

## A Freudian Reading of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

Shaima Abdullah Jassim<sup>1</sup>, Alaa Muzahim Abdulrazaq<sup>2\*</sup>

1 English Department, College of Education for Humanities, Tikrit University, Iraq

2 English Department, College of Education for women, Anbar University, Iraq

\* [edw.engalaa609@uoanbar.edu.iq](mailto:edw.engalaa609@uoanbar.edu.iq)

### ABSTRACT:

There are many theories that emerged in fields other than literature but influenced the literary works greatly. These theories are used by scholars and critics to analyses and study the literary text. Among these theories are Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis and the theory of interpretation of dreams. According to Freud, the human mind is divided into two parts: the conscious and the subconscious. Freud used this theory to treat his patients by making them lie down and talk about their dreams, childhood and other thoughts. It is an attempt to make the unconscious conscious. Additionally, the unconscious can be revealed through the slips of the tongue (paraphrases) and dreams. Moreover, Freud assumes that the human psyche consists of three parts: Id (a store of the human desires and needs); superego (the part of the psyche which represents the high ideals); ego (the part which tries to make a compromise between the id and the superego). He also emphasizes the effect of our childhood upon our lives. The present study is a Freudian reading to Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* with reference to the impact of the author's life upon the flow of the events and the lives of the characters.

**Keywords:** Bronte; Dreams; Freud; Psychoanalysis.



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## 1- The Influence of Emily's Life upon Her Work

Emily Bronte (1818-1848) is one of the finest novelists of all ages. She and her sisters are called the Bronte sisters. They add greatness to the Victorian novel. The young Bronte was sent to school, but when Emily's elder sister, Elizabeth and Maria died of tuberculosis there, the remaining children returned home (Hoffman: 1).

They read literature and invented their own stories and adventures. In fact, *Wuthering Heights* is Emily's only novel. She wrote it in 1848. After one year of the publication of the novel, she died because she had tuberculosis after her only brother's funeral. Her brother Branwell also was interested in stories and adventures.

Emily's life was full of tragedies. She lost her mother and two elder sisters when she was three. Branwell wasted his talents, ruined his future and became an addict. However, Hoffman suggests that literature surrounded the Bronte family. It was a part of their life (Ibid.). Virginia Woolf expresses her understanding of the differences between Emily and her sister Charlotte, another creative novelist. She states that *Wuthering Heights* is a more difficult novel to understand easily than *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte because Emily was a greater poet than Charlotte (Woolf: in Jonson).

The Bronte sisters started publishing their works using false names to disguise their gender. Charlotte Bronte wrote as Currer Bell gained most the praise for her stirring novel *Jane Eyre*. All the three sisters used the surname Bell. Critics at that time considered the works published by the three sisters belong to one writer.

In fact, Emily Bronte presents in *Wuthering Heights* a diversiform of styles changing from Catherine's poetic discourse, Heathcliff's oral violence, Lockwood's skillful literary tone and fashionable cliché, Nelly's homiletic eloquence to Joseph's biblical Yorkshire dialect and incomprehensible mumbling. All these varieties produce mutuality of accents and idioms, presenting Bakhtin calls as dialogic heteroglossia. Nonetheless, the dialogue is the most special attribute by Bronte's interest in distinctive idiolect. In fact, she disassembles language to make it appear in a social manner as much as accessible to her readers. Thus, some characters used dictions to reveal their speech style. Mostly, Bronte's linguistic style relies on her praiseworthy selection of words, though it is distinguished by hyperbolic excess exactly when Catherine and Heathcliff speak. The honesties of Bronte's style is fully revealed in the opening paragraphs of the first Chapter. This is one of the many examples of the direct technique of introducing a special kind of speech of extra accent upon certain concentrating words (Varghese: 2). These varieties of styles reveal her talent as a poet. Also, they reflect her childhood experience as a young adventure writer.

