

Analysis of the Characters in Wuthering Heights by Freud's Structural Theory of Personality

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Abstract

Wuthering Heights is a classic British literary work written by Emily Bronte, and this paper aims to analyze the main characters in the work using Freud's structural theory of personality, which can reveal the complex psychological activities and behavior motives of the characters. In this novel, Heathcliff's wild and revengeful behaviors reflect the id impulses, driven by primitive desires and revenge mentality; Catherine's inner struggle and conflicting behaviors reflect the ego in reconciling reality and desire; Edgar Linton's behaviors, representing moral and social norms, show the regulatory power of the superego in individual behavior. This analysis deepens our understanding of the novel's characters while highlighting the value of Freud's theory in literary criticism.

1. Introduction

1.1 An Introduction to Emily Bronte and Wuthering Heights

Emily Bronte was a remarkable female writer of the 19th century in Britain, who left behind her only novel, "Wuthering Heights," during her short life. The novel has been listed as a world classic for its enduring appeal and wide popularity, solidifying the author's place in both British literary history and world literature. Emily Bronte was born in 1818 and was a member of the Bronte family, which was a prominent literary family in British history, including her sister Charlotte Bronte and Anne Bronte. The three sisters were all famous for their literary works. Emily's novel was set in Wuthering Heights and told the tragic life story of the Gypsy orphan Heathcliff. Heathcliff was adopted by the elder Mr. Earnshaw, the owner of Wuthering Heights, but was constantly bullied by his son Hindley. However, Catherine fell in love with him. After Mr. Earnshaw died, Heathcliff could no longer bear being treated as a slave by Hindley and left

Wuthering Heights to seek wealth elsewhere. And then Catherine married Mr. Linton of Thrushcross Grange. After returning rich and powerful, Heathcliff used every means to take revenge on Hindley and Linton, trying to seize the property of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Once his goal was achieved, Heathcliff realized his mistake and fell into deep remorse, ultimately leading to his death. This novel, with its bizarre plot, was once criticized by critics as the author's unrealistic description. However, in the later era, its unique narrative style, profound character description and exploration of themes such as love and family were widespread acclaimed.

1.2 Thesis Statements

This thesis attempts to use Freud's structural theory of personality to analyse the main characters in Wuthering Heights. Freud's structural theory of personality provides us with a unique perspective to deeply explore and analyze the characters in literary works. This theory divides personality into three zones: the id, the ego and the superego, each of which plays a different role in an individual's psychological activities. The id represents primitive impulses and desires, seeking immediate satisfaction; the ego serves as a mediator, balancing the id's desires with the possibility of reality; The superego represents internalized social norms and moral standards that judge and guide individual behavior. The theory is particularly applicable in Emily Bronte's classic work called Wuthering Heights. The novel's main characters including Heathcliff, Catherine and Edgar Linton exhibit many aspects of Freud's structural theory of personality. By analyzing characters through this theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of their motivations and how these motivations drive the development of the novel's plot. This article will delve into the characters of Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar Linton in Wuthering Heights. By analyzing their id, ego, and superego, we will reveal the complex relationships and motivations among the characters and provide readers with a new understanding of this literary work.

2. The Specific Embodiment of the Id--Heathcliff

The most basic layer of the personality structure is the id, which is innate and the most primitive part, a kind of innate instinctual impulse. It is chaotic and irrational, blindly seeking satisfaction and outlet. The only function of the id is to directly release psychological energy or reduce tension, and thus get the satisfaction of happiness. It has no sense of right and wrong in its demand for satisfaction, and has no idea what is good or bad, or what is morality. The id is driven by the pleasure principle. "It seems that our entire psychological activity is about making a decision to beg for pleasure and avoid pain, and is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle." Freud said(Che, 2006).

