

# The Abuse of Children In Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights

*Submitted by  
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## *1- Life and Work:*

Emily Bronte is born in Yorkshire on 30 July 1818. Her father, Rev. Patrick Bronte, is a man of intelligence and determination which enables him to gain an admission as a sizar to 81. John's Cambridge in 1802. He has six children where Emily is the fifth. The mother is a young beautiful girl who belong to an important family. Both Emily's parents try to teach

their children well, support them all the time and elevate them to  
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high levels. This causes an eagerness towards reading and writing, but the happiness of the children is affected by the sickness and later on by the death of their mother in 1821. After that things would never be the same as the father keeps himself away with his studies and Parish's work. The only compensation for children becomes the love they have for each other (Herbert Read, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, PP.145-8).

As if the death of their mother is not an enough disaster for the Bronte's, for it is then followed by the death of their sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, in 1825. Because of the bad conditions at their school, Cowin Bridg, they become weak out of tuberculosis and die. Consequently, Charlotte and Emily leave the school. (Ibid).

The harshness of the real world makes the Brontes shrink into themselves, into a dreamy world where everything is created by them. Thus, they start to share writing which bind them more, but when the Bronte sisters are sent to school, the Roe Head School, the union between the four Brontes is broken. Emily and Anne start their own "Gondal Saga" poem, while Charlotte and Branwell start "Angria Saga".

Despite all the mishap they face, the Brontes are courageous enough to gather again and establish a school of their own, but later on it turns up to be a complete failure. By this time, Emily's health declines gradually and she dies In December 1848 (Ibid).

Emily differs in her writings from all the Victorian Writers. Such differences appear to Derek Traversi as those of an emotional intensity which is a mixture of both primitive feelings and spiritual exaltation that corresponds to the potentialities of human nature (Derek Traversi, "The Bronte Sisters and 'Wuthering Heights'" P .49). Such primitivism helps her to depict character psychological analysis especially the harsh, cruel side. Her interests are in the ghost world, the savage world and the evil one. She secludes herself from the outer one into her home and the moors which represent the beauty, the liberty and the compensation for the loss of her mother and both sisters. This hard life affects Emily as well as he novel. Wuthering Heights represents everything in her life ,the good and the bad. The cruel life Emily faces is depicted in her novel Wuthering Height, especially the kind of treatment children are confronting. It is not a one side view of a narrator, it is more to be a life style. Excess is a crucial thought in this novel. It is either black

or white. Nevertheless, such portrayal, especially of the children, is notable and unique.

Wuthering Heights tells the story of Heathcliff and his passive relationships with the two worlds of the Earnshaws and the Lintons. Such a passivity that extends for two generations leaves the novel with undecided antagonist. Though Heathcliff is the cruelest and the prime villain, at certain times, it seems that he is not the only one. Almost all the characters in Emily's novel share him with this. They are a mixture of pure impulses and passions. Because of this, the behaviors of each child are important in the course of action of the novel.

The novel is narrated by two narrators: Lockwood and Nelly Dean. They are story tellers, but their role extends far more than that. It is not limited to a mere detached narration; it serves as a means of involvement in the action itself. Both of them reveal their own personality as well as treatment of other characters through their own point of view. This point of view is supposed to be objective through establishing a kind of trust between them and the reader. The novelist does that by giving Lockwood the reputation of a "heartlessness" and Nelly Dean as to be "the right person in the right place" (James H. Kavanagh, Emily Bronte, PP.22-4).

## ***11- The First Generation:***

### ***A- Adult-Children Relationship***

When Mr. Earnshaw brings Heathcliff to the heights, Mrs. Earnshaw grumbles and berates her husband for that. Yet, he never explains the reason behind bringing such a gipsy brat to the house. Mrs. Earnshaw gets mad and acts like any woman would act to her husband sinful act of adultery, because Heathcliff could be no

more than Mr. Earnshaw's illegitimate son (Eric Solomon, "The Incest Theme in Wuthering Heights", P.III). She becomes torn between her feelings. Heathcliff functions as a displaced version of both the woman Mr. Earnshaw has committed with the act of adultery and a displaced version of Mr. Earnshaw himself. Since Heathcliff's real mother is not presented, Mrs. Earnshaw projects all her hate towards Heathcliff. Yet, her hate does not last long, it ends with her death.

With Mr. Earnshaw the matter is completely different. Before he goes to Liverpool, everything seems good and fine. He asks every child what to bring him from there, even Nelly Dean. But then he shocks them through bringing Heathcliff, the dark gipsy boy, and introduces him as their gift.

Mr. Earnshaw is very much affected by the religious attitude of Joseph, his servant, who always urges the father to show some stricture in his way of dealing with the children especially because they always misbehave. Hindley tries to hurt Heathcliff, the later blackmails him, Catherine always evokes her father and Mr. Earnshaw is in the middle of all this mess. Nelly Dean once says:

Mr. Earnshaw did not understand jokes from his children: he had always been strict and grave with them; and Catherine, on her part, had no idea why her father should be crosser and less patient in his ailing condition than he was in his prime. His peevish reproofs wakened in her a naughty delight to provoke him", (P.34)

Nevertheless Mr. Earnshaw soon dies leaving the children on their own.

Thrushcross Grange is introduced later as the other and opposite world of the Earnshaw. It is not shown in details how the parents are raising up their children,

but one may understand this from their attitude toward Catherine. For Catherine, the five weeks she stays at the Grange become five weeks of instructions where she learns to adopt a double character. In other words, as her entrance into the place is violent, her education is also

- All the quotations from the novel are going to be taken from one version.

Wuthering Heights, York Press, 1987.

violent and painful. She must learn how to control her impulse, how to separate her body from her soul. And this is what she succeeds in doing when she accepts to marry Edgar Linton (Sandra M. Gilbert, The Mad Women in the Attic, Chapter three).

### ***B- Children-Children Relationship:***

The first introduction of Heathcliff to the family is very bad. Everyone rejects him especially the little ones.

As a child, Nelly's hate to Heathcliff is clear from the beginning of the narrative, because the Heights is the place where she can imagine herself not a servant, but a daughter just like Catherine. Most of the time, she could pretend that she is Mr. Earnshaw's daughter, eats her porridge with his family, plays with the kids and is never forgotten in his journeys. He always brings her something like any loving father. But this tentative fantasy begins to melt away with Heathcliff's arrival. Instead of the presents he has promised her and his children to bring, Mr. Earnshaw brings another present, a sort of a dirty, ragged, black-haired child, and asks them to take it as "a gift of God; though it's as dark almost as it came from the devil"(P.29).

Though Hindley and Catherine are disappointed at getting such an odd present instead of their promised fiddle and whip, Nelly's disappointment extends far more beyond a disappointment at not getting her apple and pears. She watches her place usurped by this new comer whose introduction to the house occasions her banishment though temporarily, it reduces her from her valued imagined position, as the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw to her true state a mere servant. Silently, she watches her love snatched away from her with an eye full of hate, wishing to punish this usurper who becomes the core of Mr. Earnshaw's affection "Hindley hated him! And say the truth I did the same," (P.30) she once says. It is only when Heathcliff is deprived of his position and reduced to a servant by Hindley after Mr. Earnshaw's death that she begins to feel or to sympathize with him. Something that makes her torn between being cruel and being kind.

Though Mr. Earnshaw brings Heathcliff as a compensation for their dead child, Hindley never understands this. He keeps on seeing Heathcliff his replacement. Thus, he hates him till the end, and whenever there is a chance Hindley would show his true feelings towards him:

He [Heathcliff] seemed a sullen, patient child; hardened, perhaps, to ill-treatment: He would stand Hindley's blows without winking or shedding a tear, and my pinches moved him only to draw in a breath and open his eyes, This Endurance made old Earnshaw furious when he discovered his son persecuting the poor, fatherless child, as he called him (P.30).

From this one concludes the kind of relationship this triangle is wearing. Hindley regards "his father as an oppressor rather than a friend, and Heathcliff as a usurper of his parent's affections and his privileges; and he grew bitter with brooding over these injuries" (Ibid). It is not until the death of Mr. Earnshaw that Hindley gets his revenge:

He drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labour out of doors instead; compelling him to do so as hard as any other lad on the farm (P.3?).

It is Hindley's chance to degrade Heathcliff and treat him as trash. He always pulls Catherine and Heathcliff from their own special heaven into earth through his role and after that of his wife, Frances, as a hostile step-parent like. Hindley's and Frances' hatred consists of an attempt to impose an order at the heavenly childhood of freedom by separating Catherine and Heathcliff and depriving the latter of all his previous privileges. By doing this, Hindley would have full revenge on the usurper love who has already deprived him of his father's affection.

