equal. He does not seem to understand that the money has to come from socially acceptable sources and spent in the manner sanctioned by the dominant social order. He fails to do so. It is true that he manages to bankrupt Hindley, taking advantage of the latter's addiction to alcohol and gambling; and plotted to rob Edgar of his property by arranging the marriage between Edgar's daughter,

Cathy, and his own son, Linton Heathcliff. Nevertheless, he remained a pariah and remained outside the bail of respectable society. In the end, he realized that all his toil has been pointless. He saw Hareton Earnshaw and Cathy Linton courting and preparing themselves to get married, and consequently restore Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange to their 'rightful' owners.

John Sutherland offers an interesting explanation of Heathcliff's sudden relapse into lethargy and the fact that he had no longer any desire for further revenge and indeed for life itself.[25] Catherine suddenly decides to haunt Heathcliff and sets out to prevent him from eating and drinking. What causes this is a ruminative comment Heathcliff makes to Nelly, summing up his life's work:

> It is a poor conclusion, is it not . . . An absurd termination to my violent exertions? I get levers and mattocks to demolish two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready, and in my power, I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished! My old enemies have not beaten me - now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives - I could do it; and none could hinder me - But where is the use? (323)

This is the only occasion on which Heathcliff indicates his long-term aim - dispossessing Hareton and Catherine of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange inheritance. Over many years he managed to obtain ownership of both - by extracting gambling IOUs from Hindley, by eloping with Isabella, by forcing his son to marry Cathy, by making his son, on his deathbed, leave everything to his father. Heathcliff can now stop Hareton and Catherine from coming into their parents' property by drawing up a will which specifically disinherits them. This is what he means by "now would be the precise time to revenge myself on their representatives."

Already Heathcliff is, as he tells Cathy, "half conscious" of some power robbing him of the will to carry through this consummating act of

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25- John Sutherland. *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, P: 65.

revenge. There is, as he tells Nelly, "a strange change approaching - I'm in its shadow at present." The shadowy change will, over the next few days, "materialize" as the ghost of Cathy. Heathcliff becomes a man possessed under her "relentless" spell.

It is difficult to say that Heathcliff died of 'natural causes'. He was a very healthy 38 year-old man. He does not eat or drink for four days, which is a short period of time for someone in Heathcliff's physical condition to starve to death. Every time he makes an attempt to eat or drink, he is interrupted, as we are led to deduce, by a distracting vision of his lost love, Catherine. "I'm animated with hunger; and, seemingly, I must not eat," (250) he observes. Nelly makes him coffee, breakfast, lunch, dinner. But something always prevents him from sustaining himself. "I vainly reminded him of his protracted abstinence from food," (253) the housekeeper says: "if he stirred to touch anything in compliance with my entreaties, if he stretched out his hand to get a piece of bread, his fingers clenched, before they reached it, and remained on the table, forgetful of their aim." (253) Nelly overhears him saying: "By God! She's relentless," (255) Eventually, the relentless Catherine succeeds in killing him.

On the evening before his death, in a state bordering on distraction, he tells Nelly, "When day breaks, I'll send for Green [the solicitor] . . . I wish to make some legal inquiries of him while I can bestow a thought on those matters, and while I can act calmly. I have not written my will yet." Heathcliff then becomes even more distracted, telling Nelly, "It's not my fault, that I cannot eat or rest. . . I'll do both, as soon as I possibly can. But you might as well bid a man struggling in the water, rest within arm's length of the shore! I must reach it first, and then I'll rest. Well, never mind Mr Green." (332-3)

Heathcliff dies intestate, the property descends - as it should - to the young lovers, and the two great houses revert to their dynastic owners. But what if Heathcliff had not been conveniently haunted to death at this juncture? He would have written his vengeful will dispossessing Hareton and Catherine. Cathy returns from beyond the grave at this specific

moment to prevent Heathcliff from making his will. Her primary aim is not to starve Heathcliff to death in order that they may be reunited for a "spot of posthumous adultery."[26] It is to starve Heathcliff to death lest he do what he is just now threatening to do - make a will which will evict Cathy's descendants forever from their ancestral lands.