2.1 The Early Manifestation of Heathcliff's Latent Id

Heathcliff is the embodiment of instinct and desire, symbolizing the id. He is a savage untamed brute, uncultured and uncivilized, a mere wilderness of thorns and stones(Bronte, 1995). "Heath" is a plant full of thorns on the moor, while "cliff" means steep cliff. The male protagonist's such name also implies his innate dark nature and the negative impact he will have on other characters later. He was originally a malnourished orphan under six years old on the street of Liverpool, but kind-hearted Mr. Earnshaw took him to Wuthering Heights. However, he was not warmly welcomed by the family, and instead, he was treated as an outsider and constantly blamed. Hindley thought he had stolen the love that Mr. Earnshaw had for him. Hindley despised Heathcliff and sometimes even came to blow with him. No matter how Hindley bullied him, Heathcliff endured it with clenched fists. Meanwhile, Heathcliff's character was being twisted.

Heathcliff knew that he could not change his current situation, but he did not forget his pain and was waiting for an opportunity to take revenge. He wanted all those who had made him miserable to pay a terrible price. Heathcliff allowed his instincts to completely take control of him, allowing the element of darkness to accumulate recklessly, because he wanted revenge. His most primitive instinct was to make those who had hurt him suffer the same punishment, and he did not want to forgive. He showed no mercy or affection to anyone, including even his own son, wife, and the descendants of Mr. Earnshaw. His love and hatred were both so intense and calculated, and he never missed an opportunity for revenge. This was actually the manifestation of his most primitive desire---id.

2.2 Heathcliff's Obsessive Love for Catherine

Heathcliff displayed an extreme, almost possessive love for Catherine. This relationship could be seen as a direct expression of Heathcliff's id, as his emotions and actions were often driven by original passions and desires rather than rational considerations or social expectations(Ma, 2015). Catherine's love had always been Heathcliff's comfort and hope. The kind of force kept him self-aware. He had believed that love could be a permanent haven for each other, but when Catherine spent several weeks at the Linton family, the little girl who used to play wildly with him was gone. When she returned to Wuthering Heights, she was dressed in elegant clothes and behaved with propriety, which made the slovenly Heathcliff feel ashamed and felt an unbridgeable gap between them. Until he heard the woman he loved saying that marrying him would be a disgrace, the only force that restrained his resentment disappeared, and the pain turned into sin, the accumulated conflicts exploded instantly, plunging him into the abyss of self-expression. Since Catherine underwent her noble transformation, Heathcliff became even more self-abased; Hindley constantly suppressed his pursuit of Catherine, forbidding them from marrying. After Catherine even decided to marry Edgar Linton, these actions led him into a state of painful desperation(Xing, 2019). It can be seen that Heathcliff had become a vengeful avenger driven by the id after experiencing the betrayal of his beloved. He at this time was completely under the control of a primitive, irrational id. Eventually, Catherine's death did not bring him reconciliation or forgiveness, but tore his spirit apart, leaving him immersed in grief and unable to extricate himself. He believed that eternal love was the only happiness in life. Unfortunately, it was an unattainable love, and his unyielding devotion to this unattainable love testified to his unwillingness to compromise on love.

2.3 Heathcliff's Insane Actions of Revenge

Heathcliff's insane actions of revenge was also seen as driven by the id, reflecting his deep primitive impulses and aggressive desires(Ma, 2014). Three years later, Heathcliff returned wealthy, thus beginning his journey of revenge and yearning for the satisfaction of his desires. On the one hand, Heathcliff used Hindley's alcoholism and fondness for gambling as the clever means to seize most of his property and take control of Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff used flattery to deceive Isabella, making her fall in love with him. This behavior not only caused great harm to Edgar, who had always looked down upon Heathcliff, but also gave Heathcliff legal control over Edgar's family property, becoming a powerful guarantee for Heathcliff's true control over Thrushcross Grange later on. On the other hand, for his beloved Catherine, although Heathcliff's love was insane, he could not forgive or understand Catherine's belittling and betrayal of him. After Catherine's death, Heathcliff carried out his insane acts of revenge even more recklessly. He made Hindley's son Hareton his slave, and took revenge on Hareton as Hindley had done on himself. He used his own son Little Linton, as an instrument of revenge, and he lured and imprisoned little Kitty. All of which were his way of striking back at the world that had treated him unfairly. This series of revenge presented the reader with a crazy dark character Heathcliff,

who was completely dominated by his own id and is not constrained by morality at all. He was filled with the sentiment of hatred, and human values about "duty", "fraternity", "mercy" were his extreme aversion. As Freud described it, all his actions were governed by a distorted soul for the pleasure of human id. This pattern of id-driven behaviors showed the readers the devastating consequences that can occur when primitive impulses took control of a person's behavior.

