

The Love of the Other in *Wuthering Heights*

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Wuthering Heights is perhaps the most haunting love story which shocked the contemporary readers with their conventional morality and prudish social attitudes. It was selected by Somerset Maugham as one of the ten greatest novels of all time. Emily Bronte published *Wuthering Heights* in 1847 under the pseudonym of Ellis Bell. Bronte probably began writing this novel towards the end of 1845, though it is possible that she may have conceived the story earlier. It was completed by the summer of 1846. Even as she was exploring the theme of Gothic fiction it was almost impossible for an author to not explore the social situations prevailing in Britain and globally elsewhere during the time. While Bronte might have been a reclusive author herself her reflections on the social events taking place at the time including British colonialism to the far East and the Victorian imperial project might have had their influence in her at the time of writing the novel. The fact that the character of Heathcliff closely identifies with what postmodern and post-colonial critics have called the Other in the colonial narrative comparable to the likes of Caliban in *The Tempest*. Also, the fact that the times witnessed large scale uprisings in different parts of Europe and even in Britain the movements like Chartism were gaining ground during the time means that the ideas propounded by the lives of Marx and Engels were not just confined to intellectual elitist circles. It therefore could be interesting to analyze *Wuthering Heights* both from a post-colonial and from a Marxist perspective. If the character could be treated, both as an Other from a post-colonial perspective and as a representative of the suppressed classes through his efforts transcending to the bourgeoisie, interesting theoretical possibilities could be bought out. Through this paper it is aimed to analyze “The Love of the Other in *Wuthering Heights*” from the perspective of the character Heathcliff.

Heathcliff as the Other

The portrayal of Heathcliff is one of the most noticeable features of this novel and has given rise to much controversy. There is no doubt at all about Heathcliff’s depravity but at the same time he manages to win some of our deepest sympathies at certain points in the story. We can therefore assuredly say that he is not an unredeemed villain though a villain he definitely is.

The reader initially meets Heathcliff when he is bought by Mr. Earnshaw to Wuthering Heights from Liverpool. Mrs. Nelly Dean tells that she could hardly take a peep at the “dirty, ragged, black haired child”. If we were to compare this with Kipling’s idea of the white man’s burden we get a brilliant contrast of ‘black’ and ‘white’. In addition to this it was the duty of the white man to reform this black person. Thus from the very beginning there is a sense that Heathcliff is the Other.

The great unwashed is a term often used to denote a person of a lower order who is looked down upon by most of society. Mr. Earnshaw immediately after bringing Heathcliff home orders Nelly to “wash it and give it clean things and finally let it sleep with the children”. Thus from the description of Heathcliff’s childhood there are clear indications of Othering.

The idea of savage is an idea embedded in Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. In Indian context too the concept of savage can be seen in plenty in the colonial discourse. “Naughty swearing boy” is the description that Mrs. Linton gives to Heathcliff while Hindley calls him a “vulgar young ruffian” who is “worse than a brute”.

The very name Heathcliff is a typical representation of Othering. It consists of the words “heath” and “cliff”. Bronte might have thought of the significance of heath in Macbeth which is the place where the witches meet for the first time. A notoriety is associated with the word in the literary cannon. Heath becomes a symbol of desolation and mystery.

Even as a child Heathcliff spends most of his time out of the house in the moorlands. He is treated like a hand in the farm. There is a kind of mystery in Bronte’s description of the moorland and the description of the Orient in relation with the colonizers. The colonial Other of Heathcliff is thus represented with an aura of mystery using the moorlands.

The colonizers always looked down upon the East as a dirty place. They thought that this dirt is solely the fault of the colonized people. Thus believed that they themselves being educated and hygienic, had the responsibility to clear this filth from the mind and body of the colonized people. When Cathy expresses her aversion to dirt Heathcliff declare that “I shall be as dirty as I please: and I like to be dirty, and I will be dirty”.

The colonizers considered Orient as a land of barbarians. The only possible way to redeem the East according to the British was through their intervention. Orients were not thought to have the ability for administration. They lacked an identity and thus needed the protection of the colonizer. A similar portrayal of lack of identity can be seen in Heathcliff too. Nelly tells thus regarding the inscription on the headstone of Heathcliff’s grave “as he had no surname, and we could not tell his age, we were obliged to content ourselves with a single word Heathcliff...” she further tells that “If you enter the kirkyard, you’ll read on his headstone, only that, and the date of his death”.

Paternalism refers to the attitude and practice that are commonly, though not exclusively, understood as an infringement on the personal freedom and autonomy of a person (or class of persons) with a beneficent or protective intent. The discursive structure is formulated in order to make Heathcliff believe that Mr. Earnshaw is like a father figure to him. The novel describes Heathcliff being named after the son of Mr. Earnshaw who died in his childhood. Another instance can be seen in the description of the paternal care that Mr. Earnshaw shows. He gave Heathcliff such privileges in the house that Heathcliff “had only to speak and all the house would be obliged to bend to his wishes”.

However, from an essentially Marxian point of view every such action is motivated by economic considerations. The paternalistic attitude of Mr. Earnshaw therefore must be understood in conjunction with the policy of paternalism adopted by the imperial powers of Europe.

Can the subaltern speak?

At times Heathcliff may appear violent and repulsive, but he never loses our sympathy. Lockwood describes Heathcliff on his first visit to Wuthering Heights as “in dress and manners a gentleman”. Lockwood was disappointed by the inhospitable attitude of the host but he tells that he was encouraged to volunteer another visit the next day because “he found him very intelligent” on the topics they discussed. Why is it that Heathcliff continues to inspire our sympathies? To put it from a psychological perspective the author however distant they may be from the protagonists of the narrative, is likely to identify with the characters.

Even when Heathcliff is tried to be portrayed in a specific way the apparent positive traits of Heathcliff leaks out. Considering Indian history, even when India was in a sense portrayed as a savage land the colonizers accepted the great notions in Indian philosophy. In the novel, Heathcliff often comes out with a sudden and genuine act of sympathy. For instance, during Lockwood’s illness he sends him a brace of grouse and chats amiably at his bedside a good hour. (It could be part of the policy of paternalism or it could be a genuine slip.)

The novel was published in 1847 at a time when Victorian colonialism was at its peak. The author may have hopes that one-day colonialism would be overthrown. There was an impulse that the colonial yoke would one day be displaced by the colonized. Heathcliff runs away from Wuthering Heights only to return more powerful and with the money to buy Wuthering Heights itself after the gap of three years. Similarly, he becomes the owner of Thrushcross Grange too. Once he peeped in through its window and he was reprimanded. After eighteen years he returns to the same house as the owner of the property and the richest man in the neighbourhood. He exclaims to Hareton, Hindley’s son; “Now my bonny lad, you are mine!

And we will see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it!" This can be considered kind of a victory speech that Heathcliff makes after breaking away from

the yokes of colonialism. Ten years after Bronte published *Wuthering Heights*, the First War of Independence took place in India. Thus the author's hope of a revolution against colonialism seems to be justified.

Class struggle is another feature that is evident in the description of Heathcliff. Heathcliff moves from the subaltern to the bourgeoisie when he returns wealthy to *Wuthering Heights*. Many instances of this transformation can be seen. Lockwood on his initial visit to *Wuthering Heights* describes Mr. Heathcliff as a gentleman in "dress and manners". Nelly exclaims thus seeing the transformation of Heathcliff; "Now fully revealed by the fire and candlelight, I was amazed, more than ever, to behold the transformation to Heathcliff". She further wonders how Heathcliff had raised "his mind from the savage ignorance into which it was sunk..." Linton had more than once described Heathcliff as a vagabond and a ploughboy. But on seeing Heathcliff after his radical change he addresses him "sir". This change also becomes a representative of the emergence of the powerful middle class in Europe. This was the time when Marxian economics began to make an impact in the postindustrial societies. *Das Capital* was published in 1867 making a marked change in the ideas associated with Communism. Similar ideas to the empowerment of the subaltern is presented in *Wuthering Heights* too.

There is a psychological tenet that the central character in a work can be the projection of the attributes in the author's mind. In this novel we can infer that Bronte was supporting the cause of the colonized. Emily Bronte is often described as "mystic of the moors" and she was told to have "a peculiar mixture of timidity and Spartan-like courage". She was also often described unsociable. The character Catherine is bestowed with almost the same passions. Cathy can be considered the projection of the identity of Bronte herself. Cathy was passionately in love with Heathcliff. Even the marriage with Linton was a marriage of convenience so that she could gain sufficient money to live comfortably with Heathcliff. He is redeemed of his uncivil ways by the passionate love for Cathy. The relationship between them is not primarily a sexual relationship. She compares and contrasts her love for Heathcliff with that for Linton. "My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I'm Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind, not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being". Bronte compares the love Cathy has for Heathcliff to rocks that never perish. She identifies that close with him. Heathcliff fools Isabella into marrying him. But even after this marriage Bronte is able to convince us that what Heathcliff represents is morally superior to what the Lintons stand for. The

sympathy we feel for Heathcliff is similar to the compassion we feel towards characters such as Satan himself, Marlowe's Faustus and Mephistopheles, the Wandering Jew or even Captain Ahab. Thus it could be indirectly inferred that the author was in love with Heathcliff.

One of the main aspirations of colonialism is that there is an underlying desire to become like the master. At a certain point of time Linton becomes the role model for Heathcliff and he exclaims to Nelly; "I'm going to be good". He gains a true ambition to be rich like Linton. A subaltern like Heathcliff tries to achieve these aspirations. At one level it empowers him but at another level it leads only to further alienation. Because being rich or clean and well-dressed is not the identity of Heathcliff. He is merely copying a master when he does so. Catherine loved Heathcliff for his rugged, savage nature.

Heathcliff's ruthlessness in treating his enemies may make us feel that he pursues his revenge with complete ruthlessness. He reduces Hareton to the state of a servant just like Hindley once treated him. He marries Isabella and plans and executes the marriage of Linton and Catherine so that the entire property of the two families shall fall into his hands. But, on deeper analysis we understand that he acquires his power by the established methods of the ruling class. This weapon was used against him when he was treated like a servant in his childhood or when Catherine was married to Linton. He turns these weapons to his own advantage. When the time comes right he wields the power to crush all those who once despised him.

It is Heathcliff who dictates the whole action of the novel as he brings all his schemes to a successful conclusion. The relationship of Heathcliff and Cathy remains the important theme even in the last part of the novel and it underlies everything else that happens. The reader is thus forced to admire Heathcliff as the romantic critics admire Satan for his energy and decisiveness, even his ruthlessness.

Life will go and Others will rebel against the masters. Nothing has been resolved but much has been experienced. Lies, complacencies and faults have been revealed. A veil has been taken away from the conventional face of the middle-class man who has been revealed, through Heathcliff, without his mask.

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