Madness of Catherine and Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*

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Abstract. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Heathcliff both possess symptoms of maniacs. Catherine went mad three times because of the emotional entanglement with Heathcliff. She became seriously ill, and finally died of mental breakdown. Heathcliff had been in a state of madness since returning back. He harassed Catherine for many times, and even dug her grave to see her after her death. He took cruel revenge on Hindley and Linton, abused Isabella, Hareton, Little Catherine, and Little Linton, and died a miserable death with "life-like gaze of exultation". Superficially, both of them go mad because they are deeply in love but not marry each other. As a matter of fact, according to Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, Catherine holds childish love for Heathcliff with the characteristics of perversion and narcissism. Catherine's madness is due to not getting out of childhood, making herself unable to be separated from Heathcliff from the personal level. According to Foucault's discourse theory, from the social level, Heathcliff's madness is the result of the power operation at that time. He is the lower class under the patriarchal society and the money-oriented society and is disciplined by that kind of society. Nelly has the power to save them, but she uses it to her own benefit and refuses to do good to him. He is bound to be expelled from the society and inevitably leads to the final tragedy. So, both of them are condemned to turn into maniacs in the end.

Keywords: Madness, Catherine, Heathcliff, *Wuthering Heights.*

1 Introduction

Emily Bronte(1818-1848), a British novelist in the 19th century, is one of the famous "Bronte sisters" of British literary history. Although the woman writer spent only 30 years in the world and then quietly left, her only novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847) has established her status in English literature and world literature history.

Wuthering Heights story synopsis: *Wuthering Heights* is a sad love story. A gypsy foundling named Heathcliff is adopted by the old master of Wuthering Heights. Later, he falls in love with Catherine, the master's daughter. Then he goes out to get rich due to shame and failure in love. At last he comes back for crazy revenge. The full novel is filled with a strong fighting spirit against oppression and striving for happiness, and always shrouded in mysterious and romantic tension. He and Catherine both have the

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features of maniacs. They may be crazy and delirious now and then. At the beginning of publishing, the novel had been regarded as a naive fantasy of a young women writer from the reality, but soon it was highly praised by the critics and was warmly welcomed by the readers. In this novel, Catherine and Heathcliff all fall into madness.

Madness is a literary term to describe someone acting out of social norms or personal character.[1] (Abdulwahab, 1) At the end of the 13th century, the word "madness" meant "mental disorder, craziness", coming from the Old English "gemædde", which meant "to lose one's mind" (often also implying excitement), and "stupid or extremely stupid". At the beginning of the 14th century, it had the meaning "to lose one's mind with excitement or enthusiasm, to be affected by uncontrollable emotions" and "to rage". Michel Foucault believes that madness is not a simple mental illness, but a construction of knowledge, the result of the intersection of history and civilization. Foucault's interpretation of madness broke through the limitations of modern psychiatry, and combined with the key words of civilization, body, society, etc., which provided a new research path for the topic of madness.

2 Catherine's Madness Caused by Childish Love and Patriarchal Society

In this novel, Catherine went through three evident madness episodes, which reveals her immaturity as well as her disciplined body by society at that time.

2.1 Catherine's Three Madness Episodes

In this novel, Catherine goes through a happy and carefree childhood stage and an anguished, miserable and short adulthood stage, finally dying of mental breakdown. Her short but struggling life witnesses three crazy acts of herself. The first insanity happened when Heathcliff, after overhearing Catherine's acceptance of Linton's proposal, stormed out angrily. Catherine lost her mind, standing in the rain, drenched, and then she fell seriously ill, running a high fever and experiencing mental agony. Although she pulled through it later, this unfortunate experience planted the seed of her future sickness. The second craziness appeared after Heathcliff returned. Catherine met him privately, which, however, was discovered by Linton. Linton accused her and demanded that she choose between him and Heathcliff. Then, Catherine went insane, locking herself in a room, refusing to eat or drink. Nelly said: "She was delirious, I became convinced by her subsequent actions and ravings."[3] (Bronte, 161)The third madness happened shortly before her death. Under Nelly's help, Heathcliff secretly visited Catherine. In front of her lover, Catherine kept saying she was dying, while both blaming and embracing Heathcliff. Even when she knew Linton was about to return, Catherine refused to let Heathcliff leave. Eventually, she fell into a coma. In a state of mental confusion, she gave birth to little Cathy and then passed away.

2.2 Deep Interpretations of Catherine's Madness

There are two reasons for her madness. One, according to Freud, she has infantile traits such as narcissism and perversion and is not mature enough to be an adult. Her childishness is incompatible with her adult status. Another reason is that she lives in a patriarchal and hierarchical social environment. She is an object of power and a victim of society.