Sutherland's conclusion is that: "In the last analysis, she reverts to type: she is the mistress, he the outsider at Wuthering Heights. He may have a share of her grave, but not the Earnshaws' family house."[27] So, it can be safely stated that Emily Brontë is not a revolutionary author. She subscribes to the idea that despite the challenges posed by rising energetic and sometimes disruptive forces of the middle classes, they can always be contained and a state of 'normalcy' restored by placing power, once again, in the hands of the upper classes. Heathcliff's total removal from the world of Wuthering Heights testifies to Emily's 'absolutism' in addressing the issue of social and economic conflict and resolving the conflict in favour of the dominant hegemonic class which is capable of containing emerging threats in the form of the middle classes.

In comparison, Charlotte is indeed more compromising. Like Heathcliff, Jane occupies a precarious social position. She is not treated as an equal by the Reeds; nevertheless, she is considered a superior by Bessie, the servant. John Reed deems her less than a servant because she does not do any work in return for her upkeep. For him, she is simply a dependent:

> [Y]ou are a dependent, mamma says; you have no money; your father left you none; you ought to beg, and not live here with gentlemen's children like us, and eat the same meals we do, and wear clothes at our mamma's expense. (8)

So, Jane develops a perception of herself as being different and an acute sense of being treated unfairly in comparison with the other children of the family. Like Heathcliff, she suffers at the hands of the bully of the hosting family. But unlike Heathcliff, Jane seems to be aware

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[26]- John Sutherland. *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?* P: 66.

[27]- Ibid., P: 67.

not only of her disadvantageous position, but also of her own personal weaknesses which make the Reeds dislike her:

> They were not bound to regard with affection a thing that could not sympathise with one amongst them; a heterogeneous thing, opposed to them in temperament, in capacity, in propensities; a useless thing, incapable of serving their interest, or adding to their pleasure; a noxious thing, cherishing the germs of indignation at their treatment, of contempt of their judgment. I know that had I been a sanguine, brilliant, careless, exacting, handsome, romping child - though equally dependent and friendless - Mrs. Reed would have endured my presence more complacently; her children would have entertained for me more of the cordiality of fellow-feeling; the servants would have been less prone to make me the scapegoat of the nursery. (12)

She is equally aware of the questions of poverty and wealth. From an early age, she does not see any intrinsic positive value in poverty or in being poor. She realizes that her options are limited and sets out compensating for her poverty with hard work, serious resolve and trying her best to maintain and protect her dignity. She understands that poverty is a disabling force which prevents people from fulfilling their potential. Here is a conversation between Jane and Mr Lloyd, the apothecary who was called to check on her after a near nervous breakdown resulting from a severe punishment meted out on her by Mrs Reed:

> I reflected. Poverty looks grim to grown people; still more so to children: they have not much idea of industrious, working, respectable poverty; they think of the word only as connected with ragged clothes, scanty food, fireless grates, rude manners, and debasing vices: poverty for me was synonymous with degradation.
>
> 'No; I should not like to belong to poor people,' was my reply.
>
> 'Not even if they were kind to you?'
>
> I shook my head: I could not see how poor people had the means of being kind; and then to learn to speak like them, to adopt their manners, to be uneducated, to grow up like one of the poor women I saw sometimes nursing their children or washing their clothes at the

> cottage doors of the village of Gateshead: no, I was not heroic enough to purchase liberty at the price of caste. (20)

Jane's attitude regarding poverty and wealth comes to the fore when she started thinking seriously of marrying Rochester. One of her major concerns with regard to this marriage is the disparity in wealth and status between them. She acknowledges that despite her feeling a great deal of emotional and intellectual affinity with him, "rank and wealth sever [them] widely." (149) When she decides to leave Thornfield after the revelation that Rochester was already married, while he pressed her to stay, she also refers to her wealth deficiency as a point not in her favour. She tells him: "[If] God had gifted me with some beauty and much wealth, I should have made it as hard for you to leave me, as it is now for me to leave you." (216)

Despite Rochester's declarations of love for Jane, and although he proposed to her when she was a poor governess, Charlotte's programme for social containment made it necessary that Jane should acquire some wealth to be legitimately accepted into the upper classes. She makes her inherit twenty thousand pounds from her uncle John, which she shares with her cousins. The inheritance element is the most powerful in undermining any claim to a challenge to the accepted social and economic order. The mere fact of sharing her inheritance with her cousins highlights Jane's desire to have a family and to belong to a broader social structure at the expense of reduced wealth. This is something that Heathcliff fails to understand, and suffers the consequences.