Sigmund Freud in his theory psychoanalysis handles his ideas of the relationship between the child and his mother. He assumes that the child usually fears strangers because he is so close to a dear person he loved, that is his mother. His despair and longing are changed into fear, his idle libido, which cannot yet be held suspended, is directed by fear. It cannot be termed a coincidence that this situation, which is a typical example of all childish fear, is a repetition of the first condition of fear during birth: separation from the mother (Freud: 357).

Nearly, all the characters of Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* are shocked by their mothers' death, and they not only undergo the processes of dejection, melancholia, and hysteria, but also suffer from certain core issues like fear of intimacy, fear of abandonment, fear of betrayal, low self-esteem, insecure or unstable

sense of self. Emily in fact was a neurotic person. Her unconscious obsession of psychoanalytic love of a mother is projected in *Wuthering Heights* (Asl: 1).

*Wuthering Heights* is one of the greatest English novels. It is about the powerful love between Heathcliff and Catherine Earnshaw. This novel is creative in its structure. It deals with three generations. The major story is Heathcliff's. The first generation consists of Mr. Earnshaw and his wife, Mr. Linton and his wife. The second generation includes Edgar Linton, his sister Isabella, Hindley Earnshaw and his sister Cathy, and Heathcliff. The third generation consists of Hareton Hindley's son, Catherine Linton Cathy's daughter, and Linton Heathcliff's son Isabella. The story begins in 1801, but Nelly the major narrator goes back to 1771 when Mr. Earnshaw brings Heathcliff home.

Though Catherine and Heathcliff love each other passionately and fiercely, she chooses to marry the more refined and wealthy Edgar Linton. The conflict starts when Mr. Earnshaw dies and his son Hindley treats Heathcliff badly. Heathcliff decides to pay him what he has done to him. He decides revenge for his dignity which Hindley has crushed when he treated him like a degraded servant. However, the struggle reaches its peak when Catherine rejects him on Edgar's behalf. Heathcliff becomes a fearful soul of revenge.

Alice Hoffman points out that the powerful elements that make *Wuthering Heights* an interesting book for all generations:

*Wuthering Heights* is a story of a haunted house\_ a structure and a family haunted by grief, by sorrow, by memory, by love denied. Heathcliff himself is the ultimate literary stranger, a character whose very presence changes everything and everyone around him, a fierce storm in human form, an elemental force. (Hoffman: viii).

Through reading this novel, the reader is taken to a world of different dimensions. Catherine's spirit is still in love with her eternal lover. He is haunted by her soul till his death. The readers' hearts are taken with suspense every time they read this exceptional work. Nonetheless, the end is different from our expectations. The oppressed Hareton and the lovely Cathy live happily after the death of Heathcliff who makes their lives and their parents' as stormy as his fierce raged soul.

The events of *Wuthering Heights* are set in the moors of the English countryside. Alice Hoffman says that the world of the moors "contains all elements: natural and supernatural, the real world alongside the dream world, erotic love as well as the practical domain of domestic life" (Hoffman: xii). The moors have a dominant influence upon the major characters. Catherine and Heathcliff used to play and run throughout the wilderness of the moors when they were children.

Because of the stormy weather of the place, the Earnshaws' house is called *Wuthering Heights*. It has the strongest effect upon the characters more than anything else. Cathy and Heathcliff are engulfed by a stormy love just as the moors are engulfed with storms, rains, and high winds.

The other house is the Thrushcross Grange. It is the Lintons' home. Both houses represent opposing worlds and values (Johnson: 265). Each house is structured just like its inhabitants. The Lintons are more stylish and live a calm life until the reappearance of the revengeful Heathcliff.

As an accurate analysis, the reader notes that repetition is the most distinctive feature in Bronte's narrative style. Double feature is in everything in the novel. On the level of the structure, narrators, plot, and the characters themselves form a double to each other. There are even two diary accounts, Catherine's diary forming a sort of internal text to Lockwood's diary which represents the outer text. Most of the repeated words in the text are content words i.e., noun, verb, adjective and their derivatives. Words repeated tend to stick longer in the mind. But, repetition is related not only to words or sentences but extends to include ideas (images) that express the themes of the novel (Varghese: 2).