By analysing Catherine's life, we can see that personally, her mind does not grow after marriage. Catherine's childish emotions, especially narcissism and perversion[8] (Seichepine, 209), are shown throughout the novel. She focuses on herself and wonders what provokes everyone around her to love her: "How strange! I thought, though everybody hated and despised each other, they could not avoid loving me". [3] (Bronte, 155) Furthermore, Catherine cannot choose between her love for Heathcliff and her love for Linton. She cannot make up her mind to give up either of these two men. Although finally she chose to marry Linton, this marriage did not quell her deep, strong attachment to Heathcliff. The emotion is like an undercurrent in a calm lake, surging. [6] (Pang, 20)

In what Lacan refers to as "the mirror-phase", the kid is assisted in differentiating between the "I" and the "not-I", or between self and other, by either the mirror's reflection or the reflection returned by the perception of others. For the first time, the baby sees itself as a being distinct from its mother and, as a result, as a subject. Thus, the mirror phase gives a baby a connection to reality so that it may differentiate between its inner and outside worlds. It's true that Catherine finds it difficult to handle the mirror phase[8].(Seichepine, 211) Moreover, Foucault once said that all the evolution of madness by which it expresses itself clearly is based on language[4] (97). During the raving scene she is quite horrified by the image of herself which is given back by the mirror: "And I dying! I on the brink of the grave! My God! Does he know how I'm altered?" continued she, staring at her reflection in a mirror, hanging against the opposite wall. "Is that Catherine Linton?". [3] (Bronte, 154) Later she goes still further as she no longer recognizes herself in the mirror at all; she even comes to think that someone else's face, and not her face.

Nelly also has the same idea that Catherine doesn't grow up. After Catherine calmed down, Nelly looked at her and said: "Our fiery Catherine was no better than a wailing child." [3] (Bronte, 159) Catherine's mirror is just Heathcliff and she cannot distinguish herself from Heathcliff. Thus, she cannot leave him.

When Catherine goes crazy, she seems to come back to her childhood, which manifests her true wish in her inner world. She dreams of staying at her own room at Wuthering Heights, reminiscent of the old days when she stays with Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights. She doesn't want to grow up into an adult, or she is not accustomed to becoming an adult. The discrepancy between her mind and the real world causes her great pain. She becomes anguished and can only express her true thoughts by means of craziness and delirium.

On a social level, Catherine is influenced by the patriarchal society and the money-oriented society at that time. She is disciplined by the concepts from the upper class and is forced to keep away from Heathcliff, because Heathcliff stands for lower class

with little power and a low status. She chooses to marry Linton and merges herself into an upper class with a high status and much money. But deep in her mind, she holds firm and deep love for Heathcliff and wants to stay uncivilized and natural. Although superficially she removes her savage state and accommodates to the society, her inner mind is not in line with that idea. Catherine can only retain her pursuit of freedom and individuality through madness. She is a victim of the aristocratic social system, which more reflects the tragedy of the character. [2](Cheng, 17).

3 Heathcliff's Madness Caused by Crazy Revenge Influenced by the Society

Heathcliff became mad due to deep influence of the patriarchal society and hierarchical society.

3.1 Reasons for Heathcliff's Madness

Through observing Heathcliff's life experience, his madness and insanity can be understood and justified.

Heathcliff lost his parents when he was very young, and was left alone. Thanks to old Earnshaw's help, he was brought to Earnshaw's house, and had a home ever since. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, his physiological need, which is the most basic need of a person, has just been satisfied. In the house, however, he was treated badly. He was despised and hated at first by all but old Earnshaw, even by the servants, which showed that his position was lower than that of the servants. His safety need, the second level of need, is not fulfilled. Later, Catherine showed her kindness and was willing to accompany him. At that time, his safety need and belongingness and love need are satisfied at the same time. However, when hearing Catherine accepted Hindley's proposal, his spiritual world completely collapsed and the only spiritual support fell. His esteem need is not fulfilled and the belongingness and love need he got before also disappears. He had no one to trust, so he ran away from home indignantly. Until then, Heathcliff has still not fulfilled his deficiency needs, let alone his growth needs including cognitive needs, aesthetic needs, self actualization and transcendence. As a normal person, Heathcliff doesn't have a comfortable and favorable childhood and his basic needs are not fulfilled, which should be responsible for his unsound and twisted personality. And that is also one of the reasons of his later madness.

3.2 Heathcliff's Mad Revenge Action

Heathcliff knew that the reason why he was abused by others and betrayed by his lover was that he was the lower class of the patriarchal society and hierarchical society at that time, without education, money and high status. So three years later, Heathcliff returned as a gentleman, with the characteristics of an upper class.