The kind of relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine IS a special one. Heathcliff bears everything for the sake of Catherine, and she helps him with his education and works with him in the fields. Nevertheless, their relationship extends way beyond that. Heathcliff's presence gives Catherine a fullness of being, an alternative double self, and a complementary addition to herself. His dark, strong and proud nature suits her unfeminine, not submissive, and never lady-like nature. His presence makes her always sing; laugh at everybody who will not do the same. In short, his presence transforms the Heights for the young Catherine into heaven

(Sandra M. Gilbert, The Mad Women in the Attic, P .265). Besides, Heathcliff and Catherine's relationship extends beyond the normal term of human relations. He offers her friendship and love "which opens fresh possibilities of freedom within the interval system of the Heights" (Terry Eagleton, Myth of Power, P.103). In this case Heathcliff acts as a displaced version of both a father and a brother, and Catherine enjoys all the power of freedom that Heathcliff offers her.

This bond between Heathcliff and Catherine is broken by Thrushcross Grang, for the time she spends there makes her adopt a double character. She develops another identity different from her real wild one, and makes her imagine that she loves Edgar and everything touches her to be a lady, who would marry Edgar, while marrying Heathcliff would degrade her. Thus, the Earnshaws and the Lintons share in one way or another in dividing the wholeness of Catherine and Heathcliff. Irving H. Buchen suggests that Emily speaks of the separation of lovers and loss of love in the same dimension that she speaks of the separation of the child from God or his loss of heaven (Irving H. Buchen, "Emily Bronte and the Metaphysics of Childhood and Love", P.113).

Catherine's death marks the end of the first half of the story where all the major characters are children, but the second phase begins by considering them old enough to dominate the second generation. This new generation faces the consequence of the first one. All the love between Catherine and Heathcliff turns to cruelty from Heathcliff to the second generation as a revenge for his abuse and being left out. "Heathcliff's revenge pre-dominates" through controlling the lives of everyone surrounding him, especially the children (W.H. Stevenson, Wuthering Heights, P.163).

### ***11- The Second Generation:***



Wuthering Heights is manifested mostly through violence and cruelty. Heathcliff's cruelty is projected towards his enemies, the Earnshaws and the Lintons, in the form of willed, responsible and controlled by purpose scheme of revenge, and this controlled scheme distinguishes his attitude from all the other types in the novel. The best definition of such a scheme is that of Arnold Kettle shows the scheme's moral force:

For what Heathcliff does is to use against his enemies with complete ruthlessness their own weapons, to turn on them their own standards, to beat them at their own games. The weapons he used against the Earnshaws and the Lintons are their own weapons of money and arranged marriage (Arnold Kettle, "Emily Bronte: Wuthering Heights", P.38).

Heathcliff's controlled revenge starts with Hindley and Edgar. Both, so cruelly, have denied his right to exist and to hold a place among human beings. His revenge on Hindley consists of encouraging him to indulge in drinking and gambling which lead him to mortgage all his property of the Heights to Heathcliff in payment for his gambling debts. Thus, Heathcliff becomes the master of the Heights. Part of Heathcliff's revenge on the Lintons in general and Edgar in particular is to deceive Isabella and marry her against the will of her brother. Isabella, like Catherine, falls from her heaven to hell when she falls in love with Heathcliff, mistaking his appearance for reality despite Catherine's warnings. After marriage, she encounters his devilish 'Otherness' and finds out that the Heights is but "Sterile" purgatory" inciting her only to cruelty" (J. Frank Goodridge, "The Circumambient Universe", P.75). This leads to her eventual escape to the South and then her death after she gives birth to Linton.

Heathcliff's controlled scheme of revenge does not end with Hindley's and Isabella's death. It moves on to include the second generation of the Earnshaws and the Lintons. And as Miriam Allott suggests, Emily Bronte takes a great pain in the second part of the story to re-introduce her earlier relationship patterns where she substitutes for the violent Catherine-Edgar-Heathcliff relationships of the first generation the milder Cathy-Linton- Hareton relationships of the second, and alter the savage Hindley- Heathcliff relationship into a more temperate Heathcliff-Hareton relationship with a new kind of emphasis (Miriam Allott, "Wuthering Heights": The Rejection of Heathcliff?", PP.28-9). That is to say, the theme of cruelty, presented in the first part of the story, manifests itself in a new light in the second part of the story.