2.4 Heathcliff's Depressive and Extreme Death

Heathcliff's vengeful behavior led to his physical and mental isolation, which could be seen as a self-destructive tendency driven by the id (Yin, 2014). Heathcliff's violent revenge had been achieved. It had been thought that all this would satisfy the fire of revenge that he could not extinguish for a long time, but the dull sadness that followed proved that he could not free himself from his love for Catherine after all. The success of revenge did not achieve the purpose of id, thus showing that wealth and status could not satisfy the id needs of Heathcliff. Furthermore, he suddenly realized that all the brutal actions he committed to acquire property and seek vengeance upon two vulnerable young children had become devoid of meaning. The specter of death loomed over him as he endured four days without sustenance or hydration, succumbing to extreme mental anguish and an overwhelming yearning for Catherine. The deranged pursuit of retribution had resulted in the gradual demise of those he despised and the attainment of coveted possessions. On the contrary, in his final moments, he experienced a sudden epiphany that rendered any further purposeless destruction undesirably, ultimately leading to his demise while engulfed in depression. Heathcliff's profound love and hatred, coupled with his obdurate personality traits driven by boundless id, inflicted irreparable suffering. Heathcliff's death was the final result of his life's id-driven actions, embodying the fate of his inability to escape his primitive impulses. His death was not only a physical demise, but also a symbolic end to his inner conflicts and unfulfilled desires.

3. The Specific Embodiment of the Ego---Catherine

Catherine situated between the id and the real world, and ego is the psychological aspect of personality (Yang, 2014). The function of the ego is to restrain and suppress the id in order to adapt to the reality, which follows the reality principle. Because the id only cares about blindly satisfying the one's instincts, it pays no attention to the overwhelming external forces. If there is no protection from the ego, it is inevitable to face a fate of destruction. The ego overthrows the principle of pleasure that dominates all activities in the id, and replaces it with the reality principle, which can provide greater safety and greater success (Zhang, 2011).

In Emily's portrayal, Catherine is a typical character who has abandoned the balance between the id and the superego, and she obeyed the ego, but then was punished by the superego (Bao, 2021). Catherine grew up in Wuthering Heights, and her character was like the untamed moorland, wild and sincere. As a child, Catherine was a troublemaker, and her spirit was always in a perpetual state of excitement, yearning for freedom and randomness. She instinctively loved the vast and empty moorland surrounding the manor, and she wanted to grow up like a wild savage. She liked to run out into the wilderness with Heathcliff from early in the morning to spend the whole day there, and the punishment that followed became a ridiculous trivial matter. Before entering into Thrushcross Grange, the closure of Wuthering Heights isolated Catherine from the seductive world and gave full play to her free-spirited temperament.

3.1 The Temporary Balance between Id and Superego

Until one day, when Catherine first arrived at Thrushcross Grange, she was deeply attracted by