## 2- Fear of Loss

Heathcliff is the central figure in *Wuthering Heights*, he is designed to be an outsider. His existence raises the action of the novel especially when Mr. Earnshaw finds him in Liverpool, a dark lonely boy in the street. He raises him up like his son. Soon after his coming, Catherine, Mr. Earnshaw's daughter befriends him and they love each other when they grow up. But, after the death of her father, Hindley Catherine's brother, treats him like a degraded servant.

The Lintons are another family who live in the opposite direction to *Wuthering Heights* (the Earnshaw's house). The wealthy noble Lintons live in their beautiful house Thrushcross Grange. Once, Cathy and Heathcliff are curiously hanging up together round the Lintons' house. Their dog attacks them. She gets injured and is taken to be cured in Thrushcross Grange. Heathcliff is turned away in a harsh way by the Lintons because they think he is a servant. Edgar Linton falls in love with her. A storming struggle started inside Cathy who loves Heathcliff but wants a soft refined life. However, she discusses the matter with Nelly. He overhears her saying it will degrade her to marry him. But, he does not hear what she says after that when she regrets her struggle to be with him or with Edgar:

He is always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I is  
always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being. So don't talk of our  
separation again. (Bronte: 59).

However, Heathcliff leaves, nobody knows where. Catherine searches for him on a very cold stormy night. She becomes seriously ill. Again, the Lintons take her to the Grange to take care of her. The parents are infected and die. Three years later she gets married to Edgar.

Heathcliff returns and dresses like a gentleman. The consequence of Cathy's rejection is the destruction of everything lies in his path (Allen: 196). To achieve his revenge, he gambles with Hindley and wins all the Earnshaw property. The alcoholic Hindley dies. Heathcliff treats his son, Hareton like a servant.

Heathcliff fulfills his revenge when he gets married to the naïve Isabella, Edgar's sister. In *Wuthering Heights*, he mistreats her. She runs away to London. She gives birth to Linton. Twelve years later, she is sad and lonely. Cathy is affected by brain fever. While she gives birth to her daughter Catherine, she dies. Her death maddens Heathcliff. He accomplishes his revenge many years after her death.

However, the ghost of Cathy roams the moors restlessly to be reunited with the love of her life. After twenty years, he is more consumed with the thought of being reunited with her. At last, a strange disease affected him. He refuses to eat or drink anything for many days. He loses any interest in life. Before his death, he tells Nelly:

I have to remind myself to breathe- almost to remind my heart to beat!  
And it is like bending back a stiff spring: it is by compulsion that I do  
the slightest act... I have a single wish, and my whole being and  
faculties are yearning to attain it. (Bronte: 236).

Nelly finds him dead in his room covered with rain because the window is open and it is raining all night.

Nonetheless, it seems that neither in his life nor after his death he gets happiness or peace because many people see his ghost with a ghost of a woman walking in the moors (Johnson: 3).

The consequence of treating Heathcliff badly and injuring his feelings is disastrous. It costs the two families their happiness, stability, and peace of mind. When Heathcliff reappears, the Lintons' and the Earnshaws' lives turn into hell. In fact, Heathcliff does not attain any real thing from his avenger:

It is a poor conclusion, is it not,' he observed, having brooded a while on the scene he had just witnessed. 'An absurd termination to my violent exertion? I get levers and mattocks to demolish the two houses, and train myself to be capable of working like Hercules, and when everything is ready, and in my power, I find the will to lift a slate off either roof has vanished. (Bronte: 234).

