

A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING OF LIN HAIRE-SARGEANT'S 'H. ~THE STORY OF HEATHCLIFF'S JOURNEY BACK TO WUTHERING HEIGHTS'

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Received: Oct. 2018 Accepted: Nov. 2018 Published: Dec. 2018

Abstract: “My name is Heathcliff...Like it or not, it is mine.”

Heathcliff and Catherine, the iconic creations of Emily Bronte are brought back to life by the contemporary American writer Lin Haire- Sargeant in her 1992 novel *H. ~The story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights*. The novel is ingeniously crafted by mingling the plots of two great Victorian novels- *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* and thereby presenting a plausible and compelling tale of Heathcliff's three years of absence from the time he fled away, after Catherine Earnshaw's humiliating rejection, till he came back “educated, both in mind and manners”, transformed into a rich gentleman, to reclaim Cathy. Sargeant has thus tried to solve the mystery behind Heathcliff's much speculated origin and background.

Psychoanalysis is a useful way of understanding human behavior as it uncovers the underlying motives and ideas. Thus, the paper will approach Sargeant's novel with the aid of psychoanalytical theory. The focus will be on interpreting the novel using Freudian concepts of human psyche (id, ego and superego) and defense mechanisms such as denial, repression, and projection. The portrayal of Heathcliff's vindictive personality and his violent cruelties inflicted on others, especially on Edgar Linton forms the basis of this study.

Keywords: Projection, Psychoanalytical theory, Repression, Unconscious.

Introduction: Lin Haire-Sargeant's *H. ~ The story of Heathcliff's Journey Back to Wuthering Heights* is a 'modern-day' sequel to Emily Bronte's timeless tale of love and revenge, *Wuthering Heights*. Published in 1992, Haire-Sargeant sets out to solve the “mystery surrounding Heathcliff's origins, transformation and character” [1]. According to Caroline Van Der Meer, “It seems that the purpose of Haire-Sargeant's novel may be to fill in the gaps left by *Wuthering Heights*” [2]. This compelling tale unfolds with Mr. Lockwood travelling on a train to meet Nelly Dean, who now, is on her death bed. Majority of the story unravels through the letters which Heathcliff had written to Catherine, in order to “explain to his old playmate how he had raised himself during his absence, and to ask her to marry him” [3]. Unfortunately, Catherine neither received nor read those letters because Nelly Dean, the meddling housekeeper had kept “it hidden in the bottom of the workbox for almost sixty years”(H.,p.09), because she knew that her then mistress, Catherine Earnshaw was about to marry Edgar Linton. It is interesting to note that Haire-Sargeant brings Catherine back to life, which we know had died half-way in the *Wuthering Heights*. Moreover, Haire-Sargeant succeeds in not only bringing in characters from another well known Victorian classic, *Jane Eyre* but also in including both the authors, Emily and Charlotte Bronte as characters in this sequel. Hence, approaching such a complex yet mesmerizing novel through a psychoanalytical lens would be quite interesting.

Since, psychoanalysis is a form of study which lays emphasis on the workings of the human mind, its application in literature helps in providing a better understanding of the literary characters as it gives the readers an insight into their “mental universe”. In the opinion of Christopher Monte, “Psychoanalytic theories assume the existence of unconscious internal states that motivate an individual's overt actions.”[4] Sigmund Freud, the famous Austrian psychiatrist is considered to be the

founder of psychoanalysis. As he puts it, “The division of mental life into what is conscious and what is unconscious is the fundamental premise on which psycho-analysis is based” [5]. It is however the unconscious which is of utmost importance to Freud because he believes that it has a strong influence upon our actions. To quote Peter Barry, “Freud was not the discoverer of the unconscious: his uniqueness lies in his attributing to it such a decisive role in our lives” [6]. Freud has developed a tripartite model of the human psyche, dividing it into Id, Ego and Super-ego. The Id comprises of our “primitive impulses” and is entirely unconscious. As Frederick Hoffman defines, “The Id is the repository of all basic drives, the ego’s enemy, the obscure inaccessible part of our personality” [7]. Super-ego refers to our conscience. It is about moral values, the societal and parental “standards introjected” into our minds. Ego “is both conscious and unconscious: in that fact lays the explanation for the conflict between instinctual pleasures and reality which takes place within it.” (Hoffman, p.25) It decides what is suitable for the individual and what desires and impulses can be satisfied and to what degree, thus, acting as a moderator between the Id and Super-ego. Related to these are some other Freudian concepts like denial, repression, sublimation and projection which have been dealt with in the subsequent sections of this paper.