the detailed, elegant and affluent lifestyle and the cultural accomplishment embodied by Edgar himself. From the perspective of social moral values, she found that her id was exceptionally barbaric and ugly. Her rationality and social moral sense were awakened. Edgar's refinement and Heathcliff's roughness formed a striking contrast, although Catherine knew that she loved Heathcliff deeply in her heart. However, when she returned to the secular world, she felt that marrying a servant was not suitable for her status. From then on, the id and the superego began a complex struggle. She could not give up her sincere love for Heathcliff from the depths of her soul, but she was also tempted by the allure of the high-quality life represented by Linton. She tried to find a balance between the id and the superego. But reality was relentless, and penniless Heathcliff could not provide her with the most basic standard of living. At the same time, she yearned for the civilized life of the Linton family. Catherine was faced with not only the opposition between Heathcliff and Linton, between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, but also the opposition between nature and civilization, between the id and the superego. In the end, after weighing the pros and cons, she decided to marry Linton. Catherine betrayed her true feelings, and her superego temporarily won over her id. The betrayal of her id drove Heathcliff away from her, took away her source of joy and pleasure, and made her lose herself. As the hostess of Wuthering Heights, Catherine seemingly enjoyed the tranquility of the estate and the gentle love of Linton. However, all of these were a "fragmented prison" in her inner world, which made Catherine deeply realize the emptiness of the secular world. Catherine who lost id was not happy. Under the suppression of the superego, the id turns to the subconscious and hides itself.

3.2 The Sudden Unbalance between Id and Superego

It was not until Heathcliff's return three years later that the conflict between the subconscious id and the real superego flared up again. On the one hand, Catherine wanted to feel the real value in Heathcliff, the existence of her id; On the other hand, she wanted to reconcile the inner id with the superego, which represents social values. However, Heathcliff returned with a desire for revenge, which led to a fundamental conflict between Heathcliff and Edgar, then it was inevitable that Catherine would not find a balance between them. "Are you going to give up Heathcliff from now on, or break off with me? And be my friend and his friend at the same time? That's impossible. I demand to know which one you choose?" When Edgar forced Catherine to choose between him and Heathcliff and said (Bronte, 1995). "Why did you look down on me before, Catherine? Why did you deceive your own conscience? I will not give you a word of comfort. That's what you deserve. You killed yourself." Heathcliff also scolded Catherine for her previous behavior (Bronte, 1995). In this state of contradiction and opposition, Catherine died depressedly and regrettably, leaving this world with a longing for freedom and wildness. The real cause of Catherine's tragic fate was her betrayal of the id in pursuit of the superego. Due to the force of the id in her body was exceptionally powerful, the id was far exceeding the power of the superego. It was impossible for the ego to reconcile the two and bring them into balance, ultimately leading to Catherine's destruction. Catherine's life was a microcosm of the fierce conflict between id and superego. Her feelings and actions reflected her struggle between her passionate love for Heathcliff and her inability to completely resist society's expectations and norms. This internal contradiction and suffering eventually led to her mental and physical collapse, symbolizing the tragedy of an individual struggling between social pressure and inner desire.

4. The Specific Embodiment of the Superego---Edgar

The superego is the idealized ego that can conduct self-criticism and moral control, and it mainly consists of two aspects. On the one hand, it is what people usually say about conscience,

representing the punishment and normative role of social morality on individuals; on the other hand, it is the ideal ego that determines the standard of moral behaviors. The main function of the superego is to guide the ego to act in accordance with ethical principles and restrict and repress the instinctual impulses of the id. "The superego should also be a special need for individuals to maintain a perfect appearance. Because, to some extent, every person living in an organic group must maintain their face, and to some extent, individuals are influenced by the norms of their surroundings." According to Karen Danielsen Horney(Hornai, 1999).