To understand the relationship between Catherine and the other characters, the readers need to study her personality closely. Catherine Earnshaw is beautiful, wild, stubborn and hot-tempered. She fancies that she will love and stay with Heathcliff forever. They are alike in spirit. However, when she discusses her reasons to abandon him and marry Edgar with Nelly Dean, she admits that she wants to marry Edgar because he is handsome, young, cheerful and rich. But, inside she knows this is wrong. She is deeply in love with Heathcliff, yet; she hesitates to marry him:

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 lightening or frost from fire. (Bronte: 57).

This speech shows that their souls are made of the same substance. They love spiritually. It grows with them. Nonetheless, the word "*degrade*" is enough to make him take the decision to leave the moors.

Catherine expresses her love to Heathcliff in a touching powerful way:

My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning: my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger: I should not seem part of it. (Ibid. 59).

She makes a comparison between her love for him and her passion for Edgar. Her conversation with Nelly shows her internal struggle. Her love for Heathcliff is strong and deeply rooted inside her heart while that for Edgar is temporal and superficial. But, her feelings towards Heathcliff win the spiritual battle:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods: time will change it; I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees. My love to Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath: a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly I *am* Heathcliff. (Ibid.).

When Catherine declares that "I am Heathcliff ", this shows how powerful her love is. They grow together and their affection grows with them, with the difficulties and miseries they face.

In fact, Heathcliff never hears or knows about these words. He departs at the moment of saying it will degrade her to marry him. When he returns rich, she is married. This maddens him. He plans to marry Isabella, Edgar's sister to spite Cathy and Edgar. Cathy becomes seriously ill. She dies while she gives birth to her daughter, who is named by her father Catherine (Johnson: 3). shortly Before her death, Heathcliff visits her in her room. She expresses her bitterness and pain of dying without having him. She accuses both Heathcliff and her husband of her misery and plight. She tells him that she wishes to hold him till they both die.

The tragic love story between Heathcliff and Cathy is the central idea in *Wuthering Heights*. They share the same wild soul. Catherine admits that they are halves of the same person. Heathcliff describes her as his soul and being. This love roams the moors where it is inspired for the first time even after their death (Johnson: 261). This love causes all the miseries for all people around them because they are obliged to leave each other. Because of his loss of Cathy, Heathcliff destroys the Lintons and Earnshaws. His love possesses his soul and being.

Cathy and Heathcliff love each other dearly. They use the words 'my soul', 'my life' and 'myself' to refer to each other. This shows the depth of their love. The dying Cathy wants both of them to die together; she wants to take him with her to the grave: "I shall love mine yet; and take him with me: he is in my soul" (Bronte: 116). Here, she means she will take the Heathcliff whom she loved before he departed.



Cathy breaks her heart when she gets married to Edgar. She knows that she cannot live with him as she does to Heathcliff. In doing so, she breaks Heathcliff's heart.

Hoffman considers Cathy a divided soul tormented between what she truly desires and what a woman of her time and position should want (Hoffman: x). Heathcliff is embittered when he realises that the fortune he earns to win her is useless so he seeks revenge. He becomes another Heathcliff: dark inside, angry, and avenger who wants to ruin everyone around her including himself.

The dying Cathy understands that the man beside her is no more the same person she has loved once: "That is how I'm loved! this is not my Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me: he is in my soul" (Bronte: 116). A strong passionate love lives inside two souls. It can be compared to the stormy wild atmosphere of the moors in which Cathy's soul hovers restlessly searching for the union with Heathcliff.

Nonetheless, the two families are re-established through the love that blossoms between Hareton Earnshaw and Catherine Linton. The sub-plot of Cathy and Hareton is there to show a successful relationship which is built upon love and understanding unlike the Catherine-Heathcliff affair. Cathy is able to correct the faults of her behavior with her cousin who really deserves her attention and deserves another chance to build his life.

### 3- Catherine's Ghost:

After Catherine's death, Heathcliff calls her soul to haunt him, "Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living! You said I killed you- haunt me, then" (Bronte: 122). She haunts him till the last day of his life. Nelly notices when his end is approached that he talks to an invisible object. He himself tells her after many years that when people returned home after her funeral he felt a sigh near his ear.