Heathcliff's hatred to the Earnshaw and the Lintons reflects itself through a pattern of sadism and infanticide imposed on the motherless children of these families. Such sadism proves that the Heights is a world of violence and cruelty where normal emotions are almost completely inverted, I.e., cruelty replaces kindness (Wade Thompson, "Infanticide and Sadism in Wuthering Heights", P.?)I). The first member of the second generation who is subjected to this cruelty is Hareton Earnshaw.

Heathcliff's hatred to Hindley is reflected in his irrepressible desire to twist Hareton's life "we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another with the same wind to twist it" (P.160). Though he has not treated him severely, he turned him into a brute by never teaching him to read and write; never rebuking him for any bad habit, never leading him a step towards virtue nor protecting him against vices. By doing so, Heathcliff is trying to make out of Hareton another version of himself and he succeeds: "Hareton's aspect was the ghost of my immortal love; of my wild

endeavours to hold my right; my degradation, my pride, my happiness, and my anguish" (P.277), but instead of growing to hate or be cruel to each other, they grow to love each other. This love suggests that Heathcliff may degrade Hareton, yet, he cannot "reproduce the hatred felt by Hindley Earnshaw for the young Heathcliff. Situation and characters are essentially different" (Barbara Hardy, Wuthering Heights: Emily Bronte, P.47).

Hareton is saved from Heathcliff's pattern of cruelty and sadism through his sweetness and gentleness. Yet, Linton Heathcliff, the son of hate who remains child till his life's end, is never saved. Heathcliff harshly uses him as a means to have his revenge on the Lintons. Heathcliff's scheme of revenge reaches its climax when he imposes marriage on Cathy and the dying Linton in order to become the master of the Grange, and that is what happens after Linton's and Edgar's death. This cruel act proves not only his cruelty, but his sadistic inclination represented by imposing the horror of his experience on a helpless world of things (Margaret Homans, "Repression and Sublimation of Nature in Wuthering Heights", P.18). Linton's unsuitability for Cathy is unconsciously brought out through the comparison made between their concepts of heaven:

He wanted all to lie in an ecstasy of peace; I wanted all to sparkle and dance in a glorious jubilee. I said his heaven would be only half alive; and he said mine would be drunk: I said I should fall asleep in his; and he said he could not breathe in mine (P.212).

Though Cathy, like her mother, marries the wrong man first, she is nothing like her mother. If her mother gains her heaven of love through her evolution from

Catherine Earnshaw into Catherine Heathcliff and falls from her love or heaven through her conversion into Catherine Linton, her daughter falls from heaven through her evolution from Catherine Linton into Catherine Heathcliff and finally regains her last heaven and becomes Catherine Earnshaw through her union with Hareton. Moreover, the union of Cathy and Hareton is not a compensatory union of Catherine- Heathcliff's, for Hareton is not another Heathcliff, and Cathy is not her mother. They are reminiscent of the previous generation, but they are not really representative of them. They are essentially different characters living in a different situation and the possibility of reestablishing a union between them happens because "they return love for hate, unlike their elders who repaid hate with hate" (Victor A. Newfeldt, "Emily Bronte and the Responsible Imagination", P .20).

### *III- Conclusion:*

The work of Emily Bronte comes as a product of real hard ~ experiences and harsh life. It shows that feelings of cruelty and hate co-exists not only in adults, but also in children themselves.

In her single novel Wuthering Heights, Emily Bronte proves that man is a creature who differs from all the other creatures. The main difference lies in the extremeness of the feelings of cruelty and hate in every human being. The coming of the unknown, dark-face child to Thrushcross Grange the life and future of the adults as well as the children. Through him the novelist shows that the feelings of hate can be hidden under the soft exterior of human beings, and these feelings might turn him into a beast which shows but hate and cruelty. This kind of toughness that is hinted upon

in the first generation, it is strongly revealed in the scheme of revenge Heathcliff intends with the second generation. He is the beast who returns hate for hate embodied in the cruel treatment on the second generation. While those in the second generation returns love for hate, of Heathcliff , because they could find beauty inside them and in their surroundings .

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