

## Forbidden passion in The Lover and Wuthering Heights

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### Abstract:

*The key to understanding the romance between Catherine and Heathcliff is its obsessive and all consuming nature, a ferocity of desire that exceeds even the realm of the sexual, it is a profoundly metaphysical longing in which Catherine cannot conceive of herself without her metaphysical Other Heathcliff, they are two parts of a whole as Catherine declares that "I am Heathcliff". Life without him is futile and meaningless because she is only completed as a human being in and through her existence with Heathcliff. While Heathcliff is dark, destructive and brutal, one is brought to admire the intensity of his desire for Catherine as an all consuming passion that will haunt him throughout his life and bring him to long to be reunited with Catherine in death. The Lover is a book about a teenage girl who was physically and emotionally abused by her mother and elder brother. She felt unable to control her predicament. She sought solace and control through her passionate affair with a wealthy Chinese man from Cholon. The affair is tragic from the beginning because of the cross-cultural battle experienced by the two lovers. On one hand, there was the French social restrictions about relationships with the "inferior" race of Vietnamese and the Chinese. On the other hand, it was about the Chinese tradition of arranged marriages.*

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The Lover is a book about a teenage girl who was physically and emotionally abused by her mother and elder brother. She felt unable to control her predicament. She sought solace and control through her passionate affair with a wealthy Chinese man from Cholon. The affair is tragic from the beginning because of the cross-cultural battle experienced by the two lovers. On one hand, there was the French social restrictions about relationships with the "inferior" race of Vietnamese and the Chinese. On the other hand, it was about the Chinese tradition of arranged marriages. The question is: Did she eventually love him? Here are the words of Duras: "Among all the other nights upon nights, the girl had spent that one on the boat....when it happened, the burst of Chopin.... There wasn't a breath of wind and the music spread all over the dark boat, like a heavenly injunction whose import was unknown, like an order from God whose meaning was inscrutable. And the girl started up as if to go and kill herself in her turn, throw herself in her turn into the sea, and afterwards, she wept because she thought of the man from Cholon and suddenly she wasn't sure she hadn't loved him with a love she hadn't seen because it had lost itself in the affair like water in (the) sand and she rediscovered it only now, through this moment of music....."

The Chinaman has the advantage of being older, male, and wealthy, but he is Chinese -- and she is white. He has "lived it

up" in Paris, where he had many liaisons. He is an expert at lovemaking. But he is also vulnerable as an only child, orphaned by his mother, dominated by his father. The Chinaman uses love and lovemaking to fight against his insecurity. He is the archetypal romantic lover, talking to her of love, death, and eternity. His love, while passion-filled and pleasurable, is also a torture and physical torment. He is not at all the dominant, forceful seducer whom she desires. Perhaps because he is racially inferior.

By contrast, we know the feelings of the girl, even though time has certainly altered her memories. Right from the start, the girl refuses to use the language of love, denying the romantic concept of being his only love. The girl's desire for the Chinaman's body is firmly grounded in sensuality as well as in curiosity, but the first appeal she feels upon meeting him on the ferry is for his wealth, his luxurious car, his diamond ring. However, as she sails back to France, we learn that she comes to the realization that she may have loved him all along.

As the affair progresses, other figures creep into the sexual situation :the young brother, the older brother, her friend Helen, and of course, her mother. There is a mother-daughter love/hate relationship. Duras depicts her mother as an unhappy, driven woman. She admires her mother's quality of perseverance, yet Duras cannot forgive her mother for the life of poverty and degradation, nor for her mother's excessive love for her oldest son and apparent failure to love her two younger children.

Duras cannot forgive her mother's opposition to her becoming a writer. With her lovemaking, the girl experiences a

triumphant sense of separation from and superiority over her mother. She is trying to eradicate the mother, to escape the stranglehold of their mutual hatred. The daughter's drive toward the lover, toward social disgrace and reputation, without understanding it herself, is to get revenge on the mother.

The girls' love affair with a Chinese man is also a giant step toward her freedom from the tyranny of her elder brother. It is somewhat ironical that the older brother's gambling, drug-addiction, and social marginalization are mirrored in the way her lover spends his days gambling and smoking opium.