However, the first time Catherine is introduced to the readers is as a ghost. She comes as a child whose hand is cold sobbing to be let in. Lockwood is bothered with a bough of a tree near the window of Catherine's bedroom. He stretches his hand to push it. It is a horrible nightmare. He is not horrified when a cold hand clings strongly to his hand. Mr. Lockwood is extremely horrified. the ghost yells:

Let me in – let me in'

'Who are you?' I asked, struggling meanwhile, to disengage myself. 'Catherine Linton... I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor. (Bronte. 17).

Sigmund Freud assumes that dreams reveal the unconscious. Freud (1900) considered dreams to be the *royal road to the unconscious* as it is in dreams that the ego's defenses are lowered so that some of the repressed stuff comes through to awareness, although in distorted form. Dreams achieve significant functions for the unconscious mind and serve as clues to how the unconscious mind works. Freud differentiated between the manifest content of a dream (what the dreamer remembers) and the latent content, the symbolic meaning of the dream (i.e., the underlying wish). The manifest content is often based on the events of the day. The process whereby the underlying wish is translated into the manifest content is called dream-work. The aim of dreamwork is to transform the forbidden desire into a non-

threatening form, thus reducing anxiety and helping us to continue sleeping. Dreamwork concludes the process of condensation, displacement, and secondary elaboration (McLeod: 12).

In his *Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud assures that all the material making up the content of a dream is in some way or another derived from experience. In other words, it may be remembered or represented in the dream. The connection between the reality and the content of a dream is easy to be seen, as a direct result of comparing them. The connection needs to be hidden certainly. The cause of this lies in a number of oddness which are demonstrated by the faculty of memory in dreams and which, though generally remarked upon, have still resisted illustrations. It will be worth to test these features accurately. It may happen that a piece of material occurs in the content of a dream which in the waking state we do not identify as forming a part of our knowledge or experience. We remember, of course, having dreamt the thing in question, but we cannot remember whether or when we experienced it in reality. We are thus left in doubt as to the source which has been drawn upon by the dream and is tempted to believe that dreams have a power of independent production. Then at last, often after a long interval, some fresh experience recalls the lost memory of the other event and at the same time reveals the source of the dream. We are thus driven to admit that in the dream we knew and "remembered something" which was beyond the reach of our waking memory (Freud, 2010:44-5).

However, Lockwood's dream is the accumulation of his reading of the diary, Catherine's name, and his curiosity about Wuthering Heights; yet, the things the ghost reveals are astonishing for example mentioning the period through which it has lost its way, 20 years which are the years since Catherine's death. Heathcliff is seen by peasants walking with a woman in the moors after his death. This refers to his union with his beloved after death.

#### 4- Wrong Choices

One of the central issues Emily Bronte presented in *Wuthering Heights* is civilised and primitive natures. Primitive nature is represented by the Earnshaws, especially Catherine and Heathcliff. Both of them are governed by their passions. Their emotions are not governed by civility or reflection. They act according to their strong feelings for example, Cathy is instantly raged for the slightest thing that irritates her (Johnson: 261).

The Lintons represent civilised nature. The Grange and its inhabitants represent culture, refinement and cultivation (Ibid.). When Cathy is bitten by the Lintons' dog, they take care of her; she is influenced by their culture and is changed in appearance only. Her marriage brings the union between the two families. The peace in the Grange is overpowered by the influence of Wuthering Heights. In fact, the difference between the two natures produces many problems for the two parties. Moreover, the desire of the members of the two parties to be close to the other party causes traumatic issues. Bad choices of most of the characters of the two groups bring misery to themselves and others.

Almost everyone in *Wuthering Heights* suffers emotional and physical trauma. The protagonist tries to avoid the physical illness but he aches for his love for Catherine. Foolish decisions seem the principal cause of suffering. Catherine chooses to marry Edgar for passion not for real love. Isabella accepts to marry Heathcliff though she is warned by Nelly and Catherine that he does not really love her and he exploits her feelings for his benefits. Nonetheless, none really wants to admit his/her responsibility for the misery results from foolish decisions. They always blame each other for their suffering.



