

Self Betrayal:
Marxist and Psychoanalytic Analyses of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

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Abstract

This essay is a Marxist and Psychoanalytic approach to Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*. The protagonists Heathcliff and Catherine are dealt with in terms of self-betrayal that bring economic well-being but can shatter the psychic integrity of the whole personality. Heathcliff shows symptoms of abandonment neurosis transforming natural life energies into destructive urges against his external world when Catherine marries for social status. Her death drive is re-directed inwards when she no longer can have a relationship with Heathcliff and they both perish in a life denying psychotic state. Their intense union is based on their common pre-oedipal personalities, and they can only be reunited in death.

Key words: *Wuthering Heights*, Marxism, Psychoanalysis, self-betrayal, abandonment, death-drive

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Introduction

The choice of a life partner is for many the most important one made during their life. Many factors come into play when such decisions are made, such as the time and place of birth and to whom one is born. A child's home has both economic and psychological relevance to its social functioning in later life. Furthermore, rejecting true love and choosing a life partner primarily motivated by the need for social and economic status can mean a life without emotional fulfilment. Equally, the loss of a significant other can be one of the most destructive experiences of one's life if the mourning process is not successfully worked through.

Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, the main protagonists of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, face the tragic consequences of their choices, and of losing each other. This essay will examine both the economic and the psychological aspect of their choices and their subsequent demise. My claim is that Catherine's and Heathcliff's different pursuits of material well-being come at a high price in the form of illness and death as their self-betrayal sends them on a downward spiral of destructive activities. Catherine's illness is willed at an early point and she dies as she yields to the death-drive while Heathcliff suffers from abandonment neurosis manifested in aggression towards others before re-directing it on himself. Using Marxist analysis I will illuminate the self-betrayal of the protagonists from the point of view of class. Where Marxism falls short of explanatory power, psychoanalysis will be harnessed to fill in any gaps left by the spirited movements of the contents of the main protagonists' characters by including motives created by childhood difficulties, which result in their deaths.

In spite of unhappy endings for many characters, *Wuthering Heights* is considered a classic master piece, although not too well received at first. It was first published 1847 and

portrays the change from the Feudal system to the Capitalist system, but also vividly describes tragedy and passion between characters. The characters often act in extreme ways, but still seem realistic. Illness and death, occurring as a result of lost love and self-betrayal marks the core of the tale. According to Terry Eagleton in *Myths of Power*, Emily Brontë has “the imagination capable of confronting [a] tragic duality which has the power to produce the aesthetically superior work—which can synchronise the most shattering passion with the most rigorous realist control” (100-101).

I have chosen to deal with the theories separately in two chapters to make the analyses more transparent. The first chapter, “A Class Perspective”, describes important events through the lives of Catherine and Heathcliff where they make choices that go against their true ideals. Both of them succeed in changing their social status for the better, and the possibility that Heathcliff is Catherine’s half brother is significant in his becoming an agrarian capitalist. But the price paid is deep unhappiness and ultimately death. We will see how the feudal system starts to give way to the capitalist system, which is reflected in the characters. The downfall of the protagonists is also summed up in dialectic terms. The second chapter, “Abandonment Neurosis and the Death-drive”, is shorter and will explain the workings of the protagonists’ minds in psychoanalytic terms such as Freud’s ego, id and super-ego, insufficient mothering and the need to merge, the self-preservation drive and the death-drive. The notion of abandonment neurosis is only used in relation to Heathcliff, but they both die suffering from psychosis.

Chapter One: A Class Perspective

This first chapter will expound on the importance of belonging to a certain social class and ambition seen in the most important decisions Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff make. They both want to advance to the genteel class, but achieve this in different ways and at different times. Neither of them can enter this new domain without betraying their true selves and each other, so when they succeed, death is the only way to resolve both the inner conflict and to bridge the gap between them.

The close relationship Catherine and Heathcliff share is based on their feelings of being oppressed and the fact that they will not inherit any property. They grow up together after Catherine's kind father, Old Earnshaw, comes back from a trip with Heathcliff, who he presents as an orphan. After Earnshaw dies, the oldest son and new head of the Earnshaws, Hindley, treats Catherine, and even more so Heathcliff, cruelly. Terry Eagleton asserts in *Myths of Power* that Heathcliff is "robbed of liberty in two antithetical ways: exploited as a servant on the one hand, allowed to run wild on the other" (104). Heathcliff is no longer given tuition, and must work outdoors, where he and Catherine spends their time together. Neither the waif nor the female off-spring is going to inherit anything so they are both disregarded by Hindley. However, the freedom to roam the moors is a welcome consequence of the punishment for Heathcliff.

For Catherine, on the other hand, spending time outside with Heathcliff is more a window of opportunity to explore freedom from conventions as she has few obligations outside her lessons, something which Eagleton seems to ignore. This points to a deeply rooted social difference between them, which just needs the right circumstances to be brought out. Catherine is the only one of them who can choose a certain social mobility at this stage, whereas Heathcliff is entirely class-less, as he is assumed to be a gypsy. According to

Eagleton, he “offers Catherine a friendship which opens fresh possibilities of freedom within the internal system of the Heights”, the place where they live, which means a social mobility for Catherine “down that [class-]system” (103). This is a situation she thrives on, and they enjoy a free, careless friendship which, Eagleton continues, “crystallises under the pressures of economic and cultural violence” (104). Arnold Kettle sums up Catherine and Heathcliff’s relationship in his essay “Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*” as they

in their revolt ...discover their deep and passionate need of each other. He, the outcast slummy, turns to the lively, spirited, fearless girl who alone offers him human understanding and comradeship. And she, born into the world of *Wuthering Heights*, senses that to achieve a full humanity, to be true to herself as a human being, she must associate herself totally with him in his rebellion against the tyranny of the Earnshaws and all that tyranny involves. (33)

