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‘IN TIME WE HATE THAT WHICH WE OFTEN FEAR’: A READING ON THE HATED CHARACTERS IN LITERATURE

Abstract

Whatever the genre – romance, biography or fantasy – the readers are generally enticed by the characters portrayed in the stories. The impact created by the characters persists in the readers' imagination even after the perusal of the work. While the virtuous heroes with their noble actions are often applauded, the not-so-good villains continue to stay in the readers in a very perturbing groove. Two of such disturbing characters usually loathed by a legion of readers – Heathcliff and Cholly Breedlove- are taken up for study in the present paper.

Keywords : Trauma, hatred, revenge, rape, love, sex

Introduction

Time-honoured works of literature have always been witnessing the interplay of love and hate since antiquity. When poets and writers glorify the power of unyielding and constant nature of love, the power of hatred is also never to be warded off. Hatred too is a forceful emotion which is found in the very core of humanity. It exists as a primal force inexorably bound to human nature by instinct and necessity. Just as a noble hero lingers in our mind long after the story is over, so does an antagonist or rather the loathed villain remain intact in our psyche. There are certain characters who we find deliriously villainous and some others

whose occasional appearance do bother us personally but in a wrong way. However there are characters who are just universally loathed in the most vehement way.

For some of these characters, it is more or less obvious to us why they trigger intense hatred. They are pitiless and cruel to children. They scaffold innocent people for violent crimes. There are a few others for whom hatred is a little more abstract and they seem to be vexatious or awful in a way that no one can voice against them. It is usually in novels that the emotion of hate is used to create tension and distress in the plot. This paper also deals with the two popular novels and its two notorious characters that incurred the wrath of a legion of readers – Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and Cholly Breedlove in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison.

The Bronte family was a sensation in the literary pantheon with several writers of genius under one roof. The Bronte sisters- Anne, Charlotte and Emily- and their novels remain celebrated even today and they are highly regarded for their competence in expressing powerful human emotions in their characters. Their father Rev. Patrick Bronte and brother Branwell also made their own contributions. Written in the nineteenth century, both Charlotte's *Jane Eyre* and Emily's *Wuthering Heights*, are powerful enough to move the romantic sensibilities of generations of readers.

Published in 1847, *Wuthering Heights* is the only novel by Emily Bronte which she wrote under the pseudonym, Ellis Bell. The novel that revolves around the stories two families- the Earnshaws at the Heights and the refined Lintons at the Thrushcross Grange- is one of revenge and romance. The central character, Heathcliff, was brought as a foundling to the Earnshaw household by Mr. Earnshaw himself which infuriated the Earnshaw kids- Hindley and Catherine. The narrator, Nelly Dean explains to Lockwood about the little boy Heathcliff thus:

He 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, as if he has hurt himself by accident, and nobody was to blame (59).

Mr. Earnshaw's strong fondness for the fatherless child aggravated Hindley's jealousy and resentment for Heathcliff. Heathcliff was hardly given the repute of a human being by Hindley:

“Take my colt, gipsy then!” said young Earnshaw. “And I pray that he may break your neck: take him and he damned, you beggarly interloper! And wheedle my father out of all he has: only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan” (62).

The savage treatment by Hindley and his barbarous ways towards Heathcliff made his life so traumatic that the wounds inflicted haunted his mind till the end. Judith Herman in her *Trauma and Recovery* discourses about the sentiments of traumatized people:

Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly lonely, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life. Thereafter, a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds of the most abstract affiliations of the community and religion (52).

The deserted Heathcliff grew but with the contour of an absolute villain and his rivalry for Hindley also flourished along with him. But events took a different turn with Catherine. As time passed, the complex amalgam of strife and envy paved way for an alliance between Heathcliff and Catherine. But feeling rejected by Catherine, Heathcliff leaves the place to own a fortune of his own. Heathcliff returns after three years only to find that Catherine is married to Edgar Linton. Heathcliff vows revenge on all those who were responsible for his ill-fate and disaster ensues for both families.

Although Heathcliff is presented as an orphaned and innocent boy, in the course of the novel he proves himself to be an embodiment of wickedness and malice. In the initial chapters, he captivates the hearts of the readers with a poor, desolate past and the readers tend to empathize with him. Moreover, the indifferent attitude and the savage ways of treatment by the members of the Earnshaw family serve to awaken the sympathy of the readers for him. Except for Mr. Earnshaw and later Catherine, nobody in the family cares for him. Hindley calls him “fiend” and a “hellish villain”. Isabella, the daughter of Lintons and later Heathcliff’s wife, wonders if he is a man or devil. To her, he is “a monster and not a human being”. Even for his beloved, Cathy, Heathcliff is a “fierce, pitiless, wolfish man”. For Nelly Dean, the housekeeper he is a “cuckoo” and she constantly puts him in his place reminding him that he doesn’t really belong to the Earnshaw family.

The tortures meted out to Heathcliff by the Earnshaw household leads him to cultivate extreme vengeance and resentment towards his tormentors. When he grew up, he desired to don the role of an oppressor by freeing himself from oppression and humiliation. He was bent on taking revenge both on Hindley and the Lintons. He desired to work out his machinations on the children or rather the next generation of both the families. He wanted to treat their children- Hareton Earnshaw, Hindley's son and Linton Heathcliff, Hethcliff's own son by Isabella- in the same ruthless ways in which he was treated by Hindley and the Lintons. After Hindley's demise, Hareton is left under Heathcliff's care, which accords him ample space to accomplish his malicious plans:

He had the hypocrisy to represent a mourner: and previous to following with Hareton, he lifted the unfortunate child on to the table and muttered, with peculiar gusto, "Now my bonny lad, you are mine! And we'll see if one tree won't grow as crooked as another, with the same wind to twist it" (299-300).

