

A Comparative Study of the Protagonists in *Tom Jones* and *Wuthering Heights*

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Abstract

Traditionally, the protagonist in a novel is generally portrayed as a hero. The hero possesses all the qualities expected of a heroic character. Such a character clearly stands apart from villainous figures. However, a protagonist who lacks such goodness and idealism is considered an anti-hero in literary studies. While ideal characterization reflects moral values, the anti-hero represents a more realistic portrayal of human nature. This paper explores the contrast between these two types of protagonists in *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* and *Wuthering Heights*.

Keywords: Hero, anti-hero, idealism, realism, forgiveness, and revenge.

Objectives:

- i. To compare the characterization of the protagonists in *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* and *Wuthering Heights*.
- ii. To analyze how different social environments and upbringing influence the moral development of the protagonists.

Hypotheses:

- i. Although both protagonists share similar origins as foundlings, their environments and experiences lead them diversely.

- ii. Human character is not fixed but significantly influenced by social conditions and emotional experiences.

Methodology

The researcher has used a qualitative and analytical method for the study. He has used a comparative approach while reading the two novels *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* by Henry Fielding and *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte. He analyzes the development of the characters of the protagonists in the novels.

Introduction

This paper presents a comparative study of the protagonists, Tom Jones and Heathcliff, from two English novels. Fielding's work aligns with ideals of order and morality, while Bronte's novel embodies psychological depth. Tom Jones is portrayed as a conventional hero—good-hearted, forgiving, and morally upright despite his flaws. In contrast, Heathcliff is depicted as an anti-hero—vengeful and emotionally turbulent. Although both characters share a similar beginning as foundlings, their paths develop differently.

The Foundlings

Similarly, Tom and Heathcliff are abandoned by their parents and found by kind men. A kind-hearted man, Squire Allworthy, finds a baby in his bedroom. A lady named Jenny Jones pretends to be the servant in the house while Allworthy is away on his business. She claims the baby is hers and refuses to reveal the baby's father's name. Therefore, the baby is considered illegitimate. In reality, the mother of the baby is Allworthy's sister, Miss Allworthy (later Mrs. Blifil). As a result, Tom is considered socially inferior, though he is related by blood to a rich and respected family.

Like Tom, Heathcliff is also a foundling. There is no question of his being a legitimate or illegitimate child, but he is found alone. He appears to be a gypsy boy. A kind-

hearted man, Mr. Earnshaw, tries to find the child's parents. As he cannot find anyone to take the child, he brings him home and takes responsibility for raising him alongside his own children.

Both Adopted by Kind Men

As Mr. Allworthy cannot identify the baby's father, he adopts the child. He becomes fond of the baby and raises him with care and affection. Mr. Earnshaw takes Heathcliff with him when he finds no one willing to take him. He adopts Heathcliff despite societal prejudice against foundlings and treats him as one of his own children. Both Tom and Heathcliff are adopted by kind men who serve as their guardians and provide them with shelter and upbringing. However, they are brought up in different environments. Tom lives in an economically stable, moral family, whereas Heathcliff suffers Hindley's hostility. This difference shapes their personalities in different ways.

Both protagonists experience a mixture of love and hostility in their families. Tom Jones receives affection from Allworthy but faces jealousy and hatred from Blifil, Allworthy's nephew. Despite the adverse conditions created by Blifil, Tom remains generous and eventually forgives others. In contrast, Heathcliff experiences emotional conflict. While he shares a deep bond with Catherine Earnshaw, he faces cruelty and humiliation at the hands of Hindley. This mixture of love and hatred fosters resentment in him.

When Catherine comes to visit Mr. Earnshaw's House, Heathcliff realizes how clean Catherine is and how fine she looks. He moves away when Mr. Earnshaw insists that he shake hands with Catherine. Heathcliff says: "I shall not stand to be laughed at. I shall not bear it!" (Bronte 62). From an early age, Heathcliff is conscious of his self-esteem. He thinks his appearance contrasts with Catherine's, and the others will laugh at him for looking dirty. He is very sensitive, whereas Hindley is very insulting to him.

Paying Back to their Families

Both protagonists differ in how they respond to their upbringing. Tom Jones remains grateful to Allworthy and ultimately proves his worth through his actions. Even when wronged by Blifil, he does not seek revenge. Instead, he demonstrates forgiveness and integrity.