Keeping in mind the story of *Wuthering Heights*, we know that Catherine had refused to marry Heathcliff for she considered him below her status. Thus, dejected and heart-broken, Heathcliff had run away, only to return after three years, transformed completely from a “farm-laborer” into a “rich gentleman”. Haire-Sargeant’s story thus begins with a brief reference to this sudden and surprising transformation of Heathcliff. In Heathcliff’s own words, “*Cathy, I am a gentleman. Strange shifts of fate and my own bitter perseverance have made me so. I have been educated, both in mind and manners. I have a fortune, sufficient to sustain us together for the rest of our days.*” (H., p.14) Haire-Sargeant has then tried to throw light on Heathcliff’s much speculated origin. Since, in *Wuthering Heights*, it is mentioned that the kind-hearted Mr. Earnshaw had picked up Heathcliff, the “starving and houseless” child from the streets of Liverpool where, “Not a soul knew to whom it belonged” [8], Haire-Sargeant gradually reveals the mystery shrouding Heathcliff’s parentage. It is in Chapter 3 of *H. ~The Story of Heathcliff’s Journey Back to Wuthering Heights* that the readers are first introduced to Mr. Are, a wealthy man whose full identity is not disclosed at once. But, going by the numerous clues which Haire-Sargeant provides throughout the novel, we can clearly decipher that actually Mr. Are is none other than Mr. Rochester from *Jane Eyre*, the owner of the big estate, “Thornfield Hall.” Eventually, it is also revealed that this Mr. Are is in fact Heathcliff’s father which he himself admits saying, “*You are my son, and shall be known so to the world from this day forward.*” (H., p.222) Mr. Are also informs the readers that the original name of Heathcliff was Heathwood Are. Moreover, justifying his immoral action of putting his son in a madhouse, some fifteen years ago, he tells the readers that Heathcliff’s “*mother was mad, and he resembled her greatly in body and seeming disposition, I feared him equally afflicted, and could not abide to watch the malady develop in one who bore my blood.*” (H., p.221) Thus, we see that now, when Mr. Are is reunited with his long lost son, he considers it to be his duty to “mend” and teach him “how to act like a gentleman.” (H., p.52) Speaking of Heathcliff’s mother, we thus get a clue that she is undoubtedly no one else but Mr. Rochester’s mad wife, Bertha, from *Jane Eyre*. Haire-Sargeant describes her as “*Bertha Mason Are, the Creole, the wanton.*” (H., p.224) As in *Jane Eyre*, here too, she is seen to be living in the attic of Thornfield Hall because in the opinion of Mr. Are, “*Chained, she torments only me. Loosed, she would harrow the whole world!*” (H., p.224) Interestingly, this statement also questions the so-called dangerous actions of an insane person which is even depicted by Heathcliff through the course of the story. When Heathcliff finally meets Bertha, she says, “*And you look strangely familiar. Perhaps you are my son after all.*” (p.226) Thus, by presenting such physical and perhaps also psychological resemblance between Heathcliff and his mother, the write also puts forward the idea of inheritance of madness. As W.C. Ellis claims, “Doctors have also agreed that insanity is a hereditary disease” [9]. Haire-Sargeant’s text is full of evidences wherein not only others but Heathcliff himself seems to be skeptical about his mental status. For instance, in Chapter 2, he states, “*Perhaps I am malicious and wicked. Perhaps I am mad.*” (H., p.180)

Now, let’s try to figure out the reason behind such psychic imbalance. As Bernard Paris opines, “all humans have a set of basic needs that must be reasonably well met if they are to develop in a healthy

way. In the order of their potency, these are psychological survival needs, needs for safety, for love and belonging, for esteem and for self-actualization. Frustration of the basic needs arrests development and leads individuals to develop defensive strategies for making up their deficiencies” [10]. These “defense mechanisms”, as Freud calls them, include denial, repression, sublimation and projection. All of these result due to the conflict between the conscious and the unconscious mind. As Phebe Cramer states, “denial is the failure to see what exists in reality” [11]. Thus, Heathcliff shows denial by not accepting the fact that Catherine is attracted towards Edgar Linton because she finds him to be more handsome and socially acceptable than Heathcliff. Hence, this denial could be one reason for Heathcliff’s hatred towards Edgar. He says, “*The fact that only one of us could marry Catherine Earnshaw divided Edgar Linton and me.*” (H., p.102) Coupled with this, is the Freudian concept of repression. “The process of repression essentially consists in the idea representing a drive being not removed or destroyed, but prevented from becoming conscious” [12]. Repression is thus “selectively forgetting” such thoughts which are troubling us. Thus, Heathcliff’s running away from *Wuthering Heights* can be seen as an act of repression. He had thus tried to forget that painful experience of rejection and humiliation. Later, he discloses his bitter past feelings in these words, “*I remember the murderous jealousy that had fired my departure.*” (H., p.99) and “*Why should you not prefer his company? He, with his fair unclouded face, his happy words, and his harmonious movements must please and charm any discriminating taste.*” (H., p.14) While these unacceptable, unpleasant thoughts and emotions are forced into the unconscious by the process of repression, yet they have a great impact upon one’s behavior. And it is nothing but repression which leads to the subsequent violent projection of Heathcliff’s anger and hatred towards Edgar. Negative projection of the repressed feelings can be very damaging and this is proved true in Heathcliff’s case. It involves projecting undesirable feelings or emotions onto someone else, rather than admitting to or dealing with it. Cramer argues that “in projection, one thinks that there is something wrong with the world, not with him/her.” (p.73) Heathcliff is thus seen to be putting the blame of his vindictive actions always on Edgar or someone else. He believes that if Edgar had stayed away from Catherine, he wouldn’t have ill-treated him. To quote Paris, “*The harshness of his early experience leads Heathcliff to develop arrogant-vindictive trends. He is obsessed with a desire to retaliate his humiliations and to prove his superiority to those who have damaged his pride. He needs to hurt his enemies more than they have hurt him: his schemes are designed to reduce his persecutors and their representatives to a state of misery and degradation greater than his own.*” (Imagined Human Begins, p. 252) If in *Wuthering Heights*, it was Hindley who was Heathcliff’s object of vehemence, here it is Edgar. At one point in the story he says, “*Struggle I must, if only for sufficient advantage to kill Edgar Linton, if I could not rise above him.*” (H., p.15) In chapter 6 when Heathcliff meets Edgar, at the house party organized by Mr. Are, he declares. “*Edgar Linton! It was he! As if by magic, my most hated object was bodied up out of the shadows before me.*” (H., p.89) Two episodes have been elaborated described by Haire-Sargeant which are quite significant in this context as they portray Heathcliff putting into repressed thoughts and emotions into actions. It began when, finding Edgar alone, Heathcliff proclaimed, “*I require that you break off relations with Cathy. If you will not do so willingly, I will force you to it.*” (H., p. 170) Firstly, in Chapter 11, Heathcliff is seen to be taking Edgar out for horse riding whereby on the bridge he had laid a trap in which Edgar would fall and get injured. The whole incident happened as he had planned but in order to gain Edgar’s trust in future, Heathcliff came forward and rescued him from falling over the bridge. The very next moment, he informs the readers that, “*The chain of painful experience I had contrived for Linton, scheduled to begin (but not to end!)*” (H., p.162) Here the sadist in Heathcliff can be clearly seen because according to Freud, “Sadism consists in exercising violence towards or power over another person, the object.” (The Unconscious, p.21) The next incident takes place in Chapter 12 which is an act beyond imagination. After attending a social gathering, Heathcliff requested to escort Edgar home. Casting little doubt on the evil intentions of Heathcliff, Edgar agreed to go along. But, upon reaching Thornfield Hall, Heathcliff turned the carriage not to the house but to the stable. It is here that he had planned his next heinous action. Forcefully, he dragged Edgar out of the carriage and imprisoned him in the small room in the stable. Edgar tried hard to escape but Heathcliff made him unconscious by thrusting a blow on his chin. Then, carefully picking up a box of “sharp-clawed” tools he worked his way. To describe it in his own words, “*I trussed him securely, wrist and ankle, to the hooks on the wall with lashings of harness, to get him in good working position and in case he should wave up betimes. Then, baring his body, I used the gelding tools to perform a very deft operation, one I had done many times with Daniel (on horses) but never*

in circumstances that required such precision of workmanship, such care in excision, such meticulous regrafting of tube, muscles and skin.”(H., p.171) This grotesque act hints at Heathcliff’s partial castration of Edgar. When Edgar came back to his senses, Heathcliff threatened him further saying, “Should you marry Catherine Earnshaw here is what I would do. I would hunt you down and eunuch you, with pleasure [...] I would repeat tonight’s operation [...] Then I would systematically dismantle your house, your wealth, your family.” (H., p.174) Undoubtedly, only a madman with no kindness in his heart could set out to do such a thing. Voicing disgust, the narrator says, “Heathcliff! Brute! Fiend! Madman!” (H., p.171) Analyzing psychologically, it can be said that Heathcliff’s violent projection is his means of revealing the pain of frustrating and humiliating experiences which he had undergone and hence kept repressed. To quote Karen Horney, “inconsistencies are as definite an indication of the presence of conflicts as a rise in body temperature is of physical disturbance” [14]. Thus, Heathcliff represents Freud’s idea of Id for his behavior is usually is governed by passion and impulse and not by logical thoughts and Edgar can stand for Super-ego.

Thus, a Freudian psychoanalytic study of Haire-Sargeant’s *H.~ The story of Heathcliff’s Journey to Wuthering Heights*, brings out the psychic imbalance of the central character and on a deeper analysis, also provides reliable information about the possible reasons of Heathcliff’s abnormal mental behavior. His repressed memories and emotions are brought to the fore, in this text. To quote Bernard Paris, “One of the primary appeals of great literature has always been its portrayal of characters [...] A psychological understanding of these characters makes them all the more fascinating.”(*Imagined Human Beings*, p.05) However, on a comparative level with *Wuthering Heights*, it would not be wrong to state that Haire-Sargeant’s Heathcliff comes across more as a demonic figure than a human. “The extremity of his behavior, the rhetoric and the violence with which he expresses his aversion”[15], makes the readers question, if not fully forget their original sympathies with the protagonist.

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