



## Theory of Adaptation and Canonical Rewriting: *Wuthering Heights* to *Wuthering Hearts*

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### **Abstract**

The paper's major focus is to project the significance of adaptation in Children's literature. The study juxtaposes the canonical text *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and the adapted text *Wuthering Hearts* by Kay Woodward. The paper also highlights the Theory of adaptability, which provides a relative history for the adaptation. It contextualises certain textual evidence to reassert the importance of the shift in modern children's literature and its reflection of society with reference to the younger generation

**Keywords:** Adaptation, canonical writing, *Wuthering Heights*

### **Introduction**

"Adaptation is a form of repetition without replication; change is inevitable, even without any conscious updating or alteration of setting."

Linda Hutcheon

Adaptations play an important role in creating a new piece of work. Usually, adaptation varies according to the author and the era in which they live. Adaptations in the children's literature is unique than the rest of any other adaptations. Earlier children's literature is easier to define, but in the present scenario, several shifts have taken place in that sphere. The evolution of many theories has caused this chaotic atmosphere. As far as literature and art are concerned, adaptations offer a wide range of commentary on their source. It is a transpositional practice that casts a text from a specific genre into another genre. It is an act of revision in itself. It attempts to make the source text more relevant to the present time and easily comprehensible to the emerging audience. Adaptation is, however, a transition of novels into films, dramas into musicals, poems into paintings, songs, operas and so on. Art is derived certainly from the existing art, and the stories are obviously passed on to the next generation from the familiar stories.

For example, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Cinderella* stories are essentially considered as a book for children, but the gradual improvement in human minds has broken the stereotype of children's literature.

Now, in the present context, *Alice in Wonderland* and the *Cinderella* stories have different connotations, and the texts are open to broader interpretations. Many stories of this kind have been adapted to various forms of literary genres, music, movies and theatrical performances. These kinds of adapted versions attract new audiences. It breaks the label of strict art forms and encourages creative thoughts in the modern era. The result

of these adaptations is neutral and depends on the receptive end. The change in society, irrespective of diverse domains, puts adaptation in the new trend.

For instance, the folk tale, *Cinderella* (1697) story's first version is published by Charles Perrault in *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé*. Brothers Grimm in their folk tale collection *Grimm's Fairy Tales* has included the *Cinderella* story. The story has been retold and rewritten in several countries like China, Malaysia and Indonesia. The adaptation started back in 1950 with Walt Disney. In 1960, *Cinderella* was adapted as *Cinderella*. The tradition of *Cinderella*'s adaptation is continuing till 2015 through films and theatres.

Linda Hutcheon illustrates that, "Adaptations are so much a part of western culture that they appear to affirm Walter Benjamin's insight that storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, the critical pronouncements of T.S.Eliot or Northrop Frye were certainly not needed to convince avid adapters across the centuries of what for them has always been a truism" (2). The existing literature always contributes to the upcoming literature. T.S.Eliot in his essay *Tradition and Individual Talent* argues that the 'individual talent' is important for a writer to avoid plagiarism. At the same time, the writer should be aware of the historical sense and literary past to create a work of art. In the late twentieth century, queries were raised on the necessity of 'Originality'. Adaptations often discover new ideas; though it has a little resemblance, it never disturbs the original text. In this process of adaptation, the focus is shifted to the audience in terms of style, language, plot, theme, structure and characters. Even the cover page of the book has a transformation when it is adapted. The thesis examines the adaptation of the canonical text, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* as *Wuthering Hearts* by Kay Woodward. For the novel *Wuthering Hearts*, the target audience are modern children and for *Wuthering Heights*, the audience are Victorians so there is a huge shift in narration. In the nineteenth century *Wuthering Heights*'s recognition was much lower. In 1914, the book got adapted to the stage. Many feminist writers were fascinated and attracted by the novel and Bronte.

### **Emily Bronte: *Wuthering Heights***

Emily Bronte is the genius novelist who puts forth a girl's view of 'gothic romanticism'. Her masterpiece *Wuthering Heights* is set in eighteenth century England, which is a world of patriarchal domination. The novel explores the themes of revenge, religion, class difference and deep prejudice in the characters. The Byronic hero Heathcliff's unfulfilled love for Catherine is the main plot. The story is narrated by Mr Lockwood, who is a newcomer to the locale of Wuthering Heights. He narrates the entire novel as an entry in his diary. The story is told to him by Nelly Dean, the housekeeper and nurse in the Earnshaws. In a few instances, the characters narrate and exchange their dialogues in their voices through Nelly Dean's narration.

### **Kay Woodward: *Wuthering Hearts***

Woodward is a contemporary children's writer. Her first teen-novel is *Jane Airhead*, based on Charlotte Bronte's classic novel *Jane Eyre* (1847). She has done a marvellous work by presenting the established text *Wuthering Heights* as *Wuthering Hearts* in children's literature. She has worked for both Bronte sisters. Her novel *Wuthering Hearts* is an adaptation, and it clearly concentrates on the new generation audience. This story is set in the modern era, where the stereotype of society is completely changed. The plot revolves around the two major characters of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Earnshaw, portrayed as Emily Sparrow and Heathcliff as Robert McBride. Emily is a fourteen year school going girl who falls for a strange boy, Robert. She has a huge crush on him; this love changes the normal plot of the novel and makes it a little

mysterious as well as complicated. However, Robert is no prince to suit Emily; he is a fierce-tempered person. *Wuthering Heights* is played as a drama in *Wuthering Hearts*.

The story and the plot are completely changed to get a happy ending in the adaptation. Robert's black moods change towards the end, and he also falls gradually for the pretty Emily (Catherine). This adaptation juxtaposes *Wuthering Heights*'s air of mysterious seriousness and the presence of supernatural elements. Woodward's novel *Wuthering Hearts* exactly portrays the modern society and the mentality of the children in the present age. The socio cultural change is clearly oven in the story to bring the difference in this context.

The *Wuthering Hearts* includes many dramatic elements of *Wuthering Heights*. It also gives a glimpse on the lives of the Bronte sisters, their works and family. The literary milestone created by Bronte is still standing in the heights as it inspires many generations. There is a shift from Victorian to the modern society but the text *Wuthering Heights* is undisturbed by the changes. It still invokes its readers to explore it and the novel is open for several interpretations. A text usually has many elements, one of the primary and a significant element is narration.

### **The Variation in Story**

The novel *Wuthering Heights* is shown as a drama to be staged on in the *Wuthering Hearts*. This is the form-based change in the adaptation by Woodward. The setting of the entire novel covers up the school, classroom, campus and Emily's home. The moors from *Wuthering Heights* is also captured as a setting. But the setting of *Wuthering Heights* takes place in and around the two adjacent houses in the moors on Yorkshire, namely Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

The novel also depicts the pathetic lives of Bronte's and their struggle to publish the novel. *Wuthering Heights* is directly referred in Woodward's book. The adapted heroine Catherine Earnshaw (Emily Sparrow) in *Wuthering Hearts* is a twenty-first-century school-going, feisty girl. She is outspoken and very determined to play the part of Catherine in the school drama, and Robert plays the part of Heathcliff, who is a new boy at the school. He is very brooding and mysterious as Heathcliff. Emily falls for him at first sight and gradually develops a crush and love for him. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Heathcliff will love each other very deeply. But Catherine avoids Heathcliff because of his low social standards. In the modern context, there is no such thing as class or standards; even if they are there, then it is not explicitly shown. The families of Emily and Robert are of a middleclass living people. Both families have their own problems of modern times.

Emily's parents are divorced, but back in Victorian England, it was not possible for the husband and wife to be divorced, especially when they belonged to the middle class. The change in the women of the modern period is also shown in the novel. The character of Nelly Dean is adapted by Emily's Auntie O in *Wuthering Hearts*. Like Catherine Earnshaw, who is looked after by Nelly, Emily is taken care of by her Aunty O. Many elements of the original text have been included as dialogues, conversations and dramatic elements in the adaptation. The similarities of both texts are the major protagonists, the love theme and setting.

The common setting for both the texts is Yorkshire. Woodward says "Maia flung her eyes towards the polystyrene ceiling tiles before replying in an undertone. 'We're in Yorkshire,' she said. 'Wuthering Heights is totally logical.' 'So's algebra,' grumbled Emily. I don't get that either" (3). Certainly the characters know for themselves that they are in the place where *Wuthering Heights* is written. Maia is a close and only friend of Emily in her school. This is a character addition by Woodward in her adapted text,

whereas Catherine does not have a friend. She just has Nelly Dean as her friend, care taker and servant.

Emily does not like *Wuthering Heights* to be played for the Christmas play in school. She hates it for its dark atmosphere. Woodward emphasises that *Wuthering Heights* is so dark and depressing. It's always raining. And what about the characters? Everyone's called Cathy or Catherine or Cath or Kitty or Kat or Cate or, um . . . what's his name . . .? Cliff? No, Heathliff. He's a right charmer, isn't he? Not" (2). This thought is always there in the new generation of children. Emily's indifference is the modernised way of looking at a conventional and classical text. But as the text progresses, Woodward changes this attitude in the reader's mind. This is how the adaptation helps the young generation to love the classics and to go back to them. In the end, the indifference changes, and she loves the dark *Wuthering Heights* for giving her Robert (Heathcliff).

#### Conclusion

The *Wuthering Hearts* contextualises a simple plot from the complex novel *Wuthering Heights* because it focuses on the readers, children. So the text is changed according to the readers. Writing for the readers is of higher significance. The story and the plot are changed to get a happy ending in the adaptation. This adaptation juxtaposes *Wuthering Heights*'s air of mysterious seriousness and the presence of supernatural elements. It exactly portrays the mentality of the children in modern society. The socio-cultural shift is clearly shown in the story to plot the difference. *Wuthering Hearts* includes dramatic elements of *Wuthering Heights*. It also gives a glimpse into the lives of the Bronte sisters, their works and family. The literary milestone created by Bronte is still standing in the heights as it inspires many generations. It invites its readers to explore more and is open to several interpretations.

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