Heathcliff's tragic flaw is that he wants to be integrated into the dominant social system on his own terms, something that the system does not accept. Jane's strategy is more compromising. She applies for joining the dominant social structure of her society on its time-honoured terms. When she returns to Thornfield with the intention of marrying Rochester, she stresses the fact that now she is rich and can stand on equal footing with him: "I told you I am independent, sir, as well as rich: I am my own mistress." (370) In the same breath that she informs him of being 'rich'

and 'independent', she continues addressing him as 'sir' and describe him as 'master'.

The statement made by Richard Cobden, the emblem of the mid-Victorian middle class, about the middle classes desiring wealth in order to "prostate themselves at the feet of feudalism"[28] applies to the case of Jane who wishes for a fortune that enables her to get closer in status to Rochester. James Eli Adams argues that in Brontë's novel, there is an aristocratic order that locates value in wealth and kinship and finds its expression in Blanche Ingram who incarnates aristocratic luxury and display in her very body.[29] In Jane, by contrast – 'poor, disconnected, and plain' – Blanche's ornamental being is countered by an ideal of inner worth, of moral character located in earnestness, independence, and self-discipline. He adds that:

> Over against an aristocracy grown idle, profligate, and dissolute, so it was increasingly argued, those who earned their living through trade had proven themselves energetic, earnest, resourceful, and disciplined (both economically and sexually). Here were virtues that drew on an ideal of individual character and self-determination rather than inherited rank and connections of kinship or patronage.[30]

But Adams stops short of stating that standing for all these virtues, Jane's ultimate achievement is marrying Rochester, the embodiment of the "idle, profligate, and dissolute" aristocracy, and by so doing conforming to Cobden's characterization of his and her class. Jane sets out to achieve a goal, to be recognized both as an individual and a woman and to be accepted as an equal by Rochester, and succeeds in doing so. However, she does not succeed unaided by external forces. She inherits a fortune upon her uncle's death (a fortune made in trade), which brings her closer to Rochester in terms of social and economic status. There is also

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28- John Morley, *Life of Richard Cobden*, London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1881, 2: 482.

29- James Eli Adams, "The boundaries of social intercourse': Class in the Victorian Novel," in Francis O'Gorman ed. *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2005, P: 52.

30- Ibid., P: 53.

the fact that Rochester becomes deformed and disabled in the end, which reduces his power significantly, brings him closer to Jane's status and makes him physically and emotionally dependent on her. He is weakened and made dependent on her assistance before equality is achieved. As John Sutherland wisely concludes, "Blind and crippled, no comtesse, Blanche Ingram, or signorina will have him now. Only Jane will."[31]

Even Charlotte Brontë's choice of narrative perspective is part of her overall design of the ideological import of her novel. It is essential to gaining the reader's sympathy and empathy with her protagonist. The use of the autobiographical first person narrator enables Jane to assert what she presumes to be moral rectitude. Her unhappiness with the Reeds family stems from her feeling of being treated unfairly. After the major incident which happened to Jane, when John Reed attacked her, and then she was locked up in the red room, she ruminates on how unfairly she is being treated:

> I strove to fulfil every duty; and I was termed naughty and tiresome, sullen and sneaking, from morning to noon, and from noon to night.
>
> My head still ached and bled with the blow and fall I had received: no one had reproved John for wantonly striking me; and because I had turned against him to avert farther irrational violence, I was loaded with general opprobrium.
>
> 'Unjust!—unjust!' said my reason, forced by the agonising stimulus into precocious though transitory power; and Resolve, equally wrought up, instigated some strange expedient to achieve escape from insupportable oppression—as running away, or, if that could not be effected, never eating or drinking more, and letting myself die. (12)