4.1 The Relation between Edgar and Catherine

Edgar was a perfect gentleman image in the novel. He came from a noble family and had received good education since childhood. He had always been meticulous in his choice of words and actions, strictly adhering to social norms to demand himself(Long, 2013). It could be seen that Edgar was acting as a superego, symbolizing rationality and morality. What's more, he showed great tolerance for Catherine's rudeness and fury. The relationship between Edgar and Heathcliff was like the relationship between the "id" and the "superego". Fundamentally, they were opposed to each other, and this opposition was most directly manifested in their relationship with Catherine. As a well-educated gentleman, Edgar's love for Catherine was gentle, considerate and inclusive of her individuality. Their love was based on mutual respect and understanding, and his care for Cathy and his sense of responsibility for the family reflected strong superego traits. Despite knowing that there were deep ideological and emotional differences between himself and Catherine, Edgar still tried to reconcile these differences through rationality and tolerance, which demonstrated the mediating function of the superego in internal conflicts within individuals. Edgar pursued harmony and stability in family life, even when faced with Catherine's emotional fluctuations and the complex relationship between his wife and Heathcliff. He always maintained a gentle and rational attitude, trying to maintain the peace of the family. In addition, Edgar continued to care for their daughter after Catherine's death and tried to establish an orderly family environment, reflecting the moral persistence and principled nature of the superego. The character of Edgar represented the normative role of society on individuals. Edgar Linton in *Wuthering Heights* embodied the role of superego that conformed to social norms and followed moral constraints. His choices and actions reflected a commitment to social stability, family responsibility, and moral principles, which contrast sharply with the characters in the novel, especially the Heathcliff driven by the id. Heathcliff, on the other hand, was a passionate, fanatical and even crazy person towards love. He could not accept Catherine's departure from him. His love was a strong form of possession and control, manipulated by the id.

4.2 The Relation between Edgar and Isabella

Apart from being different from Heathcliff, Edgar's embodiment of social moral standards also isolated his sister, Isabella. After Isabella eloped with Heathcliff and returned to *Wuthering Heights*, despite her letters of repentance, Edgar's initial disappointment and dissatisfaction with her elopement led him to choose not to forgive his sister. Isabella's momentary impulsiveness was subjected to the moral judgment of Edgar, who represented the norms of society. The superego had a significant impact on Edgar's behavioral norms, causing him to strive to maintain the moral and orderly standards in handling family and social relationships.

As the eldest son of the family, Edgar took on the responsibility of upholding the family's honor and conventions. In his view, the behavior of family members should follow certain social norms, and elopement, an impulsive and damaging to the family's reputation, was undoubtedly a serious challenge to these norms. When Elizabeth chose to elope with Heathcliff, Edgar made a clear moral judgment about her sister's behavior, believing that elopement not only violated family norms but also challenged social morality. His isolation from her was a moral condemnation of

her behavior, reflecting his determination to uphold moral boundaries. By upholding family norms, rejecting impulsive behavior, and adhering to moral boundaries, Edgar's personality traits driven by superego were demonstrated.

4.3 The Relation between Edgar and Kitty

Edgar's superego behavior was also reflected in his family education for the next generation. Little Kitty was the most perfect female image in Emily's *Wuthering Heights*. She was not manipulated by the original id. Under the supervision of the superego, she fought evil with justice and barbarism with civilization[12]. Kitty was raised under Edgar's good protection from a young age, and she learned all the moral principles from the civilized society from her father. She was a simple and kind-hearted girl. She was deeply influenced by her father and, as Nelly says, "her love for him still dominates her feelings." Although Heathcliff's son, little Linton, took advantage of her feelings to deceive her into this place, she was still willing to take care of him when she saw him suffering because no one was taking care of him. She forgave those who had been cruel to her and tried to look at reality optimistically in difficult circumstances. This showed that Edgar's educational behavior based on the superego reflected his respect for morality and social order in his heart.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we analyze the main characters in *Wuthering Heights* using Freud's structural theory of personality ---the id, the ego and the superego. This theory provides us with a unique perspective to understand the complex psychological dynamics and behavior patterns of the characters in the novel. Through the analysis of Heathcliff, Catherine and Edgar, we find that Heathcliff's desire for revenge and destructive behaviors reflect the id's pursuit of satisfying primitive instincts; Catherine's inner struggle reveals the ego's conflict between reality principle and pleasure principle; and Edgar's behaviors demonstrate the superego's role in regulating individual behavior under moral and social norms. The psychological analysis of these characters not only deepens our understanding of the novel's plot but also helps us to reveal the inner motives of the characters and understand the psychological mechanisms behind their behaviors. It also shows the application value of Freud's theory in literary criticism. Future research can further explore the points of intersection between this theory and other literary works to enrich our understanding of the complexity of literary characters.

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