Hindley, as we have seen, is the tyrant who orders Joseph, the male servant, to hold a long sermon and make them read religious books instead of letting them play as usual on the Sunday the two youngsters run off together. He marks a change in the Earnshaw household from a home where the servants used to be treated on a more equal basis. His heartless behaviour indicates that, in Marx’ and Engels’ terms in the *Communist Manifesto*, “[t]he bourgeoisie has torn away from the family its sentimental veil, and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation” (3). The family members’ importance is directly related to their economic status at the yeoman Heights, because Hindley represents and enforces the values of the agrarian bourgeoisie. Kettle puts it like this: “Their rebellion is against the régime in which Hindley and his wife sit in fatuous comfort whilst they [Catherine and Heathcliff] are relegated to the arch of the dresser and compelled to read the *Broad Way to Destruction*” (33).

Furthermore, the title of the religious book thrown into the kennel becomes a foreshadowing of the temptation Catherine is about to give into. So, as she chooses to become friends with the Lintons, this soon drives a permanent wedge between her and Heathcliff. This genteel family lives at Thrushcross Grange close to Wuthering Heights where they live. When the two young rebels sneak out and end up outside the Lintons' window, they get caught peeking at the spoiled Edgar and Isabella Linton in their wealthy home. Heathcliff describes the room as "beautiful" and "carpeted with crimson, and crimson-covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass-drops hanging in silver chains" (Brontë, 60). At this point they are both laughing at the children's sulky behaviour, while joined as outsiders, physically -- under the same coat -- as well as class-wise. When they are discovered, Mr. and Mrs. Linton want to punish both suspected thieves at first, but they recognise Catherine as an Earnshaw and take care of her injury administered by their guard dog. Heathcliff on the other hand is threatened with the gallows and called names; he is viewed as a class-less servant. He stays outside watching Catherine being nursed, ready to rescue her, assuming she might not wish to be amongst that kind of company.

Once home, Heathcliff says he would "not exchange, for a thousand lives, [his] condition [at the Heights], for Edgar Linton's at Thrushcross Grange" (61), reacting negatively to the privileged children's pettiness, and failing to be impressed by the beautifully decorated room. He does not consider for a moment that any of this comfort lies within his reach because he accepts that his station and duties dictated by the feudal system from which he arises have already been rigorously determined. The Lintons make it perfectly clear that he is regarded as something less than human, as they compare him to the son of a thieving gypsy and consider locking him up in the cellar. But Heathcliff basks in his ability to look on his role as social outcast and scoff at the blatant ignorance and stupidity of the genteel world view that excludes his relevance and humanity. He observes how unhappy the children inside are in

spite of their comfort. But Catherine, once inside the home, willingly stays at the Grange for many weeks during which she adopts the snobby ways of her hosts, taking the broad way to the destruction, so to speak, of her friendship and herself. Here the title of the book they have just been reading echoes in the reader's mind. She embraces genteel values easily as she is accepted because of her family background of which Heathcliff is deprived, and she seizes the chance to take part in a wealthier life simply because she can. The wounded leg provides a way for her to spend time with the Lintons in comfort without this coming as a result of a deliberate decision.

Great emphasis is put on the tale of the couple's escape; it is even told twice. The first time, in chapter 3, the frame narrator and tenant at the Grange, Mr. Lockwood, finds Catherine's journal which is written on the pages of a Testament. There she has written the details of the "awful Sunday" describing the event after the throwing and kicking of books, but before venturing outside (38). He reads this, which is the first he ever learns of Catherine, and writes about the experience in his own journal which forms the narrative frame. Later, in chapter 6, Lockwood is furnished with the background of Wuthering Heights and its inhabitants. Nelly, the main female servant, recounts to Lockwood what Heathcliff says coming home late that same Sunday. This repetition brings out the importance of this event and marks it as one of the pivotal moments in the young lives of Catherine and Heathcliff. What is more, one and the same event is used to illuminate the source of loyalty between the youngsters as well as the beginning of the break-up of their solid friendship with the devastating effects this has on their personal lives.

Catherine gets caught up in inner and outer struggle because she will not give up Heathcliff for the friendship with the Lintons. Returning to the Heights after recuperating, instead of "a wild hatless little savage jumping into the house" she appears as a "dignified person, with ... long cloth habit she [is] obliged to hold up... so that she might sail in" (63).

Worried that her beautiful clothes will be ruined, she represents the superficiality and snobbery of the gentry. Heathcliff has also changed, but only to become scruffier than ever. When he turns up, she first reacts by kissing him, then by “burst[ing] into a laugh” surprised to see Heathcliff looking so “black and cross... [,] funny and grim” (64). What is more, she cannot comprehend why he is upset by her telling him he is “so dirty” (65). He is given a chance to clean up and eat with Catherine and the young Lintons the next day, only to be humiliated by Edgar, whom he now wants to be like, and beaten by Hindley. Catherine tells Edgar and Isabella off, admitting she “hate[s] [Heathcliff] to be flogged” ordering them to stop crying after he has thrown “apple-sauce” at Edgar (68, 69).

She therefore finds herself with split sympathies in a society which in Marx’ and Engels’ words is “[split] up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes, directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat” (2). She desires to adapt to the bourgeoisie as seen when Catherine “ke[eps] up her acquaintance with the Lintons... gain[ing] the admiration of Isabella, and the heart and soul of her brother” which in turn feeds her “ambition” and “le[ads] her to adopt a double character without exactly intending to deceive anyone” (Brontë 75). She must lie to herself because she is not willing to pay the cost which is her friendship with Heathcliff. He is now oppressed by Earnshaw and his wife, the servant Joseph who carries out his master’s wishes, the Lintons and even Catherine. In fact, she deceives both Heathcliff and Edgar, not standing up for any of them in the face of the other (75). She arranges for Edgar to come and visit behind Heathcliff’s back, and when he finds out tells him it is because Heathcliff fails “to amuse [her]” (77). She is upset by his discovery, and Edgar leaves after she accidentally strikes him when he tries to stop her from violently shaking her little nephew. But he returns and makes up with the weeping Catherine; they now “confess themselves lovers” (80).