Eventually, a misunderstanding arises about Tom Jones. Blifil conspires to show that Tom keeps bad company, and Tom is expelled by Allworthy. He does not show resentment toward this injustice but leaves in tears because he is misunderstood. He does not think of taking revenge on Blifil. He does not blame Allworthy for believing Blifil's lies but continues to respect him. This experience does not sour his mind; instead, he remains kind-hearted. He helps Mrs. Waters and the poor Man of the Hill in their times of need. This shows that his kindness is not affected by how others treat him. When Allworthy realizes that Tom has been wronged, he punishes Blifil, and Tom reconciles with him without expecting an apology.

Tom's generosity is shown from his childhood. Tom goes with Allworthy's servant, a gamekeeper, to the farmland. Allworthy warns strictly against trespassing on neighbors' fields. The gamekeeper shoots a bird in the neighbor's field. Allworthy receives a complaint from the neighbor. The gamekeeper is destined to be punished and fired from his job. Tom, as a witness, is asked about the truth. At this, Tom lies, whereas he is not a liar. His intention is only to save the gamekeeper from the trouble. Tom gets whipped for the same reason but does not utter a word about the gamekeeper. Allworthy is wise enough to notice Tom's moral strength. He regretfully says: "I am convinced, my dear child, that my suspicions have wronged you; I am sorry that you have been so severely punished on this account." (Fielding 129).

Upon Blifil's accusation, Allworthy orders Tom to leave his house. It does not diminish the respect for Allworthy in Tom's heart. Falling on his feet, Tom says: "And I

assure you, sir, your present generosity hath left me no other concern than for the present melancholy occasion. Oh, my friend, my father!" (Fielding 301). Here, Tom can clearly say he has been wronged, but this does not mean his guardian, Allworthy, is any less generous. With the same respect for Allworthy, Tom turns away, hiding tears in his eyes. He does not even think of avenging or teaching Blifil a lesson, for causing him sorrow.

In contrast, Heathcliff shows bitterness toward his upbringing. Initially, he is treated with affection by Mr. Earnshaw, but after Earnshaw's death, he is treated cruelly by Hindley Earnshaw, who humiliates him and reduces him to a servant-like status. Heathcliff endures this for a time before seeking revenge. He devotes his life to taking revenge on those who mistreated him. He returns to Wuthering Heights with a plan to destroy the lives of those whom he believes ruined his own. He succeeds in making Hindley and Edgar Linton suffer.

He disappears from Wuthering Heights as a poor boy. However, when he reappears, he is no longer poor. He returns as a wealthy man with a plan to ruin Hindley's life. He encourages Hindley's gambling and drinking and eventually gains control of Wuthering Heights. Still unsatisfied, he targets Edgar Linton, his rival for Catherine's love. Though he does not love Linton's sister, he marries her and uses her as a tool for revenge. Linton considers Heathcliff "... a most diabolical man, delighting to wrong and ruin those he hates, if they give him the slightest opportunity" (Fielding 248). He is satisfied only after ruining his enemies and even tortures their children, Catherine and Hareton Earnshaw. His way of paying back is to inflict more suffering than he endured. Unlike Tom, he cannot forgive. On the misery and cruelty of Heathcliff, Catherine responds to him: "You are miserable, are you not? Lonely, like the devil, and envious like him? Nobody loves you— nobody will cry for you when you die!" (319)

Tom believes in the goodness of society and, even in adverse situations, seeks to prove his virtue. On the other hand, Heathcliff's mind is filled with hatred in difficult

circumstances. He finds satisfaction in vengeance, though it ultimately does not bring him peace.

Conclusion

Whatever the reason for a person's reaction, one must bear the consequences of one's actions. Tom Jones also suffers in life, yet not a trace of wickedness enters into his mind. Heathcliff, though he experiences affection from Catherine and Nelly, is unable to show goodness toward others. While Tom Jones is praiseworthy as an ideal hero, Heathcliff cannot be regarded as a heroic character in the conventional sense. However, from a realistic perspective, readers may sympathize with him, recognizing that extreme mistreatment can transform an individual into a negative figure.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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