

A Foucauldian Study of Power, Gender and Violence in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*

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Abstract: This paper studies Emily Bronte's only published novel *Wuthering Heights* from the New Historical point of view mainly based on Foucault's ideas. The focus is mostly on the dialogs and the circulating discourse throughout the novel. Foucault's concepts like gender, identity, discourse, oppression, violence, resistance and their relationship with power are discussed. Also, this article elaborates on the circulating and dominant discourses flowing in the English society of the nineteenth century such as the discourse of patriarchy and masculinity, feminism and capitalism. In this article, the attempt is ventured to highlight and demonstrate how ordinary members of oppressive institutions are victimized within the manipulative power systems, and how their individuality and freedom are ignored as the consequences of their involvement in the power relations.

Keywords: circulating discourse, gender, identity, oppression, power, resistance, sexuality, violence.

Introduction:

Inspired by Foucault's concepts of discourse and power, New Historicists attempted to show how literary works are entangled in the power relations of their time, not as secondary 'reflections' of any coherent world-view but as active participants in the continual remaking of meanings. (Drabble, 2000, p. 719).

Power is often conceptualized as the capacity of powerful agents to realize their will over the will of powerless people, and the ability to force them to do things which they do not wish to do. Power is also often seen as a possession – something which is held onto by those in power, which the powerless try to wrest from their control. Foucault criticizes this view, arguing in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1978) that power is something which is performed, something more like a strategy than a possession. Power should be seen as a verb rather than a noun, something that does something, rather than something which is or which can be held onto. Foucault puts it in the following way in *Power/Knowledge*: "Power must be analyzed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain ... Power is employed and exercised through a netlike organization ... Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (1980a, p. 98). Foucault's view of power is directly counter to the conventional Marxist or early feminist model of power which sees power simply as a form of oppression or repression, what Foucault terms the 'repressive hypotheses'. Instead, he sees power as also "at the same time productive, something which brings about forms of

behavior and events rather than simply curtailing freedom and constraining individuals". He argues in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I*: "if power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?" (1978, p. 36). Implicit in this quotation is the sense that there must be something else, apart from repression, which leads people to conform. "Sexuality is far more of a positive product of power than power was ever a repression of sexuality" (Foucault, 1980b, p. 120). Foucault believes that Language is a main source of power in various disciplines, and has been used as a tool to bring forth differences. He argues that discourse should be seen as something which constrains our perceptions. Discourse does not simply translate reality into language; rather discourse should be seen as a system which structures the way that we perceive reality. Disciplinary power is a mechanism of power that permits time and labor, rather than wealth and commodities, to be extracted from bodies. It is a type of power which is constantly exercised by means of surveillance rather than in a discontinuous manner through levies and obligations over time.. This new type of power, which can no longer be formulated in terms of sovereignty, is one of the great inventions of bourgeois society, a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism and the type of society that is its accompaniment (Foucault, 1980). Foucault is interested in examining the way that power relations produce particular types of identities. However, rather than seeing power as simply a site of oppression, or as simply determining certain identities, Foucault sees that it is in negotiation and play that identities are formed. Foucault, unlike many earlier Marxist theorists, is less concerned with focusing on oppression, but rather in foregrounding resistance to power (Thornborrow, 2002). In Volume I of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault states that 'where there is power there is resistance' (1978). Mills says Foucault goes so far as to argue that "where there is no resistance it is not, in effect, a power relation. Thus, for him, resistance is 'written in' to the exercise of power" (Mills 2005:40).