Finally, there is an undercurrent theme which runs throughout the book, which is that of boundaries and borders. The film opens with a ferry ride across the Mekong and ends with an ocean crossing, signaling the constant crossing of frontiers and borders: geographic of course, but also racial, cultural, and sexual. These are confronted and sometimes dissolved as the poor white girl of French parentage meets her wealthy Chinese lover in the Cholon, the ill-repute Chinese district of Saigon. She, a white girl, was raised among natives, almost as a native. He is a native who experienced the western culture and somehow longs for it.

The girl is unable to treat the Chinaman with even courtesy when she is with her brothers because he is Chinese, not white. The book is thus about the inability to transcend racial stereotypes in love, however materially superior, the Chinaman by virtue of his race is deemed her inferior because of the colonial dominance of the west in history. The Chinaman will never be worthy of her by virtue of his apparent racial

inferiority in world history. The Chinaman does not escape colonial violence thus although he is wealthier than her.

Wuthering Heights may be conceived as a tale in which the passion is of a metaphysical force, where Catherine declares that “I am Heathcliff” she may be construed as declaring she is his metaphysical complementary or opposite, they are complementary as male and female, light and dark, civilized and savage, property-bound and dispossessed. Indeed their passion may be described as transcendental and ideal, something which exceeds the worldly and the necessities of class propriety and sexual union. Catherine marries Edgar Linton because it is the proper and worldly thing to do as a woman of her time, to marry a man with good looks and an inheritance, but in so doing she represses her true passion for Heathcliff, her ideal Other, whom she has been inseparable from since childhood. Catherine and Heathcliff are thus depicted as metaphysical contraries or opposites who find fulfilment in their complementary polarity, indeed, metaphysical opposites such as light and dark have no meaning outside their relation to each other, light gains its definition on through its distinction from darkness and vice versa, hence Catherine and Heathcliff are metaphysical contraries who are realized in wholeness only in and through each other as they derive meaning from life only in relation to each Other as the metaphysical opposite which forms a complementary whole.

From the beginning Heathcliff is depicted as wholly Other. Originating from unknown and gypsy lineage Heathcliff is frequently associated with the devil and the demonic. To the end as Charlotte Bronte puts

it, Heathcliff is unredeemed. Indeed the bitterness with which Heathcliff exacts his revenge on Catherine for marrying Edgar Linton and destroys her confirms this. Their passion is thus fiery but also destructive, both Heathcliff and Catherine are destroyed by their obsessive passion for each other and can find peace and reunification only in death. One critic has described *Wuthering Heights* as a tale which unfolds entirely in hell, and indeed, the darkness, violence, pathology, extremes of hatred and revenge seems to confirm this view. Heathcliff's attraction as a tragic hero is precisely this daemonic nature of hellish extremes and fiery passion that sets him in stark contrast with the bland and cowardly Edgar Linton. Raised in luxury and comfort, Edgar Linton evinces none of the strength and intensity of Heathcliff, which is probably what draws Catherine to him as the far more masculine and powerful of the two. The lure of Heathcliff is the lure of that which is forbidden and repressed, pure sin and desire, in Freudian terms Heathcliff is pure id, representing the darker repressed sensual desires of human nature that the ego keeps in check. It is this darkness, sinful and sensual nature that draws women to Heathcliff as he comes across as powerful, masculine and sensual as a result, while Heathcliff is demonic and evil this proves to be his attraction, as Edgar Linton seems sterile and effeminate in comparison to Heathcliff.

In creating an attractive demonic figure in Heathcliff Emily Bronte seems to imply that evil, passion, destruction, extremes of love and hate exist on a plane of greater depth than the good. In so doing she has created a character akin to Milton's Satan and Shakespeare's Macbeth. Yet while romanticizing evil Emily does not shy away from exposing its destructive nature.



Indeed it is his obsessive passion and revenge of Catherine that kills her and destroys the Linton household while he usurps the property of the Lintons and the Earnshaws. Evil is shown to be a destructive force which asserts itself over goodness and usurps its rights, but which dissipates in the end as Heathcliff fails to thwart the romance of Cathy and Hareton Earnshaw after causing the death and broken romance of Linton Heathcliff. In the end Heathcliff is unable to prevent Hareton Earnshaw from inheriting Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange through his death. Thus while evil triumphs and oppresses the good for a while, its power dissipates and Heathcliff's revenge is thwarted as he is destroyed by his own actions and has destroyed his love object Catherine in the process.

The demonic Heathcliff is thus depicted as seductive but also destructive, indeed he has singularly usurped the properties of the Earnshaws and Lintons and wreaked destruction on both families but has in no way redeemed his own 'selfish, Unchristian life' as Nelly puts it. Yet the universe of *Wuthering Heights* is not distinctly Christian though it does subscribe to a belief in the afterlife as Heathcliff believes, as Catherine does that they will be reunited in death. The intensity of the passion in particular, is what sets *Wuthering Heights* apart from other romances. Indeed what sets *Wuthering Heights* apart from the run of the mill romance is the height and depth as well as the intensity of the passion that is depicted, where Catherine declares she and Heathcliff are the same, this implies that they are parts of an organic whole and are only made complete in and through each other, as we raised earlier in the idea of Heathcliff and Catherine being metaphysical contraries who are fulfilled and completed

only in and through each other's existence. The stereotype and cliché of soulmates who fulfil each other's being comes to mind, but it is the ferocity of desire and the utter dependency of realizing a meaningful existence only in and through each other that sets this romance apart. Indeed the peculiar nature of the romance is that it is ideal and transcendent without the usual needs of other romances, such as class equality and sexual consummation, it transcends sexuality and class, it is of a primal and fiery nature that hearkens back to Cathy and Heathcliff being childhood partners and as such lovers for life in a peculiar all consuming passion which haunts both of them throughout their lives.

Emily Bronte as such was not writing a romance in the genre of Austen or her own sister Charlotte Bronte with concerns of social mobility and class issues or even gender inequality being at the forefront of her concerns, the romance she conceives is of a grander, transcendental and metaphysical nature, the idea of the self being fulfilled in existence only in and through another being, the self realizing itself only in embracing alterity and difference through another being to become one and the same. The immortality and intensity of the passion between Heathcliff and Catherine is what stands out, and the tragedy of doomed and forbidden desire for that which is dark, evil, sinful and degrading in the manner of Heathcliff brings out existentialist depths to this romance which is far from Austen's comedy of manners or even Charlotte Bronte's notions of genteel romance. Heathcliff and Cathy cannot conceive of a life without each other, it is this metaphysical complementarity which the novel highlights and the fact that their respective selves can only be realized in and

through each other, a longing that can only be realized in death since there are so many worldly and practical obstacles to them being with each other in their mortal lives.

The passion of Catherine and Heathcliff is thus a transcendent and otherworldly passion that exceeds the word of the normal, it transcends moral, physical and sexual limits through its intensity and ferocity of the ardour they experience for each other. Indeed it is Heathcliff's obsessive love for Catherine that will drive him to exact revenge on her and her family after losing her to Edgar Linton in marriage, to be reunited with her in a mystical and metaphysical manner when he commands that he is buried with Catherine and is certain of their meeting in the afterlife. Their passion thus exceeds the world of the physical, temporal and moral, it is class boundaries that kept them apart in their lifetime but all this is duly transcended when Catherine longs for her childhood flame Heathcliff after he returns with a fortune and groomed. Their passion exists on a metaphysical plane that exceeds the worldly and temporal, and can only be consummated in the afterlife as there are so many obstacles to them being together in their worldly lives. The key to understanding the romance between Catherine and Heathcliff is its obsessive and all consuming nature, a ferocity of desire that exceeds even the realm of the sexual, it is a profoundly

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metaphysical longing in which Catherine cannot conceive of herself without her metaphysical Other Heathcliff, they are two parts of a whole as Catherine declares that "I am Heathcliff". Life without him is futile and meaningless because she is only completed as a human being in and through her existence with Heathcliff. While Heathcliff is dark, destructive and brutal, one is brought to admire the intensity of his desire for Catherine as an all consuming passion that will haunt him throughout his life and bring him to long to be reunited with Catherine in death. The single-mindedness of Heathcliff's pursuit of Catherine, its unrelenting and forceful nature, being drive by a pure metaphysical longing that exceeds the physical and temporal, is what differentiates the romance of *Wuthering Heights* from Austen's comedy of manners and Charlotte Bronte's genteel romance. It is the sheer intensity and ferocity of desire and a longing that exceeds the realm of the worldly and temporal which is what distinguishes *Wuthering Heights* from the more mundane social climbing romances of Austen and Charlotte Bronte. This is seen through the pure metaphysical nature of its conception of love which is seen to exist on an otherworldly plane which exceeds the physical, temporal and sexual, it is literally a longing unto death which brings the metaphysical opposites Catherine and Heathcliff together.