

Identity and Class: Precarious relationship of Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*.

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Abstract: Love is an emotion which every human being are born with. It is the most general topic in literature deployed by different writers in various ways. In any relationship love is compulsory to embrace two people together without it a relationship would simply be like vacuum. Especially, love for opposite sexes is thought to be boundless in regards to class, creed and religion but the society formulates it and sets a boundary. These results to complexities between lovers. *Wuthering Heights* a text of 19th Century is not an unconventional in dealing with such convolutions. The period was remarkable for the boom in the industrial sector resulting to a capitalistic society. The change in the economic sector brought a distinction between the classes which in result, shaped the identity of the people. Heathcliff belonged to the labor class and Catherine to the upper class. Emily, being a realistic writer very brilliantly incorporated such issue in her novel through a binary opposite theme of love and revenge. Hence, the reader is confused whether this text is a romantic or unromantic novel? Heathcliff and Catherine loved each other or hated one another? It further raises questions of why the love couldn't be successful in getting them married? Therefore to understand the complexity presented by the author one needs to reach the core factors associated with it to better comprehend the text fully. Thus, the paper intends to study the time as well as the writer's social background and try to relate it to the text to reach to a conclusion of the unsolved questions. Furthermore, it will try to visualize the text from the critical lens of Marxism.

Key Terms: Industrial Revolution, Class consciousness, love. Revenge

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Emily Bronte was one of the prolific British writers of English literature. She was born in Bradford, Yorkshire, England on July 30, 1818, and died on December 19, 1848. *Wuthering Heights* was written in 1845 but was published in 1847. Though the text received very little appreciation at first but later became one of the Classic texts of the Victorian time. The one and only piece of Emily Bronte revealed her talent, intertextuality and passion for writing. According to the record, the time when the book was published it was the late romantic era and pre Victorian time. That's why the text deviated from the features of the romantic period and its subject; plot and themes are very different to those of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats. Emily focused on reality because her writing reflected the social context of the time. For Woolf, "Emily Bronte's characters are filled with "such a gust of life that they transcend reality" (qtd. in Manzoor 58). Since her writing was mostly based on the real social issues, rather than solely imaginative the subjects that she implemented in her novel allows for open discussion as some are still contentious. It creates a doubt whether it's a piece of love novel or dreadful as revenge. The relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff is still confusing. It still haunts the readers with the question of why the relation between them couldn't have become successful? Why didn't Catherine marry Heathcliff but chose Edgar Linton? The paper seeks to see the reason for failure of love between Catherine and Heathcliff as well as tension created in the novel which makes the novel a terrific one.

It can firmly be stated that *Wuthering Heights* realistically was a mere product of the time. During the time when the novel was written and published, it was the mid nineteenth century. The period is remarkable for great industrialization. The Industrial Revolution created a great havoc in the society because a sudden outburst in industry brought a huge change in the structure of economy. It disoriented the equilibrium of the market policy, labor and socioeconomic status of people which resulted in ignition of restlessness in society. The primary target of Industrial revolution is economy which serves as a base according to Karl Marx and hence the base shapes the super structure (culture, religion, laws, and institutions). Therefore, industrialization manifested hierarchies in society, fragmented people and distinguished from one to the other. Thus, the issue of class apparently becomes the subject matter of the society. Nayar states in his book, "Noting that in industrialized

societies, political power rested with individuals or group of individuals who controlled the factory or the industry, Marx and Engels noted that class was the key elements in such societies” (122). According to Marx and Engels, class serves as a basic unit of a society for it shapes the culture, ideology and other key elements of the society (Nayar123). When class stratification comes into discussion along with it, follow a conflict, exploitation, oppression and deprivation. Class it itself an ideology that is a result of Industrial Revolution. One group demanded freedom in terms of economy, wealth whereas another group revolted against that group for being oppressed.

According to Marxism since “forms of culture such as the novel, the opera, painting all reflect, in Marxist thinking, the deeper economic conditions in a society” (Nayar124) therefore it tends to view the novel from the Marxist point of view to examine the statements stated above.

According to Marx, we are all situated historically and socially, and our social and historical contexts “determine” or shape our lives. This is as true of literature as it is of human beings: literature is not, according to Marxist criticism, the expression of universal or eternal ideas, as the New critics claimed, nor is it, as the Russian Formalists claimed, an autonomous realm of aesthetic or formal devices and techniques that act independently of their material setting in society and history. Rather, literature is in the first instance a social phenomenon, and as such, it cannot be studied independently of the social relations, the economic forms, and the political realities of the time in which it was written” (Julie Rivkin 644).

The writing of this novel started from “1801” (Brontë) but much of the incident already took place before. The narrative style that she chose it’s a blend of the past and present. So the setting of the novel is estimated from 1757 to 1801. To examine any text the literary background of the time is very important. Emily intentionally chose to write of that time so that her novel would include the transitional Britain which was heading from pre-industrial society to Industrial Society and would include the complexity resulted out of it. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part is linked with the pre-industrial society as it is noticed that Mr. Earnshaw is self-sufficient in all aspects; owner of a house, land and moreover financially stable. He has people working under him on the field, so he is the master in his aboard. The early scenario was based on the pre-industrial time as the socioeconomic of the Heights was based on manual labors. The second part is the most tensed part of the novel which is a mirror to the tension created by the Industrial revolution. The final scenes are charming because it reveals the tranquil atmosphere resulted from the horrific situation which is a sign of the post Industrial revolution. That is why many critics consider it as piece which describes history. Levy claims that the “Heights clearly vacillates between pre and post Industrial modes and is clearly represented as the mediation between one historical moment and the next” (Levy 83). As a Marxist it also tends to examine the writer, for the writer is responsible for shaping each character, plot and all events in their writing. “A Marxist approach does not accept the theories of ‘artist as genius’ or ‘artist-as-solitary-thinker’. Such a notion of the artist disconnects him/her from the milieu in which s/he undergoes certain experiences and, therefore, creates particular kind of artifacts. In other words, Marxism asks us to focus on the social position of a writer” (Nayar 126).

To better comprehend the text writer’s social background is very important to be considered because intentionally or unintentionally the writing reflects writer’s own taste, ideology, social background and interest. As Peter Barry states in *Beginning Theory*,

Marxist literary criticism maintains that a writer’s social class, and it’s prevailing ‘ideology’ have a major bearing on what is written by a member of that class. So instead of seeing authors as primarily autonomous ‘inspired individuals whose ‘genius’ and creative imagination enables them to bring forth original and timeless works of art, the Marxist sees them as constantly formed by their social contexts in which they themselves would usually not admit (152).

It is determined that the novel reflected Emily’s own social background. The characters which she manifested have a connection to her own life and experience. Almost all personae are different; different based on class, attitude and lifestyle. Emily’s own social background was ambiguous for she herself had a conflict about her class consciousness. She cannot be categorized as simply as an upper class or a working class. Emily was a daughter of a cleric who eventually became the curate of Haworth. She too served the upper class people as a preceptor. So, she worked as a servant and felt subservient to that community where she regarded them as superior. Eagleton claims that “becoming a governess meant moving into a higher social circle, as well as a glad opportunity to exercise one’s intellectual talents; but it also meant entering that desirable society precisely as a servant, as socially subservient to the very men and women to whom one felt culturally superior” (Eagleton 10). Emily had the bitter feeling of being a socially inferior as well as a servant. Again she too had a servant named Tabitha Ackroid who was the servant for the family for thirty years (Robins 106). So she knew the role of a servant as well as a master. In the book she created Nelly more of her kind where Nelly acted as tutor as well as servant in Heights. She sometimes acted as the educated servant tutoring the children of Mr. Earnshaw and at the same time being the dearest guide of Catherine. For having an acquaintance with the children and elders of the family, she considered herself superior among other servants at Heights. No doubt Joseph, Zillah, Nelly

belonged to the proletariat group but for Heathcliff a question remains of his identity as he is seen in both phase; a master and a slave. Heathcliff's racial indifference and orphanage makes him a proletariat. There is no doubt for the identification of his status because Mr. Earnshaw had picked him up from Liverpool. Liverpool was the center for British Slave Trade before the abolition in 1807. Many Africans were forcibly traded to Liverpool as slaves. So when they were brought forcibly, they became homeless and Heathcliff was not exceptional. "The master tried to explain the matter;..... was a tale of his seeing it starving, and houseless, and as good as dumb in the streets of Liverpool where he picked it up and inquired its owner(43). Lisa Von Sneidern argues in *Wuthering Heights* and the Liverpool Slave Trade, "Heathcliff's racial otherness cannot be a matter of dispute; Bronte makes that explicit" (172). Nelly states, "I had a peep at a dirty, ragged, black-haired child" (43). On the other hand, Edgar Linton was a foil to Heathcliff. He resembled a man of upper society and a perfect gentleman, white, British man owner of Thrushcross Grange. Emily's presentation of characters exposes her knowledge about the class consciousness because she vividly exposed three classes; Linton's family as upper class, Earnshaw's family as upper middle class and Heathcliff and other servants as the lower class.

There is an immutable confrontation between the classes. The history provides evidence; a numerous revolution took place between the classes. The upper and lower class is not compatible in any situation, and Emily had used that universal conflict in her writing. Catherine protagonist of the novel, acted as a bridge between Edgar Linton and Heathcliff. Emily had used Love as a device to examine the class conflict that persisted in the society. Catherine had no outer experience until she met the Linton's. As she was a child, she had very few companions except for Nelly and Heathcliff. She spent much of her time with Heathcliff and gained lots of his qualities, "But it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at" (55). She grew wild in nature and loved his companionship for at his presence she feels the greatest ecstasy. Their over interaction turned their relation to a more serious and deep. They fell in love with each other. But a turning point takes in her life when Catherine stayed for five weeks at Grange for being bitten by a dog. She interacts with the exterior world for the first time. A massive transformation was observed in her because she imitates the qualities of the Linton's. She developed a gentle behavior and became a perfect lady as one of the Victorian societies. Nelly narrates her character

Catherine had kept up her acquaintance with the Lintons since her five weeks' residence among them and as she had no temptation to show her rough side in their company, and had the shame to be ashamed of being rude where she experienced such invariable courtesy, she imposed unwittingly on the old lady and gentleman, by her ingenious cordiality; (80).

The Europeans considered them as the highly prejudiced class, adopted set patterns in many aspects of life. They created certain ideologies which they expect all to follow. Age after age when it is being followed it becomes standard and hence becomes a norm. Anyone who does not accept the ideology becomes an alien to the society's perception. The term "Gentle" is very important in the novel. Many of the characters in the Heights were the admirer of 'Gentleness.' The Oxford English Dictionary cited the earliest use of the term in 1340: "'gentility' refers to a social superiority that is demonstrated through gentle manners, behavior, appearance, and belonging to a family of gentle blood" ("Gentility, n."). If it's deeply reckoned, the hidden truth lies beneath the term gentility. The term creates a differentiation between classes. One cannot be considered as a gentle until and unless one has all the four qualities. It's possible for anyone to have the first three but impossible for many to have the latter for 'social superiority' is connected with 'gentle blood.' It sounds more like of the hereditary system for the blood must have the DNA of white color. For that Emily has made Catherine undergo the process of 'gentility' because she has the most important qualities of being gentle as she belonged from a family of gentle blood. When she transformed from a wild natured girl to a more refined and gentle lady, she hesitates to shake hands with Heathcliff because she finds Heathcliff dirty and not a gentleman. Heathcliff was deprived of being gentle, and the family of Linton did not welcome him, "they had no manners to ask me to stay" (56). In the expense of time the term 'gentility' changed a little. The Industrial Revolution had a great influence in the economy of the country. It transformed the economy to a capitalistic economy where wealth and money received the most priority. This resulted a change in the definition of gentility. The term encapsulates wealth as another quality for anyone to become gentle, turning out to be more like of materialistic. Edgar Linton was perfect gentleman for he has all the qualities but Heathcliff lacks in that case. He tried his best to become one of those, so he asked Nelly to make him like one of them, "Nelly, make me decent, I'm going to be good" (67). He further wishes to be handsome and rich like Edgar, "But, Nelly, if I knocked him down twenty times that wouldn't make him less handsome or me more so. I wish I had light hair and fair skin, and was dressed and behaved as well, and had a chance of being as rich as he will be!" (68). Even Heathcliff was conscious about wealth for he knows he is being deprived and not treated equally because he does not have money. When he eavesdropped to Catherine speech, he decides to leave Heights in order to collect money. Finally, he returns from nowhere to the Heights as one of the prosperous men yet he couldn't be gentle. Heathcliff overzealous to

change his status made him collect money which the capitalistic society gave him the opportunity but failed to change his blood because he did not belong from an elite family.

Catherine not only matured emotionally but also psychologically. She grew the stereotype set up by the society and developed the thoughts of class consciousness within her and evaluated Edgar and Heathcliff from that perspective. When serious issues like marriage came into broad light she chooses to marry Edgar. Marriage is a part of a culture which is again a part of a society. Catherine conscious about the society's expectation and demand agrees to marry Edgar. Catherine did not revolt against the society's norms and system rather she proved to be subservient to it. She decides to marry Edgar Linton for he has wealth and property and a perfect man fit for the society. Marrying Heathcliff would be a wrong choice as he was in a destitute condition. She confesses to Nelly about that when Nelly asked her for the reason of her choice "And He will be rich, and I shall like to be the greatest woman of the neighborhood, and I shall be proud of having such a husband" (95). She further states that she loves Heathcliff, but it would be degrading if she chooses Heathcliff now (98). Emily portrayed Heathcliff as one of the most terrific, horrible and bestial characters among all. She too maintained the norms of the society for it was possible for her to do it easily as he belonged from the deprived and the underclass section of the society. Hadn't she done the opposite her novel wouldn't have been accepted by the people of the aristocrats? Right from the childhood Heathcliff has been negatively presented in front of the readers. All bestiality and instincts of human are casted in him whereas Edgar has been bestowed with the positive qualities. Edgar represents the bright side of the society whereas Heathcliff the opposite. Heathcliff an alien among the members of both houses encountered oppressions, denigration, insults and torture by the higher class people. Peter Barry states, "The exploitation of one social class by another is specially seen in modern industrial capitalism, particularly in its unrestricted nineteenth-century form" (151). There is always a parallel between the privileged and the underclass people. They consider one another as a rival. Mrs. Earnshaw did not welcome him rather uttered insulting words. Hindley abused him from the very first day of his entrance and begrudged him for being his father's foster son. His torture multiplied after Mr. Earnshaw's passed away. He snatched all the rights that he was enjoying and confined him into a room. The life of Heathcliff became harder and out of this the deep sense of hatred grew towards Hindley. "I am trying to settle hoe I shall I pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it, at last. I hope he will not die before I do" (73). He waited for the right time to arrive and when it arrived he took it. Heathcliff planned to take revenge in a different way which was not direct. It revealed his cunning and wicked attitude at the same time. He neither made plan to engage in physical fight nor to kill him rather seize all the property of Hindley. His main aim was to become the master of the Heights. That showed his hidden love and greed for money for which he was deprived and ill-treated. He too wanted to exercise power and so to have power, capital is the first important thing one needs. Heathcliff works according to his plan and becomes successful in gaining Heights as his. His greediness becomes more apparent when he made plan to inherit Thrushcross grange. He had no emotion and sympathy; he used his son younger Linton in his wicked plans to get him married with Cathy so that his son would ultimately get the property. This collection of wealth and becoming richer and fullest was the result of Capitalistic Society. Capitalism promoted private ownership and so anyone can be financially stable. Heathcliff in a very short period of time became stable, and this position did not satisfy him rather he grew greedier for wealth.

Accretion of all the brutalities towards Heathcliff inflicted him with abhorrent for that class. He takes vengeance to almost all the characters. His revenge against all characters was explicitly except for Catherine. One needs to analyze the discourse of the characters to reach the insights in order to uncover their mind. This vengeance is the result of class distinction. Heathcliff's absent for three years from the story is noteworthy. The question arises why was he absent for three years? Why did he return back? What did he do for three years when he wasn't there in the Heights? He returned to take revenge. That is why; when he was away, he acquired more money and proved himself to be a rich man. He returned as a rich man and acted to be a gentleman. Heathcliff could remain as he was but he changed himself as he found that it was because of money and gentleness Catherine rejected him. So, he changed himself in order to present his new look and wealth in front of Catherine so that Catherine would regret for marrying Edgar and will burn in anguish whenever she saw him. Otherwise, if his motive was just to take revenge on Hindley and Mr. Linton he need not change his identity because Edgar and Hindley already knew his identity and thus would not make any difference. By the time when Heathcliff returned back Edgar and Catherine were married. Heathcliff at first went to the Grange to see how Catherine was living her life. Till then the conjugal life of Catherine and Edgar were at the top most level of happiness and peaceful. Catherine not only proved herself as a good wife but also as good sister-in-law of Isabella. As Nelly narrates that "I got Miss Catherine and myself to Thrushcross Grange and to my agreeable disappointment she behaved infinitely better than I dared to expect. She seemed almost over fond of Mr. Linton an even to his sister" (111). Thus, it proved that Catherine not only loved but also changed rapidly beyond Nelly's expectation. She managed herself in the new place of Thrushcross Grange. It was possible for her to easily accommodate with that family because her social status and theirs are alike. There is no sign of class struggle between them but it starts when Heathcliff returns in her life.

Heathcliff trapped Isabella in order to accomplish his revenge. Love and marriage served two intentions of Heathcliff, one to take revenge against the people of Grange who insulted him for being poor and the other to take revenge against Catherine. Catherine was completely aware of Heathcliff's intention so she proved her best to defend her family from being destroyed. She knew the status of Heathcliff and his attitude but Isabella was unaware about his past life. On knowing the consequence of the marriage Catherine resisted against the relation of Isabella and Heathcliff. Further analysis of her mind reveals that she was conscious about the class and so she tried to protect it from being contaminated. Class conflict becomes more transparent after the marriage of Heathcliff with Isabella. Heathcliff has got the chance to exercise his power on the upper-class people. Isabella could not enjoy a peaceful life with him and was tortured mentally and physically. Her life became intolerable with Heathcliff, not only that the child born to Isabella and Heathcliff was a hybrid. He has been presented as an extremely frail and unhealthy boy. The child is itself a sign of class conflict so he could not overcome the struggle that the society endured and unfortunately he was made to accept death.

The prominent figure of the novel faced duality, and it's the sign of Capitalistic Society. Every people seemed to be unstable within them as they can't decide. It's only the discourse analysis of Heathcliff and Catherine reveals the hidden psychological thoughts of Catherine and Heathcliff. "What is to you? He growled. I have a right to Kiss her, if she chooses, and you have no right to object- I'm not your husband, and you needn't be jealous of me!"(137). If Heathcliff still loved Catherine, he wouldn't have uttered these words. His hateful nature undermined his love for Catherine. It becomes more apparent when he says, "Catherine, I have a mind to speak a few words now, while we are at it- I want you to be aware that I know you have treated me infernally – infernally! Do you hear? And if you flatter yourself that I don't I perceive it, you are a fool – and if you think I can be consoled by sweet words you are an idiot – and if you fancy I'll suffer unrevenged" (137). He clearly states his motto and further reminds her of defying him. He considers himself as a slave in front of Catherine and for that he states, "The tyrant grind down his slave – and they don't turn against him, they crush beneath them" (138). He considers Catherine as an oppressor rather than a lover who betrayed him for his straightened condition. This confirms that Catherine no longer loved him. She further exposed her thoughts about him by declaring him as a Satan.

Therefore, from the preceding discussion it could be stated that the relationship between the two different classes is not possible. Because of the social conflict the relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff did not continue, it just persisted for a while. By selecting Edgar, she proved to be a woman conscious about her identity. Catherine in the novel served loved as a commodity and acted as a device. Emily just behaved according to the time and portrayed an exact picture of the society. In Capitalistic society no matter how much a working class man strives valiantly at the end he will receive nothing. Heathcliff did not get his lover Catherine, but Edgar received her effortlessly. He was left alone, received nothing but remained a suffering soul with agony and revenge. This ever ending battle between the two groups will continue and in the novel it continued until Heathcliff died after which Cathy and Hareton got together. Thus, it went to its equilibrium position by getting both the aristocratic bloods together. Though it ended in tranquil but the struggle between the classes produced the novel a dreadful one.

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