Heathcliff couldn't endure the act of Catherine giving her hand in marriage to Edgar Linton. Heathcliff's words to Catherine, his dearest were scathing enough to wound her heart:

"Oh! You said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer- I repeat till my tongue stiffens- Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you- haunt me, then! The murdered do haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts have wandered on earth. Be with me always- take any form- drive me mad! Only do not leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I cannot live without my life! I cannot live without my soul!"(268).

He was so madly in love with Catherine that he ached for just a glimpse of her which would relieve him of his suffering. Heathcliff who believed in communication beyond the grave has clearly spent quite some time trying to get Catherine haunt him: "Come in! Come in!" he sobbed. Cathy, do come. Oh, do- once more! Oh! My heart's darling, hear me this time- Catherine, at last!"(44). Heathcliff had a feeling of being haunted by the spirit of Catherine and he indeed pined for it. Judith Herman observes: Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context rather they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images (38).

The insanities and bizarre sensations of Heathcliff pervade all through the novel. To begin with, Hindley planted the seeds of hatred in Heathcliff by humiliating him by all the

means he could. This hostility grew as they matured and spread into other characters. Even at the Thrushcross Grange he was little more than an outcaste. Such a kind of reproductive hate culminates in making Heathcliff worse than his oppressors and ultimately shapes him into the arch-villain of *Wuthering Heights* and also one of the most hated characters in literature.

Another embodiment of vice and malice, oft discussed as a hated character is Cholly Breedlove in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The Nobel winner, Toni Morrison born as Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain is the author of many acclaimed works like *Beloved* and *Song of Solomon*. Morrison, in her works, mainly focussed on the neglected history of the Afro-Americans and endeavoured to re-vitalize their identities. With her gripping stories, she could dramatize the realistic situations of the neglected Black Americans and also arrest the attention of the readers to the burning issues of racism and sexual politics. Her novels which are highly emotional are often rooted in the oral traditions of the Black American folk narratives and that helps in the re-discovery of the African-Americans and their cultural roots.

There are critics who often acclaim *The Bluest Eye* as her bravest work as it discusses many sensitive issues like menstruation, prejudices, prostitution, incest, rape and the like. Of the many wrongs delineated in the book, Morrison ruminates incest as the focal point for it is the worst of all anomalies in a society and is definitely unthinkable in any civilized society. And for this reason *The Bluest Eye* remained one among the 'bad books' for quite some time. Most of the contemporary writers of Morrison brought out the theme of Black beauty in their works while Morrison exposed a "uniquely ugly family" in her novel.

Published in 1970, *The Bluest Eye* acquaints the readers with a discomfiting account of Cholly's rape of Pecola, his daughter and this incident forms the crux of the novel. Cholly himself was abandoned as a four-day old infant when his mother left him near the railroad track wrapped in blankets. It was his aunt, Jimmy who finds the infant and raises him up and her death was indeed a blow to him. Later on in his quest for his father he painfully realizes that the man whom he believed to be his father doesn't really want him. All such dreadful incidents in his life made him a "free man" and such a kind of freedom provoked him to turn to his daughter with a lustful eye. By becoming free, Cholly opted to do as he pleased to the ones to whom he was closest. Cholly never knew the nurturing love of a parent and as he grew up he turns up with an outlet to express his love: sex.

Even his first sexual experience was a traumatic one. While having sex for the first time with a girl named Darlene, he was interrupted by two white men who wanted him to

continue the act till climax. For such an outrageous command, he was not miffed with the intruders but with Darlene: "He hated her. He almost wished he could do it- hard, long and painfully, he hated her so much"(117). This later on affected his married life in a very awful way that it was a very rude sexual encounter he had with his wife, Pauline. Cathy Caruth in her *Unclaimed Experience* observes:

In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (11).

His first experience in sex haunted his later life too where sex was just a one-sided affair and his only way to express love was sex. And his love for his daughter Pecola was also expressed not in any different way:

What could he do for her- ever? What give her? What say to her? What could a burned-out black man say to the hunched back of his eleven-year old daughter? If he looked into her face, he would see those haunted, loving eyes. The hauntedness would irritate- the love would move him to fury. How dare she love him? Hadn't she any sense at all? What was he supposed to do about that? Return it? How? (127).

Cholly recognizes his hopeless and impotent past in Pecola which causes a revulsion in him towards her. He also finds a failed parent in himself. The desolate Pecola's presence recalls him of how he never learnt to parent. Cholly, in a way tries to evade his fears by projecting them on to Pecola and in part tries to demolish those fears by raping her. The act of rape was equally devastating for both Pecola and Cholly. The moment after raping his own daughter, we see the culmination of his dual feelings of love and repulsion towards her. Both Pecola and Cholly could neither move on free from their past nor from battling their fates. Dori Laub in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* argues:

The traumatic event, although real, took the place outside the parameters of 'normal' reality such as casualty, sequence, place and time. The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after... (69).

Cholly's act of molesting his own daughter can never be pardoned. It would be absolutely unfair to Pecola to do so. *The Bluest Eye* leaves the reader asking why such a heinous crime has to happen to which Morrison perfectly comments, "since the why is too difficult to handle, one must take refuge in how" (9).

Conclusion

Both Heathcliff and Cholly Breedlove discussed in this paper are the characters whom we love to hate for their sinister and sadistic overtones. Heathcliff who deflects from being a traditional hero to one like a Byronic hero is followed by the author from his first appearance at the Heights to his death there. Cholly who defines himself as a "free man" abused his 'freedom' to an extent of raping his own daughter. Though the trauma and humiliation suffered by them at the hands of their oppressors contrived them to be embodiments of animosity and hatred, their actions are beyond justification and vindication.

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