

The Opposition and Integration between Civilization and Nature

—Analysis of *Wuthering Heights* from the Perspective of Eco-Criticism

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Abstract

Eco-criticism offers a new perspective for us to study *Wuthering Heights*. In *Wuthering Heights*, the place of *Wuthering Heights* and the residents are the representatives of nature, while the place of Thrushcross Grange and the residents are the spokesmen of civilization. The history of the changing relationship between the human beings and the nature is reflected in the relationships of the main characters in *Wuthering Heights*. Long ago the human beings lived in awe of the nature and admired it and then they exploited the nature excessively. At last they return to respect the nature and form a harmonious relationship between the human beings and the nature under the guidance of the eco-ethic. With the deterioration of the environment, the relationship between the human beings and the nature reflected in *Wuthering Heights* drives the modern people to think deeply.

Keywords

Nature, Civilization, Nature, *Wuthering Heights*, Thrushcross Grange

1. Introduction

Wuthering Heights published in 1847 is the only novel of Emily Bronte. The novel received a universal cold acceptance and severe derogation at its first appearance, but in the 20th century, there appeared “a tide of Emily”. Many experts and critics analyzed *Wuthering Heights* from various perspectives. English critic, Cecil, regarded Emily was a mysterious person. Keitel thought that *Wuthering Heights* was a good theme of class struggling theory. And Virginia Woolf viewed *Wuthering Heights* as a more complicated novel than *Jane Eyre* (Yang, 1983). *Wuthering Heights* is a profound novel and it reveals the changing relationships between human beings and the

nature from people's worship of nature, reverence for nature to excessive exploitation of nature to respect for nature and the ecological belief of harmonious relationship between human beings and nature. It is an eternal topic that how nature gets along with civilization in the long human beings history. And it is also a core topic in ecology literature. So, *Wuthering Heights* is analyzed from the perspective of ecology to enhance people's ecological consciousness and to warn people to protect nature and to be friendly with nature. First, the paper conveys *Wuthering Heights* and the residents in it are the representatives of nature, while Thrushcross Grange and the residents in it symbolize civilization. Later, we make a comparative analysis between the relationships of characters in *Wuthering Heights* and the changing relationships between nature and human beings to show the opposition and integration between civilization and nature.

Most experts focus on such points as revenge, love, language, etc. (Tang, 2008), though some experts have analyzed *Wuthering Heights* from the perspective of eco-feminism (Zhou, 2013) and Emily Bronte's ecological consciousness (Huang, 2014), while there are few people to see it in terms of the relationship between civilization and nature.

2. Nature—*Wuthering Heights* and the Residents in It

2.1. The Residence of Nature—*Wuthering Heights*

At the beginning of the novel, readers can feel the smell of strong wildness. Lockwood describes it like this “‘Wuthering’ being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather... one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge... as if craving alms of the sun” (Bronte, 2010). A rough and wild picture comes into the paper and appears before the readers.

When spring is coming or the sun appears after a long rainy days, wonderful music performed by nature will fill the air in *Wuthering Heights*. “Both the valley and the stream are filled with gurgling and melodious water, which is the wonderful sounds of nature before the summer leaves rustling” (Bronte, 2010).

The residents of *Wuthering Heights* rigidly observe the life style of working at the sunrise and returning at the sunset. They have a close relationship with the nature. Equal and intimate relationship can be observed especially when old Shawn is alive. “yet it was not cold, and we were all together—I, a little removed from the hearth, busy at my knitting, and Joseph reading his Bible near the table (for the servants generally sat in the house then, after their work was done)” (Bronte, 2010). This is a harmonious and wonderful picture in the hugs of nature.

2.2. The Son of Nature—Young Catherine and Heathcliff

The characteristics of Catherine and Heathcliff are rough, grumpy and unruly but they are energetic, passionate and enthusiastic. The most enjoyable thing for both of them is to play in nature and they are the real children of nature. The wind roaring and cliff which is not suitable for survival in the eyes of civilized people are paradise for Catherine and Heathcliff.

Catherine and Heathcliff love nature and respect for freedom. Whenever they feel upset or there is a conflict with others, they will go to the wilderness, enjoy the embrace of nature, talk to the nature and get consolation. In nature, they will never feel hungry or tired. They are like angels, breathing the fresh air greedily, enjoying the beautiful wild flowers, carefree and relaxed in the embrace of nature. Freedom and comfort are filled with their hearts. Wildness makes them forget to return home and they are willing to enjoy it regardless of a severe punishment. In the novel, Dean said: “But it was one of their chief amusements to run away to the moors in the morning and remain there all day, and the after punishment grew a mere thing to laugh at” (Bronte, 2010).

3. Civilization—Thrushcross Grange and the Residents in It

3.1. The Residence of Civilization

“Ah! It was beautiful—a splendid place carpeted with crimson, and crimson—covered chairs and tables, and a pure white ceiling bordered by gold, a shower of glass—drops hanging in silver chains from the centre, and shimmering with little soft tapers” (Bronte, 2010). The first description of Thrushcross Grange is out of young Heathcliff. And the description includes such words as gold and silver which modern civilized people are interested and love. From the description, we can also discern that the decoration of Thrushcross Grange matches the

taste of the modern people-luxury.

3.2. The Spokesmen of Civilization—Edgar Linton and His Family Members

“Isabella—I believe she is eleven, a year younger than Cathy—lay screaming at the farther end of the room... Edgar stood on the hearth weeping silently... from their mutual accusations, we understood they had nearly pulled in two between them” (Bronte, 2010). There is a great difference between the description of *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange. In Thrushcross Grange, although Edgar and Isabella are brother and sister, they are weeping and screaming respectively, accusing each other and the distance between them are the whole room. From the behaviors of Edgar and Isabella and the special distance between them the readers are easy to feel the alienation of civilized people.

The residents in Thrushcross Grange are elegant, delicate and frail. Dean remembered that the voice of Edgar is low and gentle. The death of Old Linton and his wife is a good proof for their fragile body. Because of Catherine’s illness, old Mrs. Linton insisted on conveying Catherine to Thrushcross Grange. Unfortunately, she and her husband both took the fever, and died.

Catherine and Heathcliff are rough, rude and carefree and they are the children of nature. While Edgar and Isabella are gentle, delicate and fragile and they are the representative of civilized people.

4. The Opposition and Integration of Civilization and Nature

Wuthering Heights is the symbol of nature, and it is exposed to the nature and enjoys in the nature. The residents in it are rough, rude, unruly but energetic, vigorous and enthusiastic. On the contrary, Thrushcross Grange is the symbol of civilization and it is filled with fragility and quietness. The residents in it are gentle, fragile, rich and snobbish. Catherine destroys the balance and independence between *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange, especially after her marriage with Edgar. Catherine’s marriage, the relationship between Heathcliff and Catherine and the relationship between Catherine and Edgar show, to some extent, the relationship between human beings and nature in the long history (Table 1).

Young Heathcliff and Catherine enter into Thrushcross Grange by chance, and thus they destroyed the balance and independence of *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange and the life style of their residents. Great changes happen in Catherine after her return from Thrushcross Grange. Obviously, it is the first conflict between civilization and nature. Later, Catherine becomes the wife of Edgar, who is the representative of civilization. After getting married, Catherine seems to earn the civilized behaviors and roughness and rudeness are far away from her. A happy and harmonious picture appears in Thrushcross Grange. This picture is the same as the situation of the beginning of the invention of modern technology. People thought they conquered nature, they grasped nature and they are the owner of nature. But very soon, Heathcliff returns. He returns with strong revenge. As a result, Catherine dies because she is not able to deal with the triangle relationship among she and Heathcliff and Edgar. After Catherine, the representative of nature, dies, Edgar, the spokesman of civilization, changes too. He becomes upset, and he is always in a low mood and he quits a lot of social roles. Catherine’s death, Heathcliff’s revenge and Edgar’s tortures reveal human beings are not really able to conquer nature. The

Table 1. The relationship between human beings and nature is exposed in the relationships of characters in *Wuthering Heights*.

The relationships of the main characters represented nature and civilization	The relationship between nature and civilization in the history
Young Catherine, Heathcliff, Edgar and Isabella live happily in their own residence respectively.	Before the invention of modern technology, people respect for the nature, obey the nature and they run on their own orbit respectively.
Catherine, the representative of nature, seems to earn the civilized behavior after she got married with Edgar, the spokesman of civilization.	At the beginning of the invention of modern technology, people exploit nature excessively and people seems to be the winner.
Heathcliff’s maddy revenge for Catherine, Edgar and Isabella after his return.	People’s excessively exploitation of nature destroys the balance and ecological imbalance results in great natural disasters.
The marriage of little Catherine and Hareton.	The human beings and nature tend to be a harmonious relationship.

fact is the transitory and seeming victory is at the expense of destroying the balance between human beings and nature.

Little Catherine is brought up by his father, Edgar Linton, who is the representative of civilization, so little Catherine is the spokesman of the new generation of civilization. At the end of the novel, the marriage of little Catherine and Hareton is the integration of civilization and nature and it predicts there will be a harmonious relationship between human beings and nature.

5. Enlightenment

With the fast development of science and technology, people exploit nature excessively and take from nature crazily. People try their best to meet their increasing material requirement by using science and technology, which outstrips available resources. As a result, a series of problems of environmental pollution and ecological imbalance appear (Lu, 2000). Such problems as land desertification, grassland degradation and soil erosion are especially serious. Meanwhile, many important resources and energies like soil, forest, water and mineral are also in serious shortage. Furthermore, the deterioration of ecological environment has been retarding economic sustainable development. This situation is the same as the situation of the main characters in *Wuthering Heights*. Heathcliff, the representative of nature takes on his crazy revenge on Catherine and Edgar, the spokesman of civilization after his return.

Nowadays, people have to face up the current ecological problems and think about how to get along with nature. Gradually, people begin to realize that they are not able to conquer nature and they are not the owner of nature. The only right and proper way is to utilize and develop nature properly and reasonably. At the end of the novel, little Catherine, the new representative of civilization, gets married with Hareton, the spokesman of nature, which reveals the new relationship of modern people and nature. People start to respect nature, protect nature and learn to set up a good relationship with nature. Only in this way can the society move forward healthily.

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