A Historical Background to Wuthering Heights: Wuthering Heights is a novel about history in some ways as much as a historical novel, and British society. The historical chronology of the novel is extremely detailed and accurate but it tells the reader more about the world of Early Victorians than the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Early Victorian was a place and time of great change and the novel reflects that, principally in the character of Heathcliff. He is possessed of a determination, love of power, great desire for individual freedom and undoubted sexual potency which lead to tremendous capacities misdirected and thwarted (Whitley, 2000). He represents an outside energy, an 'other', as Dorothy Van Ghent (1953) has put it, possibly related to the lower classes or the Industrial Revolution. Emily Bronte, succeeded in ignoring the persistent domineering male voice invading her consciousness, and managed to write as a woman, as able to reflect upon things in herself rather than answering (perhaps unconsciously) to the voice of external authority (Woolf, 1989). Emily Bronte is not writing a carnivalesque query to the patriarchal order; she is clearly working within

the terms of a language which has been defined as phallogentric. Yet she is, through a kind of irony, posing questions about patriarchal organization, and here's a sketch in some of the questions that are asked by the novel. First, who tells the story? Emily Bronte's manuscript was stolen from her and presented to a publisher by her sister, Charlotte. It was eventually published under a male pseudonym: Ellis Bell. The author is a woman, writing a private novel; she is published as a man, and acquires some fame and notoriety. She uses two narrators -- a man, Lockwood, and a woman, the nurse, Nelly Dean. The whole novel is structured through those two narrators. Lockwood is a parody of the romantic male lover. He is set up as a foppish gentleman from the town who thinks he loves all the things the romantic gentleman is supposed to love, such as solitude, or a heart of gold beneath a fierce exterior. These things are criticized from within the novel, particularly through the character of Isabella, who thinks that Heathcliff is a dark, romantic Gothic hero who will prove to be the true gentleman beneath all his cruelty (Mitchell, 2000).

Emily Bronte's implicit model for Heathcliff was the long poem *Manfred*, a self-portrait by Lord Byron in which the Romantic poet allows himself to absorb aspects of Milton's Satan. Despite Heathcliff's sadism, he is however satanic primarily in his wounded pride. His obsessive love for Catherine Earnshaw is the only principle of his being. This passion is so monumental and so destructive, of everyone, that it seems inadequate and imprecise to call it "love." To define the mutual attachment between Heathcliff and the first Catherine is a difficult enterprise but is essential to understanding *Wuthering Heights* (Bloom, 2008). One hesitates to term the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine even potentially sexual, since sexual love unites in act, but not in essence, and Catherine is capable of saying: "I am Heathcliff." As we reread *Wuthering Heights*, according to Bloom (2008), we come to see that there are two orders of reality in the novel, with only tenuous connectors between them. One is *both* social and natural, while the other is neither, being the realm of dreams, ghosts, visions, and (most importantly) the transcendental yearnings of all our childhoods. That second realm is neither psychological nor spiritual; Emily Bronte was neither a moral psychologist nor a Christian, though she was a clergyman's daughter. Doomed, like all her siblings, to an early death from tuberculosis, she learned to dwell in her deepest self, which is the theater where the drama of *Wuthering Heights* is performed. The two oldest Bronte sisters, Maria and Elizabeth, died in 1825, aged eleven and ten. Charlotte, the family survivor, died at thirty-eight, after mourning the deaths of Emily, aged thirty, her brother Branwell, at thirty-one, and Anne, at twenty-nine. *Wuthering Heights*, completed when Emily Bronte was twenty-eight, gives us a world in which everyone marries young because they seem to know that they will not live very long. Catherine Earnshaw dies at eighteen, Hindley at twenty-seven, Isabella at thirty-one, Linton Heathcliff at seventeen, Edgar at thirty-nine, and Heathcliff, probably, at about thirty-seven. At the end of the book, Hareton and the second Catherine are twenty-four and eighteen, respectively, when they happily marry. While

the urgency of all this has both its societal and its natural aspects, the larger suggestion is a kind of doom eagerness, impatient alike of society and of nature (Bloom, 2008). By the end of the first page, some characters are being deployed. Lockwood, whose name could have had various Yorkshire origins, is, as Ian Jack notes in the introduction to the Oxford 'World's Classics' *Wuthering Heights*, a Waverley figure. His function appears to be the stranger-observer, who will mediate the odd world of the Heights to the reader. As the chapter advances Emily becomes interested in his character, making him a fop, later enamoured of the young girl he meets, with a 'susceptible heart' and a good opinion of his own attractiveness. Lockwood's interest in the girl fades as the book proceeds and is not a live issue with the reader for very long (Chitman 2001: 98). As Chitman writes, Catherine and Edgar characters are taken from her earlier poetry. On the whole, Emily Brontë had a lot on her mind regarding the people, events and dates when she had been busy writing her novel.

The relationship between Gender, Identity and Power in the Novel: Brontë's Catherine's, the first and the second, are figures who subvert male structures of knowledge and action in the novel. These ambiguous women are the source of conflict for men; they threaten the fragile world of men. Catherine Earnshaw is such a conflict for Edgar Linton's masculine power and discourse and the same is true for Catherine Linton, their daughter, who takes up this strategy to dominate Linton, Heathcliff and especially Hareton's patriarchal world. In Brontë's world, power and virility reflect masculinity, money equals potency, and capitalism is more important than emotions and feelings. Violence helps certain characters retain their gender-power and, therefore, their identity. Heathcliff tries to gain power by being the master of the two houses, by suppressing Hindley, and by marrying Isabella and forcing Catherine, the junior, to marry his son, Linton. Heathcliff, from childhood, was ill-treated by the patriarchal, land-owning class and refused education. Therefore, the opposition of his energy to the listless Earnshaws and Lintons results in disharmony (Whitley, 2000). Heathcliff has considerable sexual presence: he repeatedly crosses thresholds by brute force and with phallic implements. This is contrasted both with Lockwood's possible reference masturbation, his failure with the poker and, even in his dream, his significant lack of a 'weapon'. More importantly, it is contrasted with Edgar's general limpness, for Nelly calls him a 'soft thing' and 'he is ever ready to cry if crossed'.

The marginal or secondary characters who seek support from Heathcliff, Linton, Hareton or Edgar are females like both Catherine's and Isabella. This is an indication of the dominance of patriarchal discourse flowing in the society. In this circulating discourse, women generally function as property owned and exchanged by men and the authority of the masculinist discourse. Nelly Dean is a manipulative creature who will go to considerable lengths to maintain the status quo of male authority. The first Catherine defines herself depending on Heathcliff's identity and being. Although she means to convey her utmost love toward Heathcliff, but it can also mean she doesn't have an independent identity. She says:

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... Nelly, I am Heathcliff. He's always, always in my mind: not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself, but as my own being...' (Bronte, 1992, p. 59)

Discourse, Identity and Power in the Novel: According to Foucault, power is enacted by discourse as a form of social interaction. Cathy, being tortured by her own decision to decline Heathcliff and marry Edgar, has now created a situation to bring the two males face to face to show Edgar how powerful Heathcliff is. Initially, Edgar dehumanizes Heathcliff by saying: "Your presence is a moral poison that would contaminate the most virtuous". In response to Edgar, he turns to Catherine and this way, he treats Edgar like nothing, belittling his gender, identity and power. When finally he turns to Edgar, he says: "Mr. Linton, I'm mortally sorry that you are not worth knocking down!" When Cathy sees that Edgar is too weak even to defend himself, she uses degrading words against him: "If you have not courage to attack him, make an apology, or allow yourself to be beaten." Heathcliff completes Edgar's humiliation by referring to Cathy and saying: "And that is the slaving, shivering thing you preferred to me! I would not strike him with my fist, but I'd kick him with my foot, and experience considerable satisfaction. Is he weeping, or is he going to faint for fear?" as if he is a helpless defenseless child. Here, Edgar's sexual identity and power is taken into challenge and it seems although he possesses Cathy's body, he is not capable of holding her. But Cathy chooses to be the property of their patriarchal world. By being subjugated, she gains support. Edgar is even not able to act as a guardian when his sister flees with Heathcliff: "She went of her own accord," answered the master; 'she had a right to go if she pleased. Trouble me no more about her. Hereafter she is only my sister in name; not because I disown her, but because she has disowned me" (ibid, 97). He doesn't want to be troubled about her, because he knows he cannot do anything. He has lost his dearest relation. Isabella is owned by Heathcliff now. To make things worse, Heathcliff robs Edgar of his property which means his power and identity. Then, the only thing Edgar can do, as we learn from the talk between Nelly and Heathcliff, is to put surveillance on Catherine not to talk about Heathcliff:

You say she never mentions my name, and that I am never mentioned to her. To whom should she mention me if I am a forbidden topic in the house? She thinks you are all spies for her husband. Oh, I've no doubt she's in hell among you! I guess by her silence, as much as anything, what she feels. (Bronte, 1992, p. 112)

Nelly and Lockwood are the two narrators of the story; but Lockwood has less narrative time than Nelly and he seems more passive, more receiver of information, and a surrogate reader, perhaps. Having more time for narration is considered to be a chance for gaining power, because one has logically more time to introduce and define him/herself. But the listener's status and desire to hear plays a relatively important role in discourse and power relations. This is the listener who encourages the speaker to keep talking. If the listener shows him/herself not interested in

the talk, he or she grabs the power out of the speaker's control. To see the power of discourse in imparting authority to characters in the novel, let us consider the following example. The situation is that Nelly has found about the letters Cathy has been sending to Linton. She threatens to tell her father about it, making Cathy beg her not to do that, and in this way Nelly demonstrates her authority of discourse over Cathy.

'Oh, Ellen! you have got them,' she commenced immediately, dropping on her knees, when we were enclosed alone. 'Oh, give them to me, and I'll never, never do so again! Don't tell papa. You have not told papa, Ellen? say you have not? I've been exceedingly naughty, but I won't do it any more!' ... 'If I consent to burn them, will you promise faithfully neither to send nor receive a letter again, nor a book (for I perceive you have sent him books), nor locks of hair, nor rings, nor playthings?'

'We don't send playthings,' cried Catherine, her pride overcoming her shame. 'Nor anything at all, then, my lady?' I said. 'Unless you will, here I go.' 'I promise, Ellen!' she cried, catching my dress. 'Oh, put them in the fire, do, do!' (Bronte, 1992, p. 165)

Thus, the claim that she knows about Catherine's secret, gives her power of discourse over the other. Later, Catherine seeing she cannot do anything to make Nelly approve of her reunion with Linton, uses Nelly's own words to run what she wants to:

'Oh, it will be something worse,' she said. 'And what shall I do when papa and you leave me, and I am by myself? I can't forget your words, Ellen; they are always in my ear. How life will be changed, how dreary the world will be, when papa and you are dead.' (Bronte, 1992, p. 168)

On the one hand, Cathy wants to make Nelly pity her, and on the other hand, she wants to remind her of death when she will have no power over Cathy. In the novel, there are male characters who find it hard to represent a self-made identity against women. Linton is such a character. He wants Cathy to respect his sexual identity and manhood: "But papa says you would love me better than him and all the world, if you were my wife; so I'd rather you were that", but she refuses to do that: "I should never love anybody better than papa", because she's afraid of the patriarchal world: "And people hate their wives, sometimes; but not their sisters and brothers". She doesn't see Linton as a powerful male figure who can support her. A woman's identity in a patriarchal world depends to a great extent on the male to whom she is attached. And Cathy knows she will lose her identity and status by depending on Linton. In spite of her love for him, she prefers to have him as her brother so that she wouldn't later be oppressed.

The Relationship between Wealth, power and Identity: In a capitalist system, according to Foucault, wealth and men are equally treated as capital. Heathcliff represents the bourgeois idea that everyone has to work to earn their living, but the profit goes to those who have power over the former, and this profit comes from the labor of the people from the lower-class. As Foucault believes, power can circulate through the accumulation of both capital and men. Heathcliff takes his hands on both. Regarding Hareton, Heathcliff makes him "live in his own house as

a servant" (Bronte, 1992, p. 137) and he uses Hareton's labor as well. Heathcliff's revenge on Earnshaws and Lintons may involve a pathological condition of hatred, but it is not at bottom merely neurotic. It has a moral force. For what Heathcliff does is to use against his enemies with complete ruthlessness their own weapons, to turn on them (stripped of their romantic veils) their own standards, to beat them at their own game. The weapons he uses against them are their own weapons of money and arranged marriages. He gets power over them by the classic methods of the ruling class, expropriation and property deals. He changes directly from oppressed to oppressor and his 'fleecing' of these two families can be taken as a savage parody of that fierce capitalist activity which was, even now, driving the Industrial Revolution and creating the British Empire. After gaining possession of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, now Heathcliff plans to take revenge on Hindley, because his possession of the two households has given him power and, as a capitalist, put him in a position of authority. Talking to Nelly, he gives vent to his hatred towards Hindley.

'I'm trying to settle how I shall pay Hindley back. I don't care how long I wait, if I can only do it at last. I hope he will not die before I do!' 'For shame, Heathcliff!' said I. 'It is for God to punish wicked people; we should learn to forgive.' 'No, God won't have the satisfaction that I shall,' he returned. 'I only wish I knew the best way! Let me alone, and I'll plan it out: while I'm thinking of that I don't feel pain.' (Bronte, 1992, p. 42-43)

The sense of revenge in Heathcliff is highly strong, and it means he has suffered a lot. Nelly has learned to suppress her negative feelings, because they are contemptible in the religious circulating discourse of the society. But Heathcliff wants to go beyond the borders. He strongly resists the higher suppressing forces: he tries to get and marry into the higher class; he returns a gentleman and after being informed of Cathy's marriage to Edgar, he takes revenge by marrying Isabella and torturing her, taking his son to himself and oppressing him as much as he can and using him to seduce the second Catherine and even taking control of Hareton. So, he takes both things and humans under his control as Capitalistic properties. In one part he tells the second Catherine :

'... the rest of them do earn their bread – you live on my charity! Put your trash away, and find something to do. You shall pay me for the plague of having you eternally in my sight do you hear, damnable jade?' 'I'll put my trash away, because you can make me, if I refuse,...But I'll not do anything, though you should swear your tongue out, except what I please!' (Bronte, 1992, p. 21)

Circulation of Power and Resistance in the Novel: From the very beginning, Lockwood brings forth the background for the circulation of power throughout the novel. He states:

"1801- I have just returned from a visit to my landlord- *the solitary neighbor that I shall be troubled with.*" (emp. added) (Bronte, p. 1)

This question immediately pops to the reader's mind that what such a trouble is and why it might happen. Then there is this scene of their introduction to each other. Lockwood deems himself to be higher in social rank to Heathcliff; he tries to seem like a gentleman and employs

polite and formal words and expressions, and in doing so, he attempts to get power over the *solitary* landlord. Even he calls himself 'Mr.':

'Mr. Lockwood your new tenant, sir. I do myself the honor of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you by my perseverance in soliciting the occupation Thrushcross Grange: I heard yesterday that you had had some thoughts-' 'Thrushcross Grange is my own, sir,' he interrupted, wincing. 'I should not allow anyone to inconvenience me, if I could hinder it- walk in!' (Bronte, 1992, p. 1)

As one can see, in just a few utterances, there are many words and expressions which Lockwood uses to show himself worthy of respect and tell us that he feels superior at first. They are: *Mr., I, myself, honor, express, not inconvenience you, my perseverance and occupation*. He uses a highly formal language of an educated person to make a prestigious identity for himself. From the New Historical point of view, this conversation between the two is like a homosexual attempt between two male partners to gain power over the other. There are six pronouns that Lockwood uses to refer to himself and just three which signify Heathcliff: twice more. But just soon after that, Heathcliff assures him that he himself is the sole owner of the place and nobody is so powerful to interrupt him with 'perseverance' or 'occupation' if Heathcliff wouldn't like that. Rather this is Heathcliff who interrupts Lockwood's talking. In fact, Heathcliff controls the talk; there are fewer pronouns which refer to himself in his speech, but at least all of them do so. The word that signifies Lockwood is 'anyone' which shows Heathcliff doesn't consider even an identity for Lockwood. After all he uses an *imperative* verb which *allows* Lockwood to go in. Both Lockwood and the reader understand that Heathcliff is the only master in and of the house. For Foucault where there is power, there is inevitably resistance. This creates space for individuals to contest power within a more or less open field of possibilities. Foucault did not deny the potential for power to be used oppressively, however he did argue that individuals always have agency – the capacity to act of their own volition – and as such, they possess power. In this formulation, the options for resistance and change are multiple, and often occur in micro-sites.

