

**International Baccalaureate
English Language & Literature HL
Written Task 2- Part 3**

Session: May 2013

Outline:

Prescribed question:

Power and Privilege- How and why is a social group represented in a particular way?

Title of text analysed:

Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte (Edition- Nelson, 1992)

Part of the course referred to:

Part 3: Literature- texts and contexts

Key points focused in the task:

- The conflict between 'nature' and 'culture' in the novel, and the implications of the male-dominated 'culture' in relation to women
- The use of names and how they determine women's position within society
- The presentation of women as somewhat conforming to the oppressing roles they are given
- The comment on the fragility of these patriarchal, male-dominated structures

How could a feminist reading of *Wuthering Heights* show the representation of women in the novel?

It can be argued that the way Emily Bronte's novel *Wuthering Heights* presents women, is a criticism of their role at the start of the nineteenth-century, and that Bronte was implicitly exposing female oppression. I will look at the way female characters are presented in the novel, as well as how their relationship to men contributes to this implied criticism.

The conflict between nature and culture is very significant, and is a theme present throughout *Wuthering Heights*. The Earnshaw family represents nature, and their actions, particularly Catherine and Heathcliff's are driven by passion and natural forces. The Lintons, on the other hand, represent culture and tradition, and have a patriarchal structure. They are a male dominated family, run by Mr. Linton, a magister and father. The Earnshaws, after Mr. Earnshaw's death, do not have such a conventional structure, because, although Hindley becomes the master, Catherine, a woman, and Heathcliff, an outsider, try to rebel and undermine Hindley's power. Catherine's transformation witnessed in Chapter 7 is a perfect example of the contrast between the world of Thrushcross Grange and *Wuthering Heights*. Before leaving *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine is described as "wild", and Nelly predicts she would return from Thrushcross Grange still a "hatless little savage", but she comes back a "very dignified person" whom Hindley compares to a "lady". This shows Catherine's change is controlled by the Linton's patriarchal view of women, that women should be well presented, well mannered and 'lady-like'. *Wuthering Heights* is presented as a threat to those traditional values, as Frances says "she must mind and not grow wild again here".

The use of names in *Wuthering Heights* is also important, as it exemplifies the role of women in the novel. Because names are gendered, traditionally associated with the male figure, it can be argued that the destiny of female characters in the novel is determined by their relation to men. In Chapter 3, Lockwood finds writing scratched on the ledge of the window in his chamber, and reads: "*Catherine Earnshaw*, here and there varied to *Catherine Heathcliff*, and then again to *Catherine Linton*." It is clear that these words had been written by Catherine and that she is divided between Heathcliff and Edgar, trying out both names to see which looks or sounds best. This clearly shows how Catherine's future is determined by the name she adopts- she is destined to enter a male world, and cannot have a real identity outside the patriarchal structure. This is why Catherine says to Nelly "it would degrade me to marry Heathcliff", and when prompted about why she loves Edgar she replies: "he will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband." At this point in the novel, Catherine is fully aware of the male-dominated world she is in, and acknowledges that if she married Heathcliff, she would have no money and no respectable position within society, whereas if she married Edgar, she would have both. She admits to this and says that she wants to be "the greatest woman of the neighbourhood", and this suggests Bronte is also criticising the way women conform to their roles and positions in society.

The names scratched onto the ledge are described by the dazed Lockwood as "a glare of white letters", "as vivid as spectres", which could show the negative, quite haunting connotations these names and their significance have. Bringing up this idea of names at the start of the novel, before Catherine is introduced to the readers, shows its significance, and the ghost-like negative connotations of names show how Bronte is criticising this societal

norm. The description of the words being “as vivid as spectres” can also be foreshadowing of Lockwood’s dream, when he sees Catherine’s ghost, who, after being asked by Lockwood, says her name is Catherine Linton. This may seem of little significance upon a first reading, as Lockwood himself remarks “why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for Linton”. However, it is extremely significant in terms of foreshadowing events to come as well as the issues of male power that lead to the events. The ghost, or “melancholy voice” of Catherine calls herself Linton, and that name is not only an omen of her and Edgar’s union, but also of her unfortunate demise, because she is a spirit; cold, melancholy, describing herself as being lost, “a waif for twenty years”. This bad omen shows that the patriarchal structure that Catherine has been forced into, the world of the Lintons that she joins ultimately through marriage, is directly responsible for her tragic fate, showing again Bronte’s criticism of the treatment of women within society.

Isabella Linton is an interesting character and significant in terms of the presentation of women in the *Wuthering Heights*. At first, she seems to conform to women’s roles at the time, being raised by the Lintons and growing up to be quite spoilt and superficial. However, she then takes a radical decision, rejecting her brother’s world and marrying Heathcliff, who is far below her in terms of social class. By rebelling against the norms of Thrushcross Grange, she shows independence, and does so even more later when she lives alone as a single mother. This also shows how a traditional, patriarchal structure like the Lintons and Thrushcross Grange is easily corruptible, in the way that Heathcliff manages to manipulate Isabella. This suggests that Bronte is trying to criticise male-dominated structures that oppress women, by saying they are in reality quite fragile, and easily destroyed.

Overall, Bronte makes an effective criticism of the role of women at the time the novel is set through the use of names, and most importantly through the contrast between two ‘worlds’, the Lintons and the Earnshaws, and the way each deal with female characters.

Word Count: 980