Jane narrates her own suffering, her acute sense of injustice, her persistence in doing right by all those around her, her conscious effort to persevere in improving herself, just to get accepted and to be treated as an equal. Ultimately, Jane does not seek to undermine or overthrow the existing social and economic order. She wants it to be reformed in a

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[31]- John Sutherland. *Can Jane Eyre Be Happy?* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, P: 80.

manner that recognizes, accepts and includes her. She wants a fairer and more inclusive society where individual qualities are recognized, together and not in conflict with inherited qualities.

In *Wuthering Heights*, Lockwood, a man who stands for prevalent values, is chosen as a frame narrator in order to represent normalcy. Nelly Dean, who tells him the story of Heathcliff and Catherine is also a conventional person. At the end of the novel, when Lockwood returns by chance to Wuthering Heights, and is told about their fate, the whole Heathcliff and Catherine story seems to be simply a disturbance. It shakes the normalcy of society, which is ultimately restored. The use of two conventional narrators, very different and detached from the other characters, highlights the abnormality of the protagonists and their anti-social behavior.

In *Jane Eyre*, the way Bertha is portrayed in the novel also plays on stereotypical Victorian assumptions about race: she is mad, destructive and polluting. She is a premonition, a threat, a mystery. As far as Jane is concerned, she is the impediment which prevents her from achieving her happiness. Only when she is gone, is order restored. Even her departure was destructive. She refused to go without burning down Thornfield.

Jane's concept of justice does not extend to Bertha, although there is ample evidence in the novel that she is treated unfairly. Rochester marries her for her money, brings her from her homeland in the West Indies to England, where no one knows he is married. He isolates her on the assumption that she is mad. Servants who are necessarily aware of her existence assume she is "my bastard half-sister; my cast-off mistress." (249) He persistently neglected her; and despite the many warnings, he never took an appropriate measure like putting her under proper supervision or dismissing the drunken woman who was charged with her care. He could have put her under professional care, taking into account that such care was available at that time.[32] Jane never bothers to ask any of these questions. She accepts Rochester's story unquestioningly, which

[32]- John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction: Writers, Publishers, Readers*, London: Palgrave, 1995, P: 68.

is unlike her, for she is a great questioner of most things. But she accepts the story because it suits her purposes in social climbing.

The ultimate message of *Wuthering Heights* seems to be a warning of the new men and upstarts represented by Heathcliff. That is why he is made to perish with everything belonging to him. He dies, the woman who loved and sympathized with him dies. His son dies. He remains only as a ghost haunting the moors as a warning to others.

Jane abides completely by the moral mores of her society. She refuses to become Rochester's mistress no matter how much she loved him. She insists on being with him on terms totally acceptable to society, not only in relation to emotional and sexual norms, but also to social and economic equality. In this sense, the novel can be read as a journey of self preparation to be contained and assimilated into the class she aspires to join.

Conversely, Heathcliff's relationship with Catherine flies in the face of every aspect of Victorian morality. He does not only demand equality; his manners, language, behavior and values are at odds with the society to which he belongs. He subverts the society he lives in. He uses his newly acquired wealth to destroy the existing social equilibrium. Consequently, when he refuses to be contained, he is not only kept in his place or ostracized, but completely eliminated together with his offspring.

Cora Kaplan is certainly right in her conclusion that Charlotte Brontë "was no political radical."[33] And Terry Eagleton is right in asserting that the Brontës were "both rebels and reactionaries;"[34] but the messages the reader is left with, after reading *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, is that they are more reactionary than revolutionary, according to Eagleton's own ideological standpoint.

[33]- Cora Kaplan, "Pandora's Box: Subjectivity, Class, and Sexuality in Socialist Feminist Criticism," in *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre: A Case Book*, ed. *Elsie B. Michiel,* Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, P: 42

[34]- Terry Eagleton. *Myths of Power: A Marxist Study of the Brontës*, P: xiii.

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