



DEMONIC SHADOWS IN THE SINFUL PATHS OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS

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Human life has always been an ideal pasture for artistic grazing to the novelists in the world. Where some of the novelists have looked back to the past, while constantly gazing at the present condition and texture of life, others have preferred to look beyond the past and present to the state of life in future. Surprisingly enough, no novelist in the world has ever cared or dared to enter and explore the mysterious region a soul enters after its physical death in the world. Among the novelists in English literature, Emily Bronte enters the mysterious region and treads upon its untrodden in a highly rhythmic way. It is she and she alone who has connected life before and after death and rendered it as one piece of continuous life in her novel entitled *Wuthering Heights*.

Wuthering Heights is a work of grandeur in which a wholly non-moral world of false symbolic action is localized quite precisely in the author's familiar Yorkshire – bleak Yorkshire of remoter moors – so that we have on one hand the most careful realism in the description of physical objects and on the other a world of human relationships. It is about forbidden love, and revenge and sinister elements of human nature. Never, in a novel, did so many people hate each other with such zest. It was strange, in Victorian fiction, to see passion treated as the natural pattern of life and to see life crackling like a fire through human beings. Emily Bronte is not concerned with man and society, but with his unity with nature. He, too, is a natural force, not a product of a class. Her view is altogether primitive. Her spirit is naturally pagan and she appears to owe nothing at all to the general tradition of our novel which has fed upon the sociability of men and women and the preaching of reform. When *Wuthering Heights* was published in 1847 its reception was not on the whole an enthusiastic one. Most people were shocked by the



violence of the incidents in the novel, and especially by the portrayal of its hero, Heathcliff. Mrs. Gaskell, biographer of Charlotte Bronte recorded that *Wuthering Heights* revolted many readers by the power with which wicked and exceptional characters are depicted. Writing seven years later after it appeared the poet D.G. Rossetti called it “The action is laid in hell – only it seems places and people have English names there”. (Bareeca, 1)

Few readers, either in her own day or for years to come, recognized the greatness of Bronte’s novel; nor did they understand the author’s intention or the philosophy her book embodied. Discussing critics perceived that her final and real concern was the experience of the spirit, and that the outward events—cruel, even brutal, as these so often were invented to express inner conflicts, and not to exact crude violence for its own sake. On the storm-heated and electrical atmosphere of Emily’s novel, Charlotte felt, ‘we come at times to breathe lightning and every beam of sunshine is poured down through black bars of threatening cloud. (Bareeca, 1)

Every work of literature creates its own world, in the sense that it familiarizes the reader with certain specific people, places and things and provides a certain specific emotional and moral frame of reference within which the characters and their actions can be judged. The events of *Wuthering Heights* have their roots in the wild, bleak York moors of its setting. The atmospheric tumult to which *Wuthering Heights* is exposed in stormy weather exactly risks the atmospheric tumult of the storms of passion in the work.

The seventeenth century French writer, La Rochefoucauld, said that the symptoms of great love resemble those of hatred. In *Wuthering Heights* these two emotions emerge. The main force of the novel is the violent, stormy and passionate nature of the love between the central characters, Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff. Their last meeting, one of the most overpowering scenes in English fiction, is a tribute to Emily Bronte’s virtuosity in the portrayal of extreme human emotion. A great deal of the passion and violence in the novel is a preparation for the outburst here, which represents the emotional high water mark in *Wuthering Heights*. Catherine’s anguish, in his presence, leads to her death whereupon Nelly Dean rounds on Heathcliff and declares, “That is the most diabolical deed that even you did”. (Bronte, 185). We must recognize that the diabolic, the mysteriously evil part of Heathcliff is an essential part of this affair. The physical traces of the devil in him are mentioned often. Catherine herself is



perfectly well aware of the evil in Heathcliff; the vastness of their love includes a recognition of evil. But the natural savage in Heathcliff is perhaps most clear when Nelly tells him of Catherine's death. After his death Nelly thinks about his possible connections with the devil. The devil in Heathcliff shows when he is denied fulfillment of his love. The second half of the novel is concerned with how such love, when turned to bitterness and frustration, prevents its energies to destruction. Nonetheless, the destructive Heathcliff remains an awe-inspiring figure. Not only is his revenge fascinating in its ruthlessness, but Emily Bronte also manages to win for him a measure of sympathy. The devil has the upper hand, but Heathcliff is a soul in pain.

Bronte does not try to trace the origin of evil; but we can say that it comes from Heathcliff. Throughout, Heathcliff is marked by his evil nature. Even when he returns a rich man, money and attires of a gentleman it was not enough to remove what nature has given him. Heathcliff is a thoroughly ambiguous and enigmatic character as a child he has a wonderful sense of love and freedom but as a man he is a destroyer. If he is a destroyer, he is also a pain racked soul. We are done by his treatment of Isabella that he can abuse love in the most heartless fashion. But so great are the passions in him that they can only inspire awe.

This greatness as a boy and as a young man is his ability to love. But he is evenly diabolic and all his vast energies are denied joy and turn to evil. Evil, for Emily Bronte, is the will to destroy Heathcliff himself. He destroys Hindley and comes very close to destroying Cathy. Heathcliff's revenge is in terrible proportion. He wants to destroy the whole world in which he was humiliated as a boy and denied love as a man. When he was about to lose Catherine's love he even thinks,

I wish I had light hair and a fair skin, and was dressed and behaved as well, and had a chance of being as rich as he will be! (56)

Although the force of evil seems to triumph, in the end Heathcliff is destroyed and so is evil. As evil cannot, finally, keep its momentum to fulfill itself, Heathcliff cannot, in the end, master the strength of goodness. His remembered love became even more insistent and his will to remain weaker dominates. Evil, as a last resort, is self-destructive and it's failing forces are routed with love, by Cathy and Harton. What Heathcliff's evil most desired – the destruction of the Earnshaw and Linton houses – is not achieved. They are united in a love stronger than evil. Heathcliff is often shunned because of his lower class roots and his lack of knowledge regarding



his parentage. Throughout the course of *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff runs the social gamut by being an orphaned castaway to becoming a gentleman, then turning into a slave, and finally becoming a gentleman again.

We absolute think that the children in *Wuthering Heights*, like the children of the Bronte household, are left to live for themselves early in life without the love or protection of their mothers. Without the care of their mothers, the children find themselves in a precise struggle for survival against a group of prejudiced adults who seem obsessed with the desire to dominate them. From Lockwood's early dream of pulling the waist of the ghost child Catherine along a jagged window ledge, to Heathcliff's presiding with delight over the death of his overgrown child, the novel plops a multitude of insistent variations on the ghastly theme of infanticide. When Heathcliff is brought as a boy to the Earnshaw home, Mrs. Earnsha's first reaction is to 'pulling it out of doors' (65). The infant Hareton Earnshaw lives in much greater danger. Hindley's first instinct when drunk is to kill his son, whom Nelly Dean constantly hides.

The infanticide theme is amplified symbolically throughout the novel in the killing of helpless and delicate animals. Early in the story Lockwood finds a heap of dead rabbits in the Heathcliff household. On one occasion, Isabella knock ever Hareton who was hanging puppies from a chain-back. In her death-bed Catherine recalls how she and Heathcliff saw lapwings nest full of skeletons. Even Linton Heathcliff is not to be spared as his favourite sport is to torture cats to death whose claws and teeth have been plucked. The prevalence of pain as an elementary condition of life in *Wuthering Heights*, the wild eruptions of cruising and violence are so vivid that one tends not to note – how frequently pain is inflicted as a matter of course. Pinching, slapping and hair-pulling occur constantly. The world of *Wuthering Heights* is a world of sadism, violence and wanton; especially when the children without the protection of their mothers have to fight for very life against adults who show almost no tenderness, love or mercy. Normal emotions are almost completely inverted- hate replaces love, evenly replaces kindness, and survival depends on one's ability to be tough, brutal and rebellious.

There can be no doubt that Emily Bronte cast a vague area over the entire plot of *Wuthering Heights*, of course, the incestuous elements here are not incestuous in the real sense of the word ; but they are approximately or nearly so. If Catherine had married Heathcliff, it would



undoubtedly have been an incestuous marriage because Catherine and Heathcliff had been begotten by the same father.

Heathcliff represents the basic, elemental energies of nature which are both creative and destructive. But in Heathcliff, we see this energy only in its destructive, demonic aspect. It manifests itself in amity and sadism, as blasting wind rather than fruitful sun. Destructiveness is a direct result of deprivation. Heathcliff has been denied even the most fundamental forms of nurture and care a child needs. It is not only Hindley who has twisted his growth; the spirit of *Wuthering Heights* itself seems to be generally malignant, as the name implies. He has also been rejected by society at large even since his birth. When those energies of the psyche which should be the source of all creativeness are denied their natural outlet become destructive and eventually burst out in cruelty, perversity and madness.

The novel defines the wicked acts that a good Christian should avoid. The most satisfying moral viewpoint that Bronte can give is that which identifies strength of possession as the guiding moral standard. Heathcliff and Catherine love each other with an unparalleled intensity, so much that their love survives death itself. It has been censored as downright 'immoral'. Catherine in a conversation with Nelly tells,

It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that, not because he's handsome, Nelly, but because 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. (73)

Lord David Cecil goes to the heart of the matter when he calls *Wuthering Heights* not immoral, but pre-moral. It represents, he says, "human beings who are at the same time symbols of the stormy clash of elemental forces in some drama of the universe before the inception of a moral law" (Barecca,53).

Wuthering Heights in a strange blend of maliciousness, ghastly terror and demonic evil with the enticing nature of a wild and haunting beauty. All through *Wuthering Heights* runs a strain of savagery which profoundly upset the sensibilities of readers in Emily Bronte's day. But, now in the twenty first century, it appears closer to us than most novels do because of the psychological insights we have considered and also by virtue of the author's attitude towards her characters and their actions.



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