The last words Heathcliff says to Catherine before her death show his blame to her and his suffering for losing her: “I have not broken your heart\_ *you* have broken mine”. When she asks him for forgiveness, his reply suggests that he forgives her for what she has done to him; yet, he cannot forgive her for what she has done to herself: “It is hard to forgive, and to look at those eyes, and feel those wasted hands”... “I forgive what you have done to me. I love *my* murderer \_but yours! How can I?” (Bronte: 117). Heathcliff suffers from Cathy’s choice to marry Edgar which consequently breaks her heart and divides her soul.

## CONCLUSION

Childhood experiences are reflected in people’s later lives. This is one of Freud’s thoughts in his theory of psychoanalysis. Therefore, children’s lives must be stable and happy otherwise they will be lonely or even they will act violently like Heathcliff and Catherine. Emily Bronte herself suffered a lot in her life. She felt forlorn and portrayed her experiences in *Wuthering Heights*.

Mother’s existence is essential for developing the child’s personality. Children learn how to make the right decisions from their parents. It seems that parents' absence affects the characters’ personalities. They even cannot make the right decisions which influenced their lives badly. Cathy’s choice to marry Edgar leads into a disastrous end. Isabella’s choice to elope with Heathcliff and marry him against her brother’s consent causes her misery. There are many other examples of wrong choices which cause chaos in *Wuthering Heights*.

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## قراءة لرواية مرتفعات وذرنج لاميلي برونتي من منظور نفسي فرويدي

أ.م.د. شياء عبدالله جاسم<sup>1</sup>، م. آلاء مزاحم عبدالرزاق<sup>2\*</sup>

1 قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية، جامعة تكريت، العراق

2 قسم اللغة الانكليزية، كلية التربية للبنات، جامعة الأنبار، العراق

\* [edw.engalaa609@uoanbar.edu.iq](mailto:edw.engalaa609@uoanbar.edu.iq)

### ملخص البحث

بغض النظر عن حقيقة ان علم النفس هو علم حديث، الا ان جذوره العميقة تمتد الى الحضارات القديمة والاعمال الادبية الكلاسيكية والتي سبقت الفترة التي اسس فيها رواد علم النفس من امثال سجموند فرويد وكارل يونج مبادئ هذا العلم الحديث. ولا يستثنى من ذلك الادب الروائي للقرن التاسع عشر بالرغم من تركيز الكتاب على القضايا الاجتماعية وتأثيرها على الفرد والمجتمع واغفال الكثيرين منهم تسليط الضوء على الجوانب النفسية لشخصياتهم. فقد سعى بعض الكتاب من امثال الاخوات برونتي، وجورج اليوت، واوسكار وايلد وروبرت لويس ستيفنسون على تناول الحياة الداخلية للشخصيات في رواياتهم بل وحتى سبر اعماق الشخصيات فضلا عن تناولهم قضايا اجتماعية واقتصادية. ويعزى هذا التركيز على الجوانب النفسية الى ميل الكتاب الى تضمين تجاربهم الشخصية في كتاباتهم القصصية. فعلى سبيل المثال لا الحصر لا تخلو رواية مرتفعات وذرنج لاميلي برونتي من احداث مستوحاة من حياتها الشخصية ومن دعوات صريحة للقراء للقيام برحلة داخلية في نفوس الشخصيات اذا اخذنا بنظر الاعتبار الطابع المرضي للشخصيات وتعقيداتها ورغباتها المتعارضة وهي قضية تحتاج الى التمعن والقراءة العميقة. تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تناول رواية برونتي من منظور نفسي فرويدي بالإشارة الى التداخل ما بين حياة الكاتبة والاحداث وتأثيرها على حياة الشخصيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: برونتي، الاحلام، فرويد، التحليل النفسي.