



Perceiving 'Wuthering Heights' as an insight into Emily Bronte's personality

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Abstract

This paper endeavours to read the book 'Wuthering Heights' written by Emily Bronte as a reflection of her inner self on paper. The dejection, the desolation, the discrepancies that defined Emily's life find blatant reflection in her only novel that was published in 1847 under the pseudonym Ellis Bell. The mysticism and intensity that shrouded her personality can be seen in her characterization. The deaths and the losses and the yearning to hold on to people and their ultimate exodus from her life collaborated to make a plot for her writing.

Keywords: moor, desolation, eccentricity, supernatural, love saga

Introduction

Emily Brontë was born on July 30th, 1818 in Thornton, Yorkshire, England. She was the third child of her parents. Her mother died soon after her younger sister Anne was born. Unfortunately, her two elder sisters also died when their father decided not to send her remaining daughters to school and keep them protected at home. And this watershed became the major impetus in all the girls becoming effective writers. The whole family was said to have had great imaginations and creativity.

She composed more than 200 poems and wrote the only novel 'Wuthering Heights' that can truly be called her magnum opus. If writer's personality has any reflection on the work created, Wuthering Heights can easily reflect the eccentricity, the queerness, the emotional tides that made up Emily's personality. She preferred a secluded stay and not much is known about the last couple of years of her life, and like her brother, she also died of consumption at a very young age of 30! It is surprising to realise that she had experienced the whole gamut of life's flavours that she poured in her only novel. The angst generated from the tendency to be at the losing end of life can easily be located in her novel. Her family was marred with bad health as her father was nearly blind at the end and her brother was also afflicted with consumption that we call TB now. And this suffering runs high tide in Wuthering Heights. The novel has many deaths and even the characters that are living lead a miserable life and they are mostly succumbed to live the life of unfulfilled desires.

Wuthering Heights can be summed up as a very intoxicating concoction of class conflict, passionate love and insane revenge. The thematic implications of the story are myriad. Her selection of moor as the fulcrum of the saga also has valid reasons. The moors are generally supposed to be possessed with supernatural activities and Emily also had experienced deaths in her family and it is not unbelievable if she was haunted by the people gone by, especially because she was living in the socially restricted environment. And this is the reason we witness so many deaths in her novel and she seems comfortable weaving this dimension of life in her waft. Anne Williams discusses Natural supernaturalism in Wuthering Heights. Similarly, Harun Bastug and Aila

Kurspahic also talk about tameless reflections of Nature in both the protagonists: Catherine and Heathcliff.

"The tempestuous climate represents tempestuous and wild tempers of Catherine and Heathcliff. The climate also represents the lives of the inhabitants of Thruscross Grange and Wuthering Heights that are fulfilled with turbulent changes of its course. Wuthering Heights is a large and dark place, as Heathcliff's hateful soul is. Unlike Wuthering Heights, Thruscross Grange is brighter and full of life and people. The wild landscape is an appropriate surrounding for violence and passionate events to occur."

The story takes place on primarily two locations-Wuthering Heights and Threshcross Grange. These locations are so isolated that all the children marry their first cousins! The majority of this book is story within the story. The story is told in two parts-the old generation and the younger generation. There are some points of concern that mar the beauty of the book. Everybody has the same name and if the name is not the same, they share the same first letter! And this is quite obfuscating if one is not paying attention. For me, this book is not a love story; it is more of a revenge book. It's a bizarre book; there are three layers of narrative at the same time. The characters are despicable and the book is pervaded with violence.

The story is about Heathcliff and Catherine. Heathcliff's origins are shrouded in mystery and this sense of loss permeates the whole saga. Mr Earnshaw brings him to his family from his Liverpool business trip. He is shown as a man of high moral rectitude and astute sense of dignity. Mr Earnshaw deeply admires his traits and he makes no qualms about the fact that his love for Heathcliff is stronger than his love for his son, Hindley. And this is why Hindley abhors Heathcliff. This strong dislike is also because of his dark complexion. But Heathcliff bears this ill will with remarkable fortitude that makes Catherine go fond for him. Though they are very much in love with each other, issues of social class conflict prevent them from marrying. And this is the central conflict of the story.

If Lucy was called the Nature's child by Wordsworth and she reflected all the healing and pedagogic powers of Nature, Heathcliff is the storm's child, the powerful aspect of Nature. So, both the moral and amoral values permeate him.

Nomatter, how eccentric or weird his love seems, he has staunch moral stands too! He is very confident about Catherine's love for him:

'You suppose she has nearly forgotten me?' he said. 'Oh, Nelly! You know she has not! You know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton, she spends a thousand on me! At a most miserable period of my life, I had a notion of the kind, it haunted me on my return to the neighbourhood, last summer, but only her own assurance could make me admit the horrible idea again. And then, Linton would be nothing, nor Hindley, nor all the dreams that ever I dreamt. Two words comprehend my future-death and hell-existence, after losing her, would be hell.' (pp 135)

This book is supposed to be the magnum opus of a great love saga because of the love notes dripping through in such dialogues-

"He's more myself than I am. Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same; and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire."

"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."

"It was not the thorn bending to the honeysuckles, but the honeysuckles embracing the thorn."

"He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee. I said his heaven would be only half alive; and he said mine would be drunk: I said I should fall asleep in his; and he said he could not breathe in mine."

"If all else perished, and he remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger."

"If you ever looked at me once with what I know is in you, I would be your slave."

"I have dreamt in my life, dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas; they have gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the color of my mind."

J L Muller interprets the undying love of Catherine for Heathcliff as the epitome that transcends beyond the physical existence. He sums up, "Though she cannot be united with Heathcliff while she remains the civilized wife of Edgar Linton, she can achieve unity with him in death by imprisoning and then eradicating the symbol of her civilized identity—her physical body."

Beth Newman extends a feministic reading to the novel and opines, "Thus *Wuthering Heights* anticipates questions that feminist theory has been asking about a possible "female gaze" and provides a feminist context for thinking about the visual metaphors pervading post-Jamesian theories of the novel."

Christopher Heywood points out the complexity of the plot and the challenge thrown by the paucity of the background material. To quote him, "Difficulties in the interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* have frequently led to explanations based solely on the words of the text. This apocryphal method has a seemingly secure root in the suggestion made in Charlotte Bronte's Preface to the New Edition of 1850 that Emily Bronte had been over powered by the products of her imagination."

Marianne Thormahlen truly writes about the relation between Catherine and Heathcliff in the following words:

"It is often represented as inexorable force, over riding the

laws, conventions, and considerations of lesser mortals, even transcending the boundary between life and death. The adolescent reader is easily swept along by this force and tends to remember Catherine and Heathcliff as the protagonists of the grand romantic passion of English fiction."

This similarity between the writer and her book goes to such an extent that the protagonist Catherine also dies very young (during child birth) like her creator Emily Bronte who left the world when she was just 30!

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