

Where There Is Oppression, There Is Resistance—An Analysis of the Motives of Heathcliff's Revenge

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Abstract

Wuthering Heights is one of the most successful novels in the world. Heathcliff's crazy revenge even gains lots of attention. From the perspective of psychology, especially Abraham H. Maslow's motivation theory, this paper studies the motives of Heathcliff's revenge. It finds out that the motives of Heathcliff's revenge were attributed to the dissatisfaction of the five basic needs of human beings, especially the safety needs, the esteem needs and the self-actualization needs. The revenge was, in fact, the instinctive resistance to the oppression.

Key words: Wuthering Heights; Motivation; Oppression; Resistance; Heathcliff's revenge

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INTRODUCTION

Wuthering Heights, first published in 1847, was Emily Brontë's only novel. It mainly tells a story about how the hero-Heathcliff changed from a crazy avenger. It is a marvelous love story about love and hate, life and death. As published, its gloomy description of the background and the enormous contrast of the plots have attracted a great number of readers. Heathcliff's abnormal revenge not only brings a great shock to the readers, but also makes the work to be one of the most controversial works in the literature world. *Wuthering Heights* is been viewed

as "a fascinating enigma in English Letters" and "the sphinx of literature" (Allott, 1992, p. 12). Besides, it has inspired around 10 movies since 1939. It is quite popular in China and there are more than 30 Chinese versions. In the realm of literature studies, thousands of scholars have studied the revenge of Heathcliff. However, according to the database of Web of Science and CNKI (National Knowledge Infrastructure, a database of academic papers in China), there were few papers focused on motivation of Heathcliff such as Liang Yuling and Li Lei (2001) and Shi Yeli (2004) studied Heathcliff's revenge from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis. Others such as Shen Weiwei (2007) focused on Heathcliff's identity studies, and Chen Mingxia (2010) analyzed the humanity of Heathcliff from the perspective of space. As a matter of fact, motivation is closely related to behavior. It "explains why a particular behavior is selected and why that behavior occurs with a given degree of vigor" (Hoyenga & Hoyenga, 1984, p. 6). Therefore, this paper focuses on the basic motives of Heathcliff's revenge. From the perspective of psychology, especially Abraham H. Maslow's motivation theory, the paper tries to analyze why Heathcliff has the motives and how the motives come into being.

1. OVERVIEW OF WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Heathcliff used to be a homeless dark-skinned boy who led a miserable life in a street of Liverpool. Then Mr. Earnshaw, the owner of Wuthering Heights, saw him by chance. Mr. Earnshaw brought him to Wuthering Heights and raised him as his own son. Although Heathcliff made friends with Catherine (the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw), and received much attention and love from Mr. Earnshaw, he was not welcomed by Mr. Earnshaw's wife, his son Hindley and even the servant Joseph. Hindley was so jealous of Heathcliff that he always treated Heathcliff savagely and rudely. In spite of humiliation, Heathcliff rarely fought against them nor complained to Mr. Earnshaw.

Hindley married a woman named Frances and he inherited the estate after Mr. Earnshaw's death. Heathcliff's life in Wuthering Heights became even more miserable. Hindley brutalized him and forced him to work as a servant instead of a family member. Catherine was the only friend of Heathcliff at that time, and they soon fell in love. By chance, Catherine made friends with the Lintons of Thrