

Reason and emotion in *Wuthering heights*^{*}

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Resumo

Os conflitos básicos de *O morro dos ventos uivantes* são profundamente ligados ao relacionamento conturbado de Cathy e Heathcliff. O primeiro é em relação a questão da divisão de classes sociais, e de fato, é este conflito que desencadeia todos os demais, sobretudo porque para uma mulher na sociedade patriarcal do século XIX, a única “escolha” de Cathy para o seu futuro – casamento – é feita baseada na razão, considerando a condição cruel a qual o seu sexo estava fadado em uma era de absoluta falta de poder feminino, onde os conflitos entre a razão e a emoção terminavam em um eterno sentimento de ansiedade, desejos reprimidos, loucura e morte – o curso natural da vida de mulheres que ousaram sentir necessidades diferentes daquelas comuns à ordem social de sua época.

Palavras-chave: Conflitos; desejos reprimidos; identidade.

Abstract

The basic conflicts of *Wuthering Heights* are deeply linked to the controversial relationship of Cathy and Heathcliff. The first one is linked to the issue of social class division, and in fact, it is this one that triggers all the others, for as a woman in a XIX century patriarchal society, Cathy's only “choice” for her future – marriage - is made based on reason, considering the cruel condition of her sex in an age of absolute

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lack of female power, where the conflicts between reason and emotion ended up in an everlasting feeling of incompleteness, anxiety, repressed desires, madness and death - the natural course of life for women who a little later in life dared feeling alien needs, different from those of the established social order.

Key-words: Conflicts; repressed desires; identity.

Resumen

Los conflictos básicos de *Cumbres borrascosas* están profundamente vinculados a la relación conturbada de Cathy y Heathcliff. El primero es en relación a la división de clases sociales, y de hecho, es este conflicto el que desencadena todos los demás, sobre todo porque para una mujer en la sociedad patriarcal del siglo XIX, la única “elección” de Cathy para su futuro — casamiento — es hecha basada en la razón, considerando la condición cruel a la cual las mujeres estaban destinadas en una era de absoluta falta de poder femenino, cuando los conflictos entre la razón y la emoción terminaban en un eterno sentimiento de ansiedad, deseos reprimidos, locura y muerte — el curso natural de la vida de mujeres que osaron sentir necesidades diferentes de aquellas comunes al orden social de su época.

Palabras-clave: Conflictos; deseos reprimidos; identidad.

“Why am I so changed?”

Cathy in *Wuthering Heights*

The quality of conflict is deeply linked to the Romantic states of mind, and it is its central theme. Doubtless, life is based on struggles between opposing forces, but these opposing forces of body and soul, love and hate, laughter and tears, self-indulgence and asceticism, good and evil, light and darkness, heaven and hell, life and death are at the core of the Romantic characters, and when they exercise their choice by preferring one or the other, the result is a deep feeling of incompleteness. This idea of incompleteness caused by these conflicts is, actually, what causes the destruction of two of the most powerful literary characters of the British literature, Catherine and Heathcliff, created by Emily Brontë (1818-48), in her original novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

Wuthering Heights, the only novel by Emily Bronte is told from the point of view of Lockwood, a gentleman visiting the moors of Yorkshire where the novel is set, and by Nelly Dean, one of the employees of the Earnshaw family. The Earnshaws are surprised by a foundling boy, Heathcliff, who is brought to *Wuthering Heights* — the farm where the family lives - by the patriarch to live as one of his

children, Catherine (hereafter Cathy – the way Heathcliff calls her — as opposed to her daughter, Catherine) and Hindley. He later on falls in love with her, who returns the affection, but marries her neighbor Edgar Linton, the embodiment of a rich life that she would never have with her beloved, the misfit Heathcliff; that of course, condemned her to a short life of unfulfilled desires. Later, Heathcliff hastens Cathy's death because of his incessant accusations of betrayal; weakened also by her pregnancy, she dies giving birth to a girl, condemning him to live his remaining decades in mourning, melancholy and despair, and inflicting his revenge to all the members of their generation linked to them, and to the generations to come.

Observing the gender relations in *Wuthering Heights* from a psychoanalytic perspective, it can be seen that those relations are built through the importance that the role of Catherine (hereafter Cathy — the way Heathcliff calls her) has upon the other characters. Her subjective load imprisons herself and some other characters in an eternal fight between the Apollonian and Dionysian worlds, for the writer subverts the role of the romantic heroine, mainly because it is Cathy who most suffer those typical romantic conflicts between reason and emotion which (mis)guide her life, as well as issues such as class division, social conventions and a search for identity.

Brontë's work is particularly different from that of her contemporaries, and it is distinguished by the power of her imagination, which "is truly English, violent, unself-conscious, spiritual. She writes about different subjects in a different way and from a different point of view" (Cecil 1958:123). CECIL also defends that Brontë

stands outside the main current of nineteenth –century fiction, mainly because she writes about a world that is different from those of the novelists of her days. Brontë's world is that of a primitive life of confined interests and unbridled passions, of simple earthly activities and complex demon-haunted imaginings, and an entire existence could concentrate itself with fanatical frenzy upon a single object (1958:123).

and this single "object" is either a woman, Cathy, or her beloved one, Heathcliff. Cathy became for him what Freud called *Das ding* — "the thing," the lost object that is searched and which is ruled by the pleasure principle — and vice versa. This "object" is responsible for activating the pleasure principle, as it is defended by Freud in his book *Beyond the pleasure principle* (2003).

The basic conflicts of *Wuthering Heights* are deeply linked to the controversial relationship of Cathy and Heathcliff. The first one is linked

to the idea of social class division, and in fact, it is this one that triggers all the others, for as a woman in a XIX century patriarchal society, Cathy's only "choice" for her future — marriage — is made based on reason, considering the cruel condition of her sex in an age of absolute lack of female power, where the conflicts between reason and emotion ended up in an everlasting feeling of incompleteness, anxiety, repressed desires, madness and death, the natural course of life for women who a little later in life dared feeling alien needs, different from those of the established social order. Besides, Cathy never saw Heathcliff as a threat to her inheritance, as her brother Hindley did, since as a woman she could never inherit anything. So, the only way to have a respectable life was to marry a rich white Englishman. Her conflict is that in the dark-skinned gypsy Heathcliff she finds an equal, she finds the other half of her own wild self who should never fully express itself freely.

Both Cathy and Heathcliff are

born again when they become friends as children, and their identification is so strong that creates a new origin that replaces parental origins. Both discover a deep and passionate need of each other. He, always mistreated and reduced into a servant of the house after the old Earshaw death, finds human understanding and comradeship in that lively, spirited, fearless girl. And she, 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 Earshaw. (Kettle 1970:205-06).

and against the social conventions that would condemn them to be separate. All this process is clearly implicit, since Cathy does not seem to notice it consciously.

However, when Cathy, as a teenager, meets the Lintons, the social conflict is intensified, for in an act of self-betrayal, she decides not to marry Heathcliff because of his inferior social condition. In fact, she is unconsciously trying to escape from her primitive self that is set free in her relationship with him, the true representative of all that is chaotic and controlled by the "Id", in opposition to the order she found in the young Edgar Linton. Her words are extremely clear and reveal the social and psychological conflict that torments her:

It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now; so he shall never know how I love him: and that not because he is 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 is

different as the moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire...Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff (*Wuthering Heights*, hereafter *WH*: 80-81).

Another major conflict in Brontë's novel is the exchange of identity between Catherine and Heathcliff. The novel presents

the overcoming of otherness as a relationship between the two main characters whose personalities are extremely matched. The novel may be seen as about the dissolution and transference of identity, especially if one considers the exchange of identity between the two main characters (Hommas 1980:236).

Hommas (1980:237) suggests that their "fusion of identity is not a natural reunion, but a self-alienation and an identification with otherness that is both terrifying and appealing", mainly because death is the final form of dissolution, especially in Heathcliff's plan for the physical merging of his corpse with Cathy's, as it will be discussed later. In fact, how could a white, somehow aristocratic English young lady in the Victorian period express all the savage and primitive side of herself?

Cathy says "I am Heathcliff," and he calls her "my soul" and "my life." He would cry when she is dying: "I cannot live without my life, I cannot live without my soul." Their sense of affinity is apparently deeper than sexual attraction, and it should not be described only as romantic love; surprisingly their love is "sexless," and intercourse is not even implied, even though Heathcliff is the embodiment of primitive sexual energy. He is indeed the opposite of Edgar Linton, Cathy's husband. In fact,

the primary traits that Freud ascribe to the id apply perfectly to Heathcliff, for example, the source of psychic energy, the **seat** of the instincts (mainly sex and death), the essence of dreams, the archaic foundation of personality: selfish, asocial and impulsive (Moser 1970:184)

Heathcliff sexual energy clearly contributes to the psychic disintegration of Cathy who does not find the same in her husband; the intense passion shown in their gestures in their final meeting, clearly shows that their physical passion should be definitively considered. And that is a point which unconsciously disturbs Cathy profoundly, once leaving her husband is not considered by her due to moral implications, so she finds herself imprisoned in a trap that was set by her own fear of facing society and herself.

Brontë shows in detail the immense effect Heathcliff has on the relationship between Cathy and the weak Edgar Linton who marry in April 1789, and “for the space of half a year the gunpowder lay as harmless as sand, because no fire came near to explode it” (WH:119). However, “on a mellow evening in September,” Heathcliff finally returns. Cathy is delighted at his appearance, and he looks at her with “eyes full of black fire,” while Edgar Linton grows “pale with pure annoyance;” that night he cries in bed. But within those few days after Heathcliff’s fire first nears Cathy’s gunpowder, she and Edgar Linton conceive their child. From the moment of his return on, Cathy’s attempts to reconcile herself to her husband are doomed.

The period of Cathy’s pregnancy is extremely problematic for all characters, for as time went by, she and Edgar Linton fell apart more deeply, mainly after the scene of the kitchen, which offers the most vivid example of Heathcliff as sexual force opposed to her husband. So all her frustrations seem to be felt more strongly, and that made her oscillate between sanity and insanity. Cathy locks herself in her bedroom; Edgar Linton, recognizing his weakness as a man and as a husband, isolates himself and seldom sees her; Heathcliff remains in despair, forbidden of entering in the house to see her. Cathy’s first breakdown is precipitated by the disappearance of Heathcliff at the news of her wedding, and the second occurs when the conflict between him and Linton is intensified after Heathcliff returns adult, prosperous and ready for revenge, and her husband insistence about her choosing between one of them.

Cathy spends days in sickness and in a terrible growing process of depression. When Edgar Linton visits her, she says: “I don’t want you, Edgar; I’m past wanting you (WH:118). In a delirium, she thought she was back at Wuthering Heights with Heathcliff and as a child, but she wakes and sees herself, as Mrs. Linton, “...an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world” (WH:125). She does not even recognize herself in the mirror; the idea of seeing herself caught in that situation, away from the freedom she had with Heathcliff in childhood, caused terror and desperation: “O dear! I thought I was at home...lying in my chamber...How long is it since I shut myself in here?... Before I recovered sufficiently to see and hear...the whole last seven years of my life grew a blank!..I was a child; my father was just buried...” (WH:115), she says to her maid Nelly Dean. Cathy’s project of restoration of her past through death seems unconscious at first, but grows stronger in her final scenes, when she perceives that death could make her return to nature and to the freedom with Heathcliff that she had as a child, where she could be herself.

The last time Edgar Linton goes to her bedroom she already expresses this return to nature and the past it evokes: “My soul will be

on that hilltop before you lay hands on me again" (WH:125). In fact, her body will be there, not her soul; although, it can be seen here that the transport she seeks is into nature, an unconscious reference to her savage and primitive self. According to Homans (1980:153), in "Cathy's delirium, the purpose of returning to childhood and to nature is to return to Heathcliff, the earth alternative is her early cosmic comparison between the two suitors", since the primitive aspects of nature are also associated with Heathcliff.

After days of sickness, and in a moment of delirium, she opens the window, and "bent out, careless of the frosty air that cut about her shoulders as keen as a knife...Oh, I'm burning! I wish I were out of doors! I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy and free...Why am I so changed?" (WH:116). She seems to intend a suicidal illness. Once again, Cathy does not recognize herself and the change she has been through after entering adult life away from everything she loved in her past.

Wion (2003:79) states that "hallucinations and dreams show that the boundaries between Cathy's self and the world are definitely broken down. She does not recognize her reflection in a mirror, a clear reference to the loss of identity." She stares at it and asks "Is that Catherine Linton?" (WH:130) which forced Nelly to cover it with a shawl, however, moments later the shawl slips, and Cathy shrieks in terror. She is so changed from her original, wild self that her momentary amnesia of the past seven years suggests a deep disturbance in her sense of identity. Lockwood found, years later, her search for herself, when he sees her name carved in her room — Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Heathcliff, Catherine Linton.

Heathcliff marries Edgar Linton's sister, Isabella for revenge, but as he gets to know that Cathy is dying, he manages to see her for the last time. They embrace and this is another very tense moment in the narrative, specially because Cathy is pregnant. This is also, one of the harshest passages in all literature. "I wish I could hold you," she continued bitterly, "till we were both dead!" (WH:142). Cathy associates her reunion with Heathcliff in death with regression to childhood, as she says in her delirium, and a return to her own free self.

Cathy collapses not because of the power of Heathcliff's love, but from despair at the sound of her husband's approaching, and never regains consciousness; she dies in childbirth. Both Cathy and Heathcliff seem to believe that a physical union or reunion between themselves could be possible only after death, since they have made choices that caused their separation in terms of physical love. The two characters' belief gives the idea of a merging of identity through the dissolution of the physical body, mostly because as Freud explains in his book *Beyond*

the pleasure principle (2003), the death instinct is a desire for the restoration of an earlier state of things. Besides, Freud also defends that the sexual instincts also share this regressive character, he even mentions Plato's primordial unity of the sexes in his *Symposium*. So, regression identifies the sexual instincts and the death instinct.

As Homman (1980:129) states, the

Death's project is the reuniting, not of parts of the self...but of two individuals. Heathcliff is eager for death so that he and Cathy may "be lost in one repose." Loss of self, the dispersal of identity, leads to the merging and reunion of identities.

Death is the last way of dissolution, for both characters, specially to Heathcliff after Cathy is dead who wants the physical merging of his corpse with hers. His plan is to be buried so close to her, that nobody would identify which corpse belongs to whom if one day their tomb was opened. Once Cathy and Heathcliff have both lost their — what Freud called — *Das ding*, they developed a kind of behavior where hysteria, cry, obsessive neurosis are somehow calculated in a desperate attempt to return to that lost "object," which is unforgettable, but forever unattainable.

Cecil (1958:140) states that Brontë believes in the immortality of the soul in "this world, so, the disembodied soul continues to be active in this life, once its main preoccupation remains after death, which means that the human conflicts do not end with death." In the novel, Cathy dreams that she goes to heaven, but she does not feel comfortable there, for she is homesick for Wuthering Heights, the native country of her spirit. This is a kind of prophecy, for when she dies, her spirit remains tormenting Heathcliff and the inhabitants of the Heights. Thus, death becomes only a temporary separation from those with whom the characters love.

Heathcliff, maddened by the loss of his life's object, becomes even more destructive, and proceeds with his revenge on the next generation, Haraton (Hindley's son), inflicting the same kind of social exclusion he suffered upon the boy; Catherine Linton (Cathy's daughter), forcing her to marry his own weak son with Isabella, Linton Heathcliff, a very fragile young boy who dies soon after their wedding.

Among the many philosophical and metaphysical issues in *Wuthering Heights*, one of them — but that involves many others — is linked to the Romantic conflict, and question that Cathy asks herself: "Why am I so changed?" The fact is that she tries to live two lives but fails, for she hopes to be true to herself and keep her authenticity by somehow maintaining her ontological relationship with Heathcliff at

hand, but at the same time surrenders to social convention when chooses the source of financial, social and moral security, Edgar Linton. In fact, Cathy runs away from the dangers that her true self could bring to herself in a society which had no room for her spirit which is constantly divided between the joy found in chaos and the pain and incompleteness found in order.

Cathy and Heathcliff are both misfits, because from one hand, as a dark-skinned parentless poor foreigner, he can never reach the standards, nor could never find a place in the white, "aristocratic," English society. On the other hand, Cathy unconsciously finds the other part of herself, a match in Heathcliff as a man free of all those conventions and limitations, but at the same time, she finds in Edgar Linton, what is socially accepted. While Heathcliff accepts the unsophisticated and unconventional Cathy as she is, Edgar Linton and his universe change her into a refined lady. This is one of the conflicts that would haunt her and the characters that surround her. Her love for Heathcliff only takes her outside her family and society into an opposing sphere which can be defined as "Nature," a synonym of climbing down the human scale into primitivism; a "caprice" that a young woman could not bear in that society, while her marriage to Edgar Linton, means family and social inclusion. Brontë also shows how madness used to be the final destiny for daring women like Cathy, her unconventional Romantic heroin.

The richness and originality of *Wuthering Heights* either in form: double narrators that tell a story starting from its middle, or in content: unorthodox Victorian novel that shows life from a different perspective, for Brontë "writes about a different world from the other novelists of her age" (Cecil 1958:138), reveal characters as intense and dark, and the obscure side of human soul through a gothic influence. *Wuthering Heights* can be read as a mirror of the human soul, since it deals with some of its basic conflicts.

The author lived her short life away from the universe presented by Dickens, for example, and for the public he seemed to be willing to please through the use of techniques and themes. Differently, Brontë neither have to please any kind of audience, nor to follow its conventions and concerns, but she is concerned solely with those primary aspects of life which define people's character and express the anxieties of the modern man and women, which is intrinsically a feature of the genre novel itself.

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