Eventually, she gets a marriage proposal from Edgar and accepts against her true feelings. She gives the following reasons to Nelly for accepting: she loves him but cannot explain why, “he is handsome, and pleasant to be with...[,] young and cheerful” and he returns her love (84). She also admits that it has to do with his looks and social status, but that it feels entirely wrong “striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on the breast” because she claims she has “no more business marrying Edgar Linton than [she] ha[s] to be in heaven” (85, 86). She also blames her brother for “bringing [Heathcliff] so low” that “[i]t would degrade [her] to marry him” (84-86). What this scene brings out is the paradoxical nature of Catherine’s confession, which is honest about her intention to lie to herself in order to move up permanently from the yeoman to the genteel class.

Catherine states that she “want[s] to cheat [her] uncomfortable conscience” (87) and refuses to believe that Heathcliff now knows how she sees him. But he has been eavesdropping and disappears. She refuses to accept that she will not be able to keep Heathcliff close and help him financially after marrying Edgar. He is deeply hurt and Patricia Ingham states in *The Brontës* that “the source of his loss ...is not a lack of feeling for him on her part but the difference in class between Edgar and himself: to marry him would declass or de-grade Catherine” (*sic.*) (124). The true motive for her marriage is not love but greed for status, and she is faced with some difficulties: Heathcliff, whom she actually loves, is shunned by her new peers as a “*nullius filius*, nobody’s child” (122). If she marries Edgar she thinks she can help both herself and Heathcliff, but that means living a lie and not being free to marry him although she says “he’s more [her-]self than [she is]” (86). She acts out of what in Marxist theory is termed false consciousness, defined by Sinan Kadir Çelik (*Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*) as

the claim or hypothesis that the proletariat (and perhaps other classes or social groups as well) unwittingly misperceive their real position in society and

systematically misunderstand their genuine interests within the capitalist social relations of production. False consciousness denotes people's inability to recognize inequality, oppression, and exploitation in a capitalist society due to its adoption of the views that naturalize and legitimize the existence of social classes in capitalism. (N.pag)

As long as Catherine can convince herself that it is not for purely selfish reasons that she wants to marry a Linton, she can proceed with her plans and even feel good about them. She is not aware of the position Heathcliff would be in if she were to provide for him.

Furthermore, she ignores that it is actually in Edgar's interest property-wise to enter the union. As he will inherit the bordering Grange, he stands a chance of taking over his coming wife's property if anything should happen to Hindley. This will mean an incorporation of the land which belongs to the Heights into the Grange. Even more so does this marriage serve Hindley's purposes, as it opens the doors to the Grange for the Earnshaws. Lauren Harmsen Kiehna states in her Master's Thesis "Dangerous Indulgencies: Purposeful Female Illnesses in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction" that "a Marxist reading would put pressures on the differences in Catherine's and Edgar's respective economic statuses; since Edgar is a member of the bourgeois class, and Cathy more connected to a traditional peasantry or proletariat group, their relationship necessarily means that he is treating her as a commodity when he brings her into his economic sphere" (31). Commodity is the same as "a thing of use or advantage" according to Oxford English Dictionary, so when the characters view each other in this manner it is clear that they are not relating to others for their intrinsic value as an end in themselves, but that they are used as a means to an end. Catherine is the one who would benefit most from the union since she comes from a socially inferior position with no prospects were it not for this or a similar marriage. Since we know for sure she loves Heathcliff, she proves her willingness to yield to bourgeoisie values even if it means

sacrificing her most important relationship. Heathcliff is thus commodity to Catherine, traded in for a position as a grand lady.

After Heathcliff vanishes, Catherine gets married but is already starting to fall ill. The day after Heathcliff runs off, Catherine seems to be “going mad” and comes down with a fever (Brontë 93). She marries Edgar after having got better, and moves to the Grange where she has “seasons of gloom and silence” thought to have a physical cause and not looked upon as “depression of spirits” (96). Edgar’s interpretation of her symptoms keeps his dignity intact because an unhappy wife would reflect poorly on him as a husband. It becomes clear that she cannot come to terms with living a life without Heathcliff.

Heathcliff returns a respectable-looking grown-up man with his own means necessitating a destabilisation of the rigid class differences. The master of the Grange, Edgar, does not conceal his abhorrence with the idea of “the gipsy—the ploughboy”, as he calls Heathcliff, being entertained on the same terms as other guests due to his lack of class membership (98). Catherine, on the other hand, ignores his objections and is overjoyed to see him. Nevertheless, he is criticised for not contacting her for three years, which is an indication of the intensifying struggle between the two. Beaumont states that “[c]onflict between the yeoman farming culture of Wuthering Heights and the agrarian capitalist culture of Thrushcross Grange structures its social relations. Heathcliff merely provides a focus for this and other conflicts” (138). This is true only if the fact that Heathcliff is regarded as an outsider is pushed aside, and it certainly ignores the individual strength that Heathcliff demonstrates, with its cruel effects, paradoxically fusing him with the Grange. But it is him as a class-less gypsy the conflicts arise from, given the insult to Edgar as both his wife and sister adore the former plough-boy. As we shall see later, he even becomes the new master of both households and thus the ultimate agrarian bourgeois in his own powers.

Moreover, when he announces his intentions to stay at the Heights, Nelly the servant and narrator takes this as an ominous sign. The first open conflict occurs after some visits by Heathcliff when Edgar's sister Isabella says she has fallen in love with him. Catherine warns her that he is "a fierce, pitiless, wolfish man" and that "he'd crush [her], like a sparrow's egg...if he found her a troublesome charge" (104). She also makes clear that he is not beyond marrying someone for their money regardless of his feelings. This shows that Heathcliff has tried to make himself into a person Catherine would choose as a husband, but that in the process he has become a callous, calculating person much like his former oppressors. Furthermore, Catherine's attempts to make Edgar accept Heathcliff's presence fail when he is told that Heathcliff is trying to seduce his sister. Here is an example of Edgar treating a woman, his sister, as commodity, or an object, which must not fall into the hands of a classless gypsy. Moreover, Heathcliff is also using her instrumentally for revenge.

Heathcliff's banishment has a devastating effect on Catherine, who warns that she will fall ill. She even announces that she would like to get back at her husband and "frighten him" by her illness. Heathcliff is not excused either, so "if [she] cannot keep Heathcliff...--if Edgar will be mean and jealous--[she]'ll try to break their hearts by breaking [her] own" (116). As Arnold Kettle asserts in his essay "Emily Brontë: *Wuthering Heights*", between Catherine and Heathcliff "there is no tenderness...[and] they...madly try to destroy each other; but, once Heathcliff is near, Catherine can maintain no illusions about the Lintons" (34).

This can be put in dialectic terms, a notion often attributed to German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel. He states in *The Science of Logic* that "we call dialectic the higher movement of reason in which these, being and nothing, apparently utterly separated, pass over into each other on their own, by virtue of what they are, and the presupposition sublates itself"; and the "unity [of being and nothing], which is becoming, [is] their truth" (80). Simply put, Hegel developed a triad where a proposition and its contradiction, thesis and antithesis, necessarily

entail a third proposition which is referred to as the synthesis in his view of history. Marx turns Hegel on its head by substituting the material conditions of man for Hegelian Spirit as the main driving force of human history. Dialectics prove useful in literary analysis too. With this in mind, Catherine's illness is a result of dialectical forces operating between her wish to be genuine in her personal relationships and choose Heathcliff, and the antithetical dismissal of her true love for the gain of social status, resulting in a synthesis which is the compromise: falling ill and dying. She thereby represents on an individual level both the social upheavals Brontë saw during her lifetime and the local struggle between the Heights and the Grange. Terry Eagleton points out that the yeoman class was losing their footing as the feudal society had to give way to a new market economy, often identifying with the manufacturers in their opposition to the gentry (119). The returned Heathcliff is the new capitalist similar to the middle-class manufacturers. And the departure of one economic system in favour of another creates room for transgressions of the former limits formed by the ruling class' ideology. In *Cultural Power and Popular Culture: An Introduction* John Storey expresses that "during periods of social transformation [ideological struggle] becomes chronic" (N. pag). Struggles between and within individuals thus dominate *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine crosses the boundary of class first, then mental sanity and finally the ultimate limit between life and death as we shall see. In "Preface to *Wuthering Heights*" Albert J. Guérard proclaims that "Catherine chooses to die" as a way of escaping an existence where she cannot be with both her husband and Heathcliff (63).

Catherine's feigned illness soon turns real, and Heathcliff's double standards become evident. For a short span she recovers during the pregnancy and there is a lot of hope that an heir will secure the future of the Grange, rather than leaving it to "a stranger's gripe" (Brontë 130). The statement foreshadows the intentions of Heathcliff who has eloped with Edgar's sister Isabella, but it also says something about the disintegration of the feudal society.

Heathcliff has already begun his transformation into a true capitalist. He insists on Nelly letting him meet Catherine in secret as he is worried about her health under the “shallow cares” of Edgar. Edgar is described this way from Heathcliff’s point of view because he represents the exploiting capitalist class, but hypocritically Heathcliff has given up striving for what is genuine and is becoming a violent version of Edgar. He betrays himself while opposing the people whose values he scorns.

Heathcliff is disturbed to find Catherine looking like she is “sure to die” (Brontë 148), and when she does, he is devastated. She blames him and her husband for her illness, and believes Heathcliff should die with her rather than forget her. He says living without her, he “shall writhe in the torments of hell” and they forgivingly end their bitter argument in a tearful passionate embrace before Edgar enters finding Catherine fainted (148). She dies just after an “unwelcomed” daughter is born, which means that the Grange soon will fall into Heathcliff’s hands (155). But for now he is consumed with grief and anger that he has been left and urges her to “... be with [him] always...[and] drive [him] mad” (155). The signs of madness are already there in his “howl” and the repeated banging of his head against a tree (155).

Heathcliff turns his rage over losing Catherine outwards and continues to seek revenge by gaining ownership over the Heights. He has already married Isabella for no other reason than to hurt Edgar. She helps an armed Hindley, who wants to kill him, to lock him out of the Heights. But Hindley’s pistol and knife are seized by Heathcliff. He wins all conflicts with his cunning and strength, and this makes him almost machine-like in character. He is thus a perfect capitalist, and keeps beating Edgar and Hindley in particular at their own game. When Hindley dies half a year later it is strongly implied Heathcliff is behind it. He is indebted to Heathcliff who therefore can take over the Heights. All that matters to him now is to destroy the Lintons completely, so he mistreats Hindley’s son and Edgar’s nephew Hareton like he

himself was abused by Hindley. He also insists on taking care of his own son when Isabella dies twelve years after running away pregnant. Edgar strongly opposes the boys being left to Heathcliff's care, but he is powerless against him.

There is possibly a purely practical reason for Heathcliff's return and taking over ownership of the two households. In his essay "The Incest Theme in *Wuthering Heights*" Eric Salomon claims that through Earnshaw's mysterious trip to Liverpool and the hostility his orphan receives from his wife, "Brontë casts a vague incestuous aura over the whole plot" which is later stressed by marrying cousins (82). It could certainly help understand why Heathcliff insists on his moral right to the Heights if he has worked out that he is Catherine's half brother from the lack of clarity in Earnshaw's story added to the favouritism Earnshaw shows him. However, marrying cousins in 19th century Britain was not unusual. Even if critics like Dorothy van Ghent in "On *Wuthering Heights*" holds that "Brontë insists on Heathcliff's gypsy lack of origins, his lack of orientation and determination in the social world, his equivocal status on the edge of the human", Heathcliff being Catherine's half brother cannot be disproved satisfactorily (103). Still, he is always viewed as an orphan and a gypsy publically. He is also named after "a son who died in childhood" (52), further implying his incestuous relation to Catherine. If Heathcliff has understood who his father is, then this precipitates the struggle he goes through for the sake of getting what he can rightfully claim as the illegitimate child of Earnshaw. The question arises as to why this is never said by him if he knows about his background, and the obvious answer is that his love for Catherine would then be unacceptable, and that he prefers this love to the status of being an Earnshaw. Granted the validity of this speculation, it is no wonder that he displays so much zest in his role as agrarian capitalist.

It is when Hareton changes and he and Cathy fall in love that Heathcliff reaches the climax of his ill-doings in a nervous breakdown. Heathcliff starts to see Hareton as not only a

reflection of himself as a young uncouth man and a civilised, sophisticated individual. But he is also as a reminder of Catherine through the “startling likeness” he bears to his aunt (Brontë 276). The identification of himself with Catherine, who at a crucial point was his opposite as regards education, is found within Hareton now that he is becoming educated and cultured through Cathy. Kettle claims that Heathcliff perceives the union between the two as a repetition of his and Catherine’s relationship “drawn together as rebels” when they both oppose his authority (40). But the fact that he detests Cathy, using force and violence against her, “wishing she were invisible” shows that he thinks of her as a Linton, just as he sees his own feeble son as one (Brontë 276). His cruelty has incidentally brought into being Hareton as a locus for the realisation of Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s unfulfilled relationship, but he can also be seen as the synthesis of the two, now refined and mature. He contains the rational, genuine side of Catherine, the antithetical version of her earlier self, and also the calmer, educated Heathcliff who forms the antithesis to himself as young, rough and oppressed. Therefore Heathcliff is elated although he is breaking down with visions of Catherine’s ghost during the last period of his life. Nelly, who is now his servant, sees him as a “goblin” or a possible “ghoul or vampire” who refuses to eat or sleep (281).

Furthermore, the meaninglessness of his own hypocrisy ultimately removes Heathcliff’s life force. Where he earlier had “resolved personal worth into exchange value...[in] naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation” of everyone including his dying son (Engels and Marx 3), he now finds his docile state an “absurd termination to [his] violent exertions” (Brontë 276). He accounts for this change before it actually takes place “not as a manifestation of guilt, but as a strange way of killing, not by inches, but by fractions of hair-breadths, to beguile [him] with the spectre of a hope, through eighteen years” (250). He is referring to how he has disintegrated slowly following the death of Catherine, avoiding the responsibility of using his oppressors’ methods that he so much despised to take revenge for not getting

Catherine. He does not want to take credit for feeling guilty. He dies having starved himself in the belief that he will join Catherine in death.

The next chapter will consider some central events and furnish us with an explanation of why the protagonists react in such extreme ways. It will guide the reader through the psychological aspects of these events.

Chapter 2: Abandonment Neurosis and the Death Drive

As we have seen already, both protagonists' breakdowns can be explained in Marxist terms. Catherine chooses to marry someone who will bring her financial security and status, not understanding what effect this has on herself and Heathcliff whom she really loves. He changes from a classless uncouth orphan into an educated man to fit into Catherine's standards. Finding her married, he starts acquiring estates by manipulation in order to take revenge on those keeping Catherine away from him. His vengefulness also affects Catherine who is driven mad after his return as a result of her acting from false consciousness. She refuses to realise that she is supporting a system that keeps her and Heathcliff apart and turns her into his oppressor. The only way to resolve the inner conflict is to get ill and die. It takes Heathcliff over 18 years to give up his vengeful ways, and his life also ends after going insane realising that becoming a cruel copy of his agrarian capitalist oppressors can never bring his loved one back to him. He finally consumes himself through self-starvation. Only in death does he think he can be united with Catherine.

Having said that, there is intensity in the dramatic passion between Catherine and Heathcliff that eludes rational explanation within Marxist theory. Brontë brings these two characters to a point where there would have to be more than just an uneasy feeling of self-betrayal causing the many fits of fury, and eventually, manifestations of madness. Even after their deaths their ghosts are said to be roaming the moors, showing the extent of their intensity. Still, their extreme words and actions are not conceived as melodrama in the reader. The reason why readers can take them seriously is the cohesion found in their psychological make-up. It is therefore apt to fill in the gaps left by the Marxist raster with Psychoanalytic reasoning which allows us to delve into some of the causes for Heathcliff's and Catherine's mutual passion and self-betrayal as well as their demise. As there is betrayal going on within

one and the same person, this entails a definition of the personality as divided, something which the Psychoanalytic view purports. Below follows first a short introduction to some terms that will be used in the discussion of some events analysed in the previous chapter. Then some important events are analysed in terms of the workings of the protagonists' psyche.

The Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse states in a BBC series on philosophy that Marxism and Psychoanalysis represent

two extremely different interpretations of two different levels of the same whole.... The unconscious primary drives which Freud stipulated, namely erotic energy and destructive energy, Eros and Thanatos, develop within a specific social framework which in one way or the other regulates the manifestation of these primary drives. [T]he more intense the repression in a society, the more ... mobilisation of a surplus of aggressiveness against this repression.... Repression is bound to increase with the progress of civilisation. (Section 2, 6-7 min 18 secs)

Both protagonists show on an individual level how their sophistication come about through pushing aside desires, which again results in aggression. Sigmund Freud explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that the primary drives include the self-preservation drive (107). This drive, part of Eros, is hosted by the ego (97). This is the conscious, rational, calculating part of the psyche which deals with reality according to the *World Encyclopaedia* (N. pag). Self-preservation, we will see, plays a primary part in the self-betrayal seen in both Catherine and Heathcliff. The destructive energy or death-drive is responsible for their aggressive behaviour (108) which finally becomes their death. The death-drive originates in the id where we find the passions, emotions and irrationality. The third component of the personality is the super-ego, the part which "acts as conscience and censor" (*World Encyclopaedia*, N. pag). Both Catherine and Heathcliff suffer from psychosis before they die. This happens as they "[turn]

away from reality...because the repressed unconscious is too strong” and “overwhelms the conscious” as explained in *Freud: Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* (150). Psychosis can also be the result of “the reality so unbearably painful that the threatened ego...throws itself into the arms of the unconscious impulses” which is what is observed in the protagonists (150).

One important question in relation to the Psychoanalytic view of self-betrayal is why the drives in one part of the personality rather than any other part represent what the person really wants. What can be said here is that the id is the primary part of the personality, from which the ego and later the super-ego are formed (*The Dictionary of Psychoanalysis* 66). As previously mentioned, the id is where the unconscious processes take place, processes which guide much of our behaviour without our conscious knowledge.

Both Catherine and Heathcliff grow up without sufficient mothering which causes an exaggerated need to merge and identify with each other. Mrs. Earnshaw is hardly mentioned and when she appears in the text, it is as an unwilling care-giver of Heathcliff. She dies two years after Heathcliff’s arrival with no mention of mourning which must mean that she has not been close to her own off-spring, whereas Mr. Earnshaw’s death causes strong reactions in Catherine as well as Heathcliff. He and Catherine become “very thick” after only a couple of days, and Nelly complains that Catherine is “much too fond of [Heathcliff]” (Brontë 52, 56), which can be caused by the need to compensate for the lack of mother-child intimacy.

According to Philip K. Wion in “The Absent Mother in *Wuthering Heights*”, Catherine cannot separate successfully from her mother psychologically and therefore cannot achieve a “sufficient degree of constancy” (365). He quotes Margaret S. Mahler et. al., stating that the sub-phases of the last part of the separation process between child and mother, “separation-individuation”, which are called “rapprochement” and “consolidation of individuality and emotional object constancy” are most relevant to *Wuthering Heights* (365). These processes are vital for the formation of the self in the child. Now, Wion does not mention Heathcliff as

having failed to go through the separation process. However, their mutual dependency as children and extreme reaction to separation from each other point towards Heathcliff and Catherine sharing the same problems in childhood development. Besides, Earnshaw reports that Heathcliff is an orphan, which also supports the likelihood of him having been motherless.

One exception to Catherine's pattern of psychological instability and grief as a result of separation from Heathcliff we find when she stays at the Lintons' home on the night she and Heathcliff run away from Hindley's cruel discomfort at the Heights. She is bitten so badly by their dog that she faints and regains consciousness inside the house while the Lintons threaten and degrade Heathcliff. Due to her being a lady, she is given "a plate of cakes in her lap", and they "dr[y] and [comb] her beautiful hair" (60). She is nursed in front of the fire, in "enormous slippers" they put on her. Mrs. Linton and Isabella furnish her with treats and nursing she is not used to at home (60). Heathcliff even reports that they admire her. She finally has the chance to experience the pampering she has been deprived of, and the contrast to the experience of having to listen to Joseph's sermon in a cold, humid room for hours earlier the same evening is nothing but stark. The pretty interior of the Grange is the perfect setting for a childlike fantasy, which Catherine experiences for real. She can now merge with someone else than Heathcliff, and all of a sudden she no longer feels the need for an intense union with him. She can now experience closeness with the Lintons instead.

She betrays her closest ally and friend, but she also betrays herself by acting under the domination of the self-preservation drive. Her ego, free from passion, seizes the opportunity to ensure the presence of comfort and values the protection given by the providers of this comfort, the Lintons. By becoming close to them and adopting a more civilised behaviour, she must repress, that is, push away from the conscious mind to the unconscious (Freud 158a), the drives of the id which yearn to merge with Heathcliff. But, as Marcuse points out, this

repression necessitated by civilisation will generate aggression in the individual (7 min), and in Catherine's case the death-drive will soon turn on herself. The ego does, however, not succeed in replacing the desire to be with Heathcliff completely with the need to satisfy her greed.

In the previous chapter we saw how Heathcliff's dirty appearance becomes shocking to Catherine who returns in pretty clothes not to be expected at a place like the Heights. Her cleanliness is a further proof of her becoming more civilised and therefore different from the savage Heathcliff. Her id's passion, the desire from Eros to merge with Heathcliff, is now at war with the ego's need for progress towards a role as a genteel lady, something which ought to benefit her materially. Heathcliff becomes increasingly jealous of Edgar, so much so that he wishes to be like him in looks and social status. Thus we see the beginning of the betrayal of his down-to-earth values. He disappears when he hears Catherine declaring that she loves Edgar and will not marry Heathcliff because of his lacking prospects. He has heard her say that they would be reduced to beggars if she should marry him and during the three years he stays away, he becomes educated and sophisticated. This way he abandons her before she abandons him for the second time.

In Daniela Garofalo's "Impossible Love and Commodity Culture in *Wuthering Heights*" she re-phrases Eagleton as contending that Heathcliff has to "betray his revolutionary commitment to love" in order to become a capitalist (283). His very commitment to Catherine, with whom he yearns to merge, is a desire within the id through Eros, but the transformation he undergoes is to save his own pride and therefore motivated by the self-preservation drive in the ego. Although he stays true to her, he gives up his rebellion against his oppressors and adapts to their way of living. The difference between them is that Catherine, wanting to be with two incompatible persons, experiences a conflict originating in

her id and ego, whereas Heathcliff's only goal is to be with her. His ego just chooses a way to achieve this which conflicts with the desires of the id.

Heathcliff's personality can be explained by his childhood experiences in terms of what Frantz Fanon names "neurosis of abandonment" in *Black Skins, White Masks* (54). Germaine Geux's *La Névrose d'abandon* is quoted in Fanon's work describing the process as pre-oedipal, as the "anxiety aroused by any abandonment, the *aggressivity* to which it gives rise, and the resultant *devaluation of self*" (*sic.*) (54). The feeling of abandonment is likely to be an important factor for Heathcliff. From the streets of Liverpool he comes to the Heights where no one is willing to be a loving mother figure. The only person who looks after his interest at the Heights, Earnshaw, dies. Catherine who becomes most significant to him, abandons him emotionally several times. First, on the evening they run away together, she stays at the Lintons house and breaks up the rebellious union they shared, then she says it would degrade her to marry him, and finally she makes herself ill and dies. Geux suggests the cause for this type of neurosis present in Heathcliff is "lack of love and understanding" in the early part of life (Geux in Fanon, 67), and there is little doubt that even at the Heights, in spite of Earnshaw's good treatment of him, he is shunned by everyone else at first. Only Catherine takes his side. As we will see below, this neurosis is also useful when explaining Heathcliff's behaviour after Catherine dies. But first, there is more to be said about Catherine.

Catherine gets ill on the night Heathcliff disappears, knowing that he has overheard her statements about Edgar. She has also made it clear that it is Heathcliff she identifies with and that nothing can come between them, not even her forthcoming marriage. She must lie to herself that Heathcliff will accept receiving money from her, or rather from Edgar. She will not accept that he has gone away at first, but eventually marries Edgar, and suffers from depression. After Heathcliff's return and reality corrects the faulty assumptions about the possibility for her to keep both men, her inner conflict wreaks havoc with her health even

more. Staying married to Edgar is not compatible with keeping the union she wants with Heathcliff, and neither of the two accepts the arrangement Catherine has in mind.

When she announces that she will make herself ill, she is voicing the coming victory of the death-drive. Freud asserts that “[t]he id cannot say what it wants; it has not produced a unified will. Eros and the death-drive struggle within it; ...one group of drives defend themselves against others” (118). The part of Eros that resides in the ego working through the self-preservation drive stands behind that voice, as Catherine is calculating that her suffering might manipulate Heathcliff and Edgar to accommodate her wishes. “Death drives... want to put... Eros to rest” (118), Freud continues, and this time Eros, expressed as Catherine’s desire to join with Heathcliff loses out to aggressive, destructive forces. Caught in a stalemate where she cannot do anything to satisfy both the desires of id and those of the ego, the death-drive starts to dominate her psyche.

The physical manifestations include self-starvation, which is at once an unconscious way of rejecting the mother because she is the first source of food, and a proof that one is no longer concerned with preserving the self. Thus it is a double manifestation of the death drive, aimed at sabotaging for Eros. When the self-preserving drive is knocked out, there is only aggression, turned in on herself, left. When Catherine is bedridden, refusing to eat and suffering delirious fantasies, she thinks “[she] [i]s lying in [her] chamber at Wuthering Heights” evidently “enclosed in the oak-panelled bed” suffering from “the separation that Hindley had ordered between [her] and Heathcliff...alone, for the first time” (Brontë 121, 122). This is the time of her life she re-lives, a period before she changed from “a girl ... half savage and hardy, and free” to a Linton (122). She suffers now as she did as a little girl when separated from Heathcliff. She especially seems to miss sharing the passionate, out-of-doors life with him in a non-mature relationship. Furthermore, going back in time would provide the chance to change her actions which resulted in her self-betrayal and rejection of Heathcliff.

Her wish is strong enough to make her unable to distinguish fantasy from reality when she thinks she can see candles shining at Heights from her window. This is then typical of psychosis.

Moreover, Catherine and Heathcliff have that in common that they both want to make themselves ill and that their mental strength paradoxically promotes their demise as they both die physically weak from hunger as well as suffering from hallucinations. As will become clear below, Heathcliff just takes longer time to get to such a point. Lakshmi Krishnan holds in “It has Devoured My Existence: The Power of the Will and Illness in *The Bride of Lammermoor* and *Wuthering Heights*” that “Brontë’s characters exercise their will to facilitate illness, thereby exerting power over their circumstances” (31). To expound on this it is necessary to notice that the will, which is destructive, can be employed by the id or the ego, in the service of the drives which mainly relate either to the id, or rationality which is the ego’s domain. So when Krishnan claims that their will is what enables them to will their own illness, he must mean that the death drive aiming for an “inorganic” state, as Freud calls it (97), dominates their minds and eventually gets its way. But as we saw in the previous chapter, Catherine dies knowing that she is depriving both Edgar and Heathcliff of the one they love. In that way her death drive cuts in both directions.

Heathcliff reacts to finding Catherine married on his return with absolute cruelty, and his aggression can be understood in terms of him feeling that he has been pushed aside as an unsuitable husband for Catherine, and blaming Edgar and Hindley mostly for this. After he has obviously worked hard to change so that he can look and act like a gentleman, he discovers he is too late to get Catherine, and turns to revenge. But his aggression is so callous and carefully thought through that it goes beyond what the reader would expect. Here, Fanon’s work can also be applied. He quotes Minkowski’s *La Schizophrénie* explaining how a “negative-aggressive type” cannot find any joy in life due to the pre-occupation with

failures in the past, taking revenge, obsessively blaming those around him for his misery (54). After his return nothing he does is really for his own enjoyment; on the contrary, every action is calculated to inflict the maximum amount of pain and misery for others. Any offer of friendship or love is rejected out of fear of being left again. Heathcliff displays the “intense pains that accompany such conditions of abandonment, a suffering that can be attributed to the initial experience of exclusion in childhood and makes the individual relive them particularly vividly” (Geux in Fanon, 57). One such instance is witnessed by Lockwood, the frame narrator, when Heathcliff calls out for the dead Catherine to come, and when he describes his plans to be joined with Catherine in the grave when he dies, with Nelly as the listener. These are just some clues to his lack of ability to accept being abandoned by Catherine, and the suffering this causes. He is forced to relive his childhood trauma of being abandoned by Catherine and excluded from her new life style.

After the coming of age of Hareton, Hindley’s son, Heathcliff turns the aggression he has used to terrorise everybody in on himself. This comes as a result of the frustration built up over many years where he has made sure that he controls everybody in both the Grange and the Heights households with threats and violence. Everything around him he says reminds him of Catherine; this is precisely why he uses so much force to make them stay with him. He cannot possibly merge with Catherine through the force of Eros after he is banned from the Grange, so his death-drive becomes a vehicle for a negative intimacy with Catherine’s relatives and the servants they both grew up with. This type of intimacy makes for a poor substitute for the real object of desire, Catherine. The frustration becomes too much for him to bear. In Nelly’s words he isolates himself “mutter[ing] detached words..., the name of Catherine, coupled with some wild term of endearment, or suffering; and spoken as one would speak to a person present – low and earnest, and wrung from the depths of his soul” (Brontë 283). He continues to show signs of psychosis claiming he can see Catherine and

starts to sleep in the bed they used to share, now only wishing to join her in death. Therefore the self-preservation drive withdraws and the death-drive brings him back towards the inorganic state. In one single statement he shows that he is fully aware that what he has accomplished is useless: not knowing how to deal with his property in a will, he “wish[es] [he] could annihilate it from the face of the earth” (283). He has finally acknowledged and been over-powered by the betrayal of his true wants.

He arranges to be buried right next to Catherine. After a period without eating and thinking that he can see Catherine’s ghost, he dies with a “frightful, life-like gaze of exultation” in his eyes, in blissful conviction that death will re-unite him with her. This conviction, in spite of it being nothing but a complete rejection of reality, is so powerful that when Lockwood the tenant spends the night in what used to be Heathcliff’s and Catherine’s bed, he dreams of her as a waif and ghost.

Finally, this chapter has added another dimension to Marxist analysis which sees the world and man as only consisting in the substantial and concrete conditions and subject to causal laws. Surely the protagonists of *Wuthering Heights* act according to their social class and even betray their class values. However, self betrayal can be read in terms of the dualistic view psychoanalysis proposes. It reveals not only the existence of a psyche, but one that is divided and harbours conflicting drives. The significance of the development of the child through the relationship with the mother has become clear in the emotional intensity between the protagonists. This explains why Catherine and Heathcliff, both deprived of a healthy union with the mother, ultimately die as a result of being separated. We have also seen why their aggression takes over the psyche when they can neither preserve their material interest nor fulfil their true desire to merge. Their visions and belief that death can re-unite them is explored through the notion of psychosis.

Conclusion

To sum up, we have seen that *Wuthering Heights* is a novel of its historical period, presenting events that symbolise on an individual level the great change in the economic system.

Bourgeoisie values tempt Catherine to choose the genteel Edgar over Heathcliff the class-less orphan whom she is very passionate about and identify with. The self-betrayal this choice involves causes Heathcliff to depart and leaves Catherine to marry, although with a broken heart. Heathcliff responds by becoming worse than his oppressors, and takes revenge on everyone having transformed into an exploitative capitalist.

The novel also deals with extreme emotions and passion, which psychoanalytic theory explains on the basis of a divided self and conflicting drives. The reason for the intense companionship between Catherine and Heathcliff is found in their common fate of lacking sufficient mothering. They therefore seek to merge with each other, which is seen in their united rebellion and strong reactions to being separated. Catherine's betrayal of Heathcliff is seen in terms of her self-preservation drive, hosted by the ego, dominating her behaviour. She chooses comfort and sophistication as well as social status over true love, which she tries to repress. Heathcliff also acts according to this drive when he transforms into a capitalist, betraying his former down-to-earth values to become a worthy suitor for Catherine.

Catherine and Heathcliff both become dominated by the death-drive when they cannot be together. Catherine soon turns this destructive force inwards and wills herself to get ill. She dies psychotic. Heathcliff acts like a crueller version of his oppressors in his new role as he takes revenge on the Lintons and the Earnshaws over many years. His childhood experiences also result in abandonment neurosis which entails negative aggression. In psychoanalytic terms, he now seeks a substitute intimacy through being violent before his

frustration results in the same fate as Catherine suffered. His psychotic symptoms include visions of Catherine and the intense wish to be re-joined with her in death.

Finally, we have seen that Marxist theory leaves out a substantial force in man when denying the existence of a will, or drives, based on the self. So psychoanalysis is strictly necessary in explaining that when Catherine and Heathcliff betray themselves in order to further their social and economic conditions, they destroy the very core of the self which can experience the joy of these accomplishments, and of love. Still, the fact that persons are historical and social beings, as Marxism holds, can not be underestimated.

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