Cathy resists oppression from the very childhood: she throws "the Good Book" because she can't bear humiliation. She tried to dominate Joseph in her loneliness, even if not by words but via other mediums. In one of Cathy's books in the room, for instance, Lockwood observes the "rudely but powerfully sketched caricature" of Joseph. She wished to overcome the oppression she suffered from by Joseph. According to Foucault, a picture can be a statement, too (Mills 2003). So it's considered as part of the discourse. Heathcliff expects Catherine to obey him, but she remorsefully answers him and conveys the idea that he cannot treat her that way: "I'll put my trash away, because you can make me, if I refuse,...but I'll not do anything, though you should swear your tongue out, except what I please!" (1992, p.21). Heathcliff, seeing verbal threats don't work, "lifts his hand": he uses physical violence "and the speaker springs to a safer distance, obviously acquainted with its weight."

Although he shows he's superior in physical terms, but Catherine ,in answering Heathcliff rudely, is at least able to make him lose his temper, and that's a victory for her, because then she knows there is this possibility to challenge his power and dominate him in some way.

As was mentioned before, Foucault believes that power is posed on free objects. So, when there is no freedom, it's not power posed on them but violence. In Bronte's world if female characters want to show themselves powerful, they appear nasty and horrifying to the males. Males try to avoid them when they see such a thing happen, e.g. when Edgar observes how Catherine treats Nelly with violence, he gets frightened and wants to leave the room, because he's afraid of being oppressed by her later, too. Being oppressed and deprived of power by a female means sexual castration for a male. There are many scenes throughout the novel in which the second Catherine tries to get her own voice; she tries to gain masculine traits to be able to oppose the patriarchal world power and beat the men at their own games. The dialog between Catherine and Hareton is a kind of sexual mating. Instead of using harsh words, they use soothing words. Catherine leads Hareton into saying he doesn't hate her by stating something that dehumanizes Hareton if he doesn't say the reverse: "It is not I who hate you, it is you who hate me! ... You hate me as much as Mr. Heathcliff does, and more." Thus she attempts to gain power over Hareton by encouraging him to unite with her, and later she manipulates him by turning him against Heathcliff, his own father. Then, a reunion is finally achieved between the two. And this is what gives them power to oppose Heathcliff and get their identity and property back: Now Catherine has the support of Hareton, as a masculine power, and gains a voice because she knows Hareton will support her. She makes Heathcliff so angry that he has to use the imperative verbs to deprive her of power.

'If you strike me, Hareton will strike you,' she said; 'so you may as well sit down.' 'If Hareton does not turn you out of the room, I'll strike him to hell,' thundered Heathcliff. 'Damnable witch! dare you pretend to rouse him against me? Off with her!'

Do you hear? Fling her into the kitchen! I'll kill her, Ellen Dean, if you let her come into my sight again! (Bronte, 1992, p. 232)

Heathcliff's threats don't work anymore, because Catherine has the support of a man who has been raised by Heathcliff himself and learned his ways. The two have a good motivation to reunite and resist Heathcliff's oppression. This is also what makes Heathcliff resolve his own problem, and he understands in order to gain peace, he needs to reunite with Catherine, too. At last Catherine Heathcliff becomes Mrs. Catherine Earnshaw which means she gets her identity, property and thus her power back from Heathcliff. Hareton is Hindley's son, so it is the Earnshaws who rule the house eventually. On the other hand, Hareton symbolizes Heathcliff in manner. So, Catherine and Heathcliff have also reunited with each other but in new forms.

Conclusion: Wuthering Heights is characterized by power relations which are demonstrated through various speech acts such as threats, flattery, mockery, belittling, revenge and much more. As was

demonstrated, different subjects from different social and economical classes fall prey to these power relations and then make a struggle to resist them. In other words the circulation of power in the network of the relationships among the characters of the novel is shown through circulating discourse, gender, sexuality, violence, oppression and resistance to it.

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