He boasted decent dress and manners, education and learning and a great deal of money, which also attracted Linton's sister Isabella. In Foucault's view, "Discourse,

knowledge and power are trinity: discourse is the carrier. knowledge is the image. power is the essence."[5] Power works through knowledge. For people at that time, universally recognized knowledge is the hierarchy. People all crave for money, high status and high esteem, which can decide whether they have power. Heathcliff is domesticated by the power society of the time. So he naturally tries to move from the bottom of power to the top of power by means of acquiring money and status to regain everything he deserves. But it was not that easy. When he came back, though he possessed much money, his status was not promoted in the eyes of the others. It can be seen from a scene when he came to Thrushcross Grange to meet Catherine, Linton asked her to entertain Heathcliff in the kitchen instead of the parlour. Even when he conquered Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange at the same time by the most cruel and despicable means, and became the richest man, he did not win high status and others' esteem. On the contrary, his lover suffered great mental torment and died due to him. It seems that Heathcliff upends the order of racial power at Wuthering Heights[9]. (Yu, 28) However, material wealth and high power did not bring him any satisfaction, but proved his revenge action was nothing but meaningless. He himself went crazy and mad. Heathcliff's lust for power[7] (Qian,17) finally killed himself. He said to Nelly, "My soul's bliss kills my body, but does not satisfy itself." [3] (Bronte, 422) He went to dig up Catherine's grave to see her body. he had hallucinations, saying that he was haunted by Catherine's ghost, but the ghost did not let him approach. Finally, without eating or drinking for several days, he had a serious nervous breakdown and died.

4 Their Madness Under Power Influence

According to Foucault, during the Renaissance, people support madness and treat it as a normal phenomenon, which has no clear line with reason. Pascal once famously quipped that people "are so inevitably mad that not to be mad would be to give a mad twist to madness." But later in classical age, "the mad are caged like animals". People try to escape madness and hate maniacs. In modern age, people prefer regarding madness as a sort of illness. "At the beginning of the modern age, purportedly reasonable people leave the mad to communicate with doctors through the intermediary of abstract reason. During this period, doctors either employ silence as a technique to break madness or observe the mad, rather than conversing with them." [4]((Foucault, 164) At this time, madness is treated as an avoidable and curable illness and doctors are endowed with a great power. However, Foucault claims that "psychoanalysis cannot and will never be able to hear the voices of unreason nor decipher on their own terms the signs of the insane". Because as to madness, power works in disguise of illness and medical technology and in fact do or say something to its own benefit. [4]

In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Heathcliff all wanted to talk with someone when they were in a state of insanity and delirium. Nelly has this power and should serve this kind of function, but she is not so satisfying. When Catherine murmured many illogical words and descriptions of her dream about Wuthering Heights, Nelly didn't respond her warmly and refuse to help her solve her mental struggle. She even didn't tell Linton about Catherine's condition. When Catherine was dying, Linton was

still ignorant. When Heathcliff longed to seek a person to talk about his mental misery, Nelly at first listened to him. But later, Nelly said she was scared of Heathcliff and refused to be his listener. When they are insane, Nelly tended to seek doctor's help to solve their problems, but in reality the doctor cannot understand their agony and thus cannot help them by effective communication. Foucault regarded life as the union of the body and the soul, believing that the body is subject to discipline and the soul is prone to madness. Life is the one disciplined by power and regulated by governance. [10] (Zhao, 147) Under patriarchal and hierarchical discipline, only Nelly has the ability to help them because she is the only person who knows the whole experience and understands and knows each of them well. But she refuses to do this job. At that time, for these two maniacs, she is the one who possesses the power to decide their destiny, but Nelly employs this power to her own benefit. At Thrushcross Grange, Nelly prefers Linton to Catherine because Linton has a tender and gentle personality but Catherine is hot-tempered. Nelly dislikes her and is willing to think she "acted a part of her disorder" when she loses her mind. Maybe deep in her mind, she wants to replace Catherine as the mistress of the house. As to Heathcliff, Nelly hates him to her bone because of his cruel revenge and absolutely is not willing to save him.

In that society, Catherine and Heathcliff played the role of "marginal human" [11] (Zhu, 116) and experienced self-division, which led to their tragedy.

5 Conclusion

In summary, their madness is caused by all sorts of reasons. Personally, Catherine doesn't grow up in her mind and she has the features of a baby such as narcissism and perversity. She can not distinguish herself from Heathcliff. Heathcliff doesn't have a complete and favorable childhood and he doesn't fulfill his deficiency needs, which endows him a twisted personality. Socially, they live under patriarchy and hierarchy and are influenced by them. Catherine is domesticated by the concepts of upper class and leaves her beloved Heathcliff. Heathcliff is disciplined by this idea, so he wants to use money and status to fetch what should belong to him. Moreover, their madness do not get in-time and effective help and thus leads to a tragedy. Nelly has the power, but she uses it to her own benefit and refuses to save them. Their madness is the result of operation of power, which leads them to fall victim to that society.

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