

The Representation of Love and Violence as a Tragedy of Passion in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

Dr. Sabah A. Shakury

Abstract: Emily Bronte, the highly imaginative novelist of passion of the 19th century, produced only one novel, *Wuthering Heights*, in 1847. Influenced by the times and social background and life experiences, her novel reflects a vision of human nature and of the society in which she lived. In *Wuthering Heights*, Bronte tells a story of tragedy of passion in its two aspects of love and violence. This study presents Bronte's view of the nature of man and of the world in which he existed from different aspects. By analyzing the two main characters' different personalities, the study reveals the internal reason of the tragedy. This study also deals with women's status and the patriarchal society at that time, showing the influence of the society in which they lived which was intensifying man's basic corruption. In addition, it also focuses on how Bronte's success stems from the fact that she was able to present her vision obliquely and imaginatively. Bronte could portray amoral beings like Catherine and Heath cliff with total honesty and understanding, yet remain completely aware of what the inevitable consequences of their behavior must be. From these analyses, people can reach a systematic and profound understanding of the causes of the tragedy of passion, and thus will grasp the connotation of the novel comprehensively and accurately.

Keywords: Emily Bronte; *Wuthering Heights*; Tragedy of passion; Vision

I. INTRODUCTION

Emily Bronte, one of the greatest English novelists, was born in Thornton, West Riding of Yorkshire, and Northern England. She is best known for her only novel, *Wuthering Heights* which is a monument in the history of English Victorian literature. In more than one century, *Wuthering Heights* has been one of the most frequently analyzed works of English literature, ranging from subjects to writing skills, even to social significances. For instance, Eva Hope, in her book, *Queens of Literature of the Victorian Era*, describes Emily Bronte's character as "a peculiar mixture of timidity and Spartan-like courage", and adds, "She was painfully shy, but physically she was brave to a surprising degree" (168). Juliet Gardiner, in his comment on *Wuthering Heights*, states that "the vivid sexual passion and power of its language and imagery impressed bewildered and appalled reviewers" (57). While Wade Thompson calls "the world of *Wuthering Heights* ... a world of sadism, violence and wanton cruelty" (71).

Bronte's aim, according to Professor Elliot Gose is "to make her readers and her characters acknowledge within themselves both dark and light, low and high, body and soul" (2). Thus, L. P. Hartley is correct when he says that modern man "bewildered by the threatening aspect of humanity," (3) can understand *Wuthering Heights* much better than the nineteenth-century reader with his belief in progress and the moral and civil perfectibility of man. Emily Bronte believed in an unsentimental and realistic presentation of man, even in his most unregenerate state. There is no character in *Wuthering Heights* who is either completely loveable or completely odious. Rather, as Phyllis Bentley has observed:

Emily shows to her characters exactly that clear-eyed compassion which she shows when she declines to judge the hare and the deer for timidity, or mock the wolf for his wolfishness. She portrays with absolute fidelity the weakness of the Lintons, the appalling insensate hardness of Heath cliff, the egoism of Cathy and the fatal consequences of all these qualities, yet she views these characters as she does the deer, the wolf and the hare; that is, with regret for their defects, but with understanding and compassion. She deprecates their faults, but does not blame them for their innate qualities or for the development of these qualities beneath the street of fear or shame; she lets them be heard in their own defense; she knows that Edgar, though a coward, was kind, that Heath cliff, though cruel, was bitterly oppressed. (99)

Thus, this article offers an interpretation and underlines Emily Bronte's vision of human nature and the inevitability of the tragedy. So, this study aims to find out the causes of the tragedy of passion in its both aspects of love and violence. The study is concerned about the two main characters' different personalities, which is the internal reason for the tragedy of passion and the environmental factors of the tragedy. I examine these two characters from a psychological perspective, as Emily Bronte reveals in her text some psychological insights, so that many

psychoanalytic critics have applied Freudian concept to this novel, and numerous articles and books have been written according to this perspective.

II. CHARACTERS' DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES

Wuthering Heights is a story ended in tragedy. To understand its causes of the tragedy of passion, it is necessary to study the two protagonists' characteristics. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Heath cliff are strongly different. The great difference between the two main characters' personalities decided that their passion could only be ended in tragedy.

2.1. Catherine's Bravery and Rebellion

As every reader noticed, at the beginning of the story, Catherine's personality is accorded a vivid and in-depth description. Her strong character and her rebellion against patriarch receive emphasis. It is told that it is Catherine who said: "I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! ... I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills" (102-103).

It is just this force of character that fortifies Catherine to argue with Nelly about the decision to marry Edgar. Nelly focuses on the foolish reasons for Catherine's decision. She attempts to convince Catherine that the marriage would be a mistake because of the opposite personalities of Catherine and Edgar. Catherine readily admits she has "no business to marry Edgar Linton" and that she actually loves Heath cliff (65).

Catherine's rebellious personality also clearly appears when her father, right before his death asks her "why canst thou not always be a good lass, Cathy?", she laughs as if this is a normal question, and asks him why he cannot be a better man(35).

However, Bronte offers a picture of selfishness and sacrifice with the same person, within the same decision. Because the events that follow reveal the painful departure of a heartbroken Heath cliff and a sorrowful but errant Catherine, this last motivation for Catherine's marriage to Edgar is brushed aside. The moment's sorrow overwhelms her loving sacrifice and shadows the horrible irony of the poignant kitchen scene, when she confesses her love for Heath cliff. In addition, Bronte seems to be saying that women who choose these relationships of convention or economic security often overlook what really is best for them in the future, especially in an emotional context.

Though the young Catherine realizes even while she ponders the betrayal of both herself and Heath cliff through her unfortunate matrimonial alliance with Linton: "I love him (Heath cliff) ... because he's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same"(65), she chooses Linton and brings destruction on them all. She refuses to marry Heath cliff because she would be degraded by a match to one who is socially inferior. Catherine argues with Nelly "did it never strike you that if Heath cliff and I married, we should be beggars?"(66). Catherine reasons with herself practically that marrying Edgar will make her "the greatest woman of the neighborhood"(55), whereas Heath cliff "does not know what being in love is"(65).

2.2. Heath cliff's Ambivalence

Heath cliff, a main character in *Wuthering Heights*, proves to be violent against man, and most importantly against himself because he has loved Catherine. His violence against himself, for which he ultimately paid the price of unhappiness, proved to be more harmful and more destructive than against the social conventions that deny him human rights and the love of his life, Catherine Earnshaw. A statement by Elaine Showalter aptly places Heath cliff in a unique role as villain: "if Rochester (of *Jane Eyre*) shocked critics, Heath cliff simply outraged them"(141).

Now it is necessary to examine the character of Heath cliff while explaining his passionate situation. Much of the power of the novel, as well as much of the critical confusion, emanates from the central character, Heath cliff. Readers are both attracted and repelled by his dark presence. He is neither hero nor villain; he is both hero and villain. He is a composite of the best and the worst in human nature. I conclude that his great strength of will, his ability to resist those influences foreign to his nature, his individualism, his intensity of feeling, and in the words of Royal Gettman, "his capacity to suffer greatly"(5) give him the stature of a tragic hero.

To discover Heath cliff, the reader must weigh and balance the evidence drawn from the two principal narrators as well as the different perspectives offered by the other characters and Heath cliff himself. The author never presumes to analyze Heath cliff as villain or hero, ugly or beautiful, moral or immoral but leaves such judgments to the reader.

From Nelly Dean and Lockwood the reader hear of the unusual circumstances surrounding the introduction of Heath cliff into the Earnshaw household.

This initial introduction of Heath cliff into the middle-class world reveals several things which are to prove important in an analysis of Heathcliff's character. First, it establishes the clash between the two worlds of the poor and the middle class. Catherine and Edgar as child representative of the middle class show themselves to be totally materialistic, spoiled, and shallow. Heath cliff, on the other hand, as a child of the lower class, shows the brooding resentment and rebelliousness of the abused and oppressed. However, Heath cliff's rebellion against society is more personal than social. As Dorothy Van Ghent reminds us, "The passion of Heath cliff and Catherine is too simple and undeviating in its intensity, too complex, for us to find in it any echo of practical social reality"(11). Heath cliff must struggle with the darkness both within and outside himself, a struggle which can only produce a soul in torment. An understanding of this tension provides an understanding of Heath cliff's true identity.

It is from Nelly that the reader learns of Heath cliff's need for revenge. When he determines as a youth that he shall one day 'pay Hindly back,' Nelly cautions him that he should forgive and that punishment should be left to God. Heath cliff replies: "No, God won't have the satisfaction that I shall. I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that I don't feel pain"(49).

Heathcliff as a boy is revealed as sullen, troublesome, and stoic, capable of affection for Catherine, whom he adores and Nelly, whom he tolerates. His love for Catherine Earnshaw is equaled only by his hatred for her brother Hindley, who does everything he can to feed that hatred. Heath cliff keeps these feelings of hatred locked up inside, where they grow even as he grows. Nelly remembers his stoic endurance: "He (Heath cliff) seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: he would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, ... and open his eyes, as if he had hurt himself by accident and nobody was to blame"(30). Heath cliff approaches adulthood torn between these violent extremes of his love for Catherine and his hatred for her brother.

When Heath cliff returns to Wuthering Heights from his self-imposed exile brought by Catherine's announced intention to marry the young heir of Thrushcross Grange, Nelly reports on a seeming transformation:

He had grown a tall, athletic, well-formed man; besides whom, my Master (Edgar Linton) seemed quite slender and youth-like. His upright carriage suggested the idea of his having been in the army. His countenance looked intelligent, and retained no marks of former degradation. A half civilized ferocity lurked yet in the depressed rows and eyes full of black fire, but it was subdued; and his manner was even dignified: quite divested of Roughness, though too stern for grace. (77)

He has not lost whatever destructive force which seeks asylum in his soul, but he has learned to control it in part, to use it to gain his ends. But Heath cliff's new pose does not fool the one who knows him best. Although Catherine has loved Heath cliff, she warns her sister-in-law not to seek his affections because "he's a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man"(83).

Only Catherine exercise control over this 'fierce man', a control which she relinquishes when she deserts him to marry Edgar Linton. Without Catherine's stabilizing influence, Heathcliff is unable to control the crushing destructive forces warring within him.

Heath cliff grows in cruelty and hardens in his consuming resolve to get revenge at any cost; he states; "I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the worms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a moral teething; and I grind with greater energy, in proportion to the increase of pain"(125).

Heath cliff's agony reaches its peak with the death of his beloved Catherine, who dies giving birth to her young daughter. His agony turns to anger as he curses Catherine, who has now deserted him this second time. He cries, "Oh God! ... I cannot live without my soul!"(137).

Heathcliff's grief is equaled only by his passion for revenge and his love for Catherine. He is a man torn by violence passion foreign to the world of ordinary experience and tormented beyond that which a normal man can bear.

III. THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS OF THE TRAGEDY

Before Emily Bronte's creation of the *Wuthering Heights*, she was not intending to write a wonderful 'romance', but to write a tragedy of 'romance'. Catherine pursues the pure love with her strong bravery and rebellion. However, her ideal was influenced by various factors and thus performed a pitiable tragedy. It is precisely the pitiable tragedy that created unique enduring charm of *Wuthering Heights* and made it become a romantic literary classic in English or

even the world literature. It is impossible for Catherine and Heath cliff to escape the tragic outcome under the prevailing social system.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this study, a comprehensive and overall study of various causes is made. It is a systematic research of the causes of the tragedy of passion in its both aspects: love and violence, such as the two main characters' different personalities, women's low status and dark social system, Heath cliff's and Cathy's destructive natures and their being victims of fate beyond their control. Therefore, denial and repression have a great influence on the two major characters and accordingly affected their behavior and destiny. All of these elements determine that the love story in *Wuthering Heights* could only be ended in tragedy

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