

## The Inseparable Union of Catherine and Heathcliff in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

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The Victorian period is dominated by women novelists, among them the prominent were Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Mrs. Gaskell and George Eliot. Emily Bronte's 'Wuthering Heights' is unique in English literature. Emily Bronte seeks to penetrate into the motives of life and shows how people affect each other. Emily highlights the loneliness and sufferings of the protagonists. This paper focuses on the intensity of love and revenge as depicted in the novel. The yearning souls seek spiritual union after their death. The inner conflicts and sufferings and the trauma faced by the protagonists while taking decisions, their motives and the consequences of their decisions is presented by the writer. Class powerfully structures character and conflict in the novel.

Emily Bronte's only novel 'Wuthering Heights' did not portray the Victorian life and society but it reflects the basic and fundamental aspects of human life. The human elements of love, passion, hate, revenge are well depicted in her novel. Emily Bronte interpreted life according to her own vision. Her brooding and intense personal vision combined with a remarkable power of imagination gives the novel its characteristic quality of passion and order. Wuthering Heights has gothic elements in it. It builds up a romantic atmosphere of horror and mystery through various devices, such as strange sounds, supernaturalism, violent scenes and terror. Emily shows the dark side of human nature.

Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights is a presentation of passion and emotion in an intensified form where hate means more than love and love means more than life. Emily portrays a very powerful story about love, hate and separation on one hand and sorrow, suffering and death and the union of souls on the other. It is a story of intense love of Catherine and Heathcliff in the beginning of the novel and ends with their spiritual union after their death. Heathcliff, is brought to Wuthering Heights from the streets of Liverpool by Mr Earnshaw. Heathcliff was a "cuckoo" (36) whose parentage and birth was unknown and was a dirty, ragged black-haired child. Heathcliff is treated well by Earnshaw. Catherine became a good friend of his while Hindley hated him as he saw Heathcliff as an usurper of his father's affections and his privileges. After Hindley became the master of Wuthering Heights, he became tyrannical. Hindley drove him from their company to the servants, flogged him, deprived him of the instructions of the curate and forced him to work outdoors and made him a labour in the farm. Heathcliff bore his degradation because Catherine taught him what she learnt and worked and played with him in the fields. Moreover they both promised to grow up "as rude as savages" (49).

Catherine was a pretty girl with long light hair curled slightly on the temples; her eyes were large and serious and had a very graceful figure. Catherine grew up to be a proud, arrogant and headstrong young woman as she was the queen of the countryside and she had no peer. But her attachment with Heathcliff was constant. The growing interest of Edgar Linton of Thrusscross Grange in Catherine disturbed him a lot. Heathcliff felt insecure in the presence of Edgar Linton of Thrusscross Grange and wished that he had light hair, blue eyes and a fair skin, and was dressed and behaved well. Moreover he wanted to be as rich as Edgar Linton. This awareness of

his social status and social behaviour depressed him. Finally when Catherine decides to marry Edgar and reveals to Nelly Dean that she wished to be the greatest woman of the neighbourhood and she would be proud to have such a husband. Moreover she loves him because he is handsome, young, cheerful and rich and loves her too. But there is a conflict in her mind. Her conflicting mind wants Edgar while her throbbing heart wants Heathcliff. Catherine is torn between her love for Heathcliff and her desire to be a gentlewoman, and her decision to marry Edgar Linton. She is well aware that in her soul and heart she is wrong. Moreover if Hindley had not ill treated Heathcliff and brought him so low then she wouldn't have thought of marrying Edgar Linton but now it would degrade her to marry Heathcliff. So Catherine does not express her love to Heathcliff. She loves him because his soul and her soul are same. While Edgar's soul is "as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire" (87). Catherine wants to cheat her uncomfortable conscience and be convinced that Heathcliff is unaware of these things. Heathcliff overhears their conversation and having lost everything and unable to bear the betrayal of Catherine, he leaves Wuthering Heights without informing anyone. Catherine does not feel that she has deserted him but she just thinks that she has separated from him as she will not forsake him. She is devoted and passionate towards Heathcliff as she considers him as her soul mate. In her sheer innocence she feels that if she married Heathcliff then they would have to live life like beggars. Whereas by marrying Edgar she can help Heathcliff to rise and place him out of her brother's powers. She thinks that Edgar would tolerate Heathcliff and befriend him if she reveals her true feelings she has towards Heathcliff. Explaining and clarifying her intentions to Nelly, Catherine says her great miseries in this world would be the miseries of Heathcliff. She thought and felt for him only. If everything else perished and he remained then she would continue to live and if everything else remained and he annihilated then the universe would turn into a mighty stranger (89). Her love for Linton is like foliage in the woods and time would change it. While her love for Heathcliff resembled like eternal rocks. She further confides that "I am Heathcliff! He's always, always in my mind-not as a pleasure to myself, but as my own being" (89). Catherine does not realize that this separation would kill her from within and her intention is impractical. After Heathcliff left Wuthering Heights, Catherine's grief was unbearable. Being heartbroken, she became more passionate and haughtier than ever. Returning after three years, a completely changed man Heathcliff had grown taller, athletic, well-formed and looked intelligent and dignified. He had struggled only for Catherine. On meeting Heathcliff, now wife of Edgar Linton, Catherine could not take her eyes off him. She feared that he would vanish were she to remove it. Heathcliff too glanced once a while. Distance and separation could not change their feelings towards each other. They longed for each other even now as much as they yearned previously.

Heathcliff's violent nature and his vengeful intentions are revealed after he returns to Wuthering Heights. The bitterness within him makes him ruthless and merciless. He wishes to settle scores with Hindley and save himself from execution. His revenge is shown through his actions towards Hindley, the man who had degraded him. He does not want to seek revenge on Catherine in spite of her betrayal. This shows the depth of Heathcliff's love towards Catherine. Though there were a number of fights between Edgar and Heathcliff, Heathcliff continues to visit Thrusscross Grange. Catherine is upset and yet unable to resist herself to talking to Heathcliff. She is torn between discord and distress. In one such visit when Catherine is nearing death, she expresses to Heathcliff how she longs to be with him and suffers the pain of separation. She admits that she cannot lie in the grave without him, "I'll not lie there by myself; they may bury me twelve feet

deep, and throw the church down over me, but I won't rest till you are with me. I never will!"(138)

Unable to bear the encounters and fights of Heathcliff and Edgar, Catherine's health deteriorates she locks herself up in her room and fasts herself into a delirium. Nelly stops Heathcliff from visiting Catherine and reminding her of their love. Heathcliff justifies himself by saying that Edgar just performs his duty while he loves her. Moreover he assures her that Catherine too hadn't forgotten him. He says "You know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton, she spends a thousand on me!"(163) His world comprises of two words, death and hell and after losing Catherine his existence would be hell. He was fully aware of Catherine depth of love towards him, "And Catherine has a heart as deep as I have" (164).

Before her death, Heathcliff met her for the last time. He had her grasped in his arms and neither spoke nor loosened his hold and kissed her and he could not bear the agony to look into her face for he was sure that Catherine would not survive. Without Catherine he would not survive, he says in despair "Oh, Cathy! Oh, my life! How can I bear it?"(173). They realize that as lovers they cannot be united in this world so Catherine wants to hold Heathcliff in her arms till they both were dead. She wished they had not parted and their intensity of passion can be felt when Catherine says that any word of hers would distress Heathcliff hereafter then she would feel the same distress underground. Death separates them and it is death itself which unites their souls. Catherine is tired and enclosed in this physical world. She realizes that it is her folly to select Edgar and forgo Heathcliff. Her separation from him took her life. She has betrayed herself and her own heart and killed herself. Heathcliff too felt the torment of separation and accuses Catherine of leaving him, "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" (177).

Heathcliff, upon Catherine's death wails that he cannot live with his soul in the grave. His pain was unbearable as he could not live without his life. He expressed his grief by dashing his head against the trunk of a tree and howling like a beast. When Nelly allowed him a chance to bid adieu to his beloved, he kept his lock of hair in the locket hung in Catherine's neck. The day she was buried Heathcliff went to the churchyard and being alone and conscious that two yards of loose earth was the only barrier between them. His yearning of her union made him say, "I'll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I'll think it is this north wind that chills me; and if she be motionless, it is sleep" (316).He scraped the coffin to be united with Catherine and he heard a sigh which made him realize that Catherine was there with him on the earth. The haunting of Catherine shows her passion to be united with him. She has shown herself a number of times.

After Catherine's death, Heathcliff's love turns to revenge Heathcliff merely extends and deepens his drives toward revenge and cruelty. Young Catherine, Linton, Hareton become his victims. The younger generation suffers the actions of his frustration, guilt, anger and dejection. He uses his own ailing son Linton in the plot of acquiring Thrushcross Grange. When Edgar Linton was about to die, he kidnaps Catherine and forces her to marry Linton. After his son dies he becomes the owner of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange and he physically and emotionally torments young Catherine and Hareton.

When Edgar died, Heathcliff insisted the sexton to open the coffin lid of Catherine's coffin and saw her face. He kept the coffin lid loose and when he is laid to rest, to slide his coffin lid too so that he is comfortable there. He does not consider that he has disturbed a dead body instead he feels Catherine has disturbed him for eighteen years day and night since she has haunted him a

few times. After keeping the coffin-lid loose he was at peace and he dreamt that “I was sleeping the last sleep by that sleeper, with my heart stopped and my cheek frozen against hers” (315). The feeling of incompleteness without each other and the desire and thirst to unite, the yearning to transgress the bonds of society and fuse with each other and culminate this union with the corpse of Catherine. Though in life they could not be united and after death Heathcliff wants to unite with her soul. It is death that separates them and keeps them apart and it is death which is uniting them in a different realm and in a different world. In a world where there are no social bonds or class differences where love is felt through heart and union is of souls.

Heathcliff brings Hareton to the same state as he was reduced by Hindley and keeps him uncultured and uneducated but unfortunately his resemblance to Catherine reminds him of Catherine every now and then and he waits for his death.

For eighteen years Catherine was haunting him though he was pacified a little but he suffered every moment of his life. The haunting of Catherine kept his hope alive to unite with her after his death. He grew more and more disinclined to society and when his death approached he called out to Catherine from the depth of his soul. He instructed Nelly to carry out his directions about his burial, as he had instructed the sexton about keeping the coffin lids loose. He was buried as per his wishes. In their death they were united and reconciled and people felt their presence in the moors.

Catherine and Heathcliff represent the restless spirits dissatisfied with life, with a profound human passion of love for something higher and diviner. Their union after death at a spiritual level brings about harmony and peace in Wuthering Heights. Presenting the mystery of death and life after death, Emily Bronte incorporates the element of supernaturalism to show that love is immortal and timeless and souls are not destroyed. The souls craving for love and union are united even after death. Love does not end in this physical world but continues even after death. It was the passion and intensity of Catherine’s love which had the power to haunt Heathcliff for eighteen years after her death. Therefore their union is inseparable as their souls unite at a spiritual plane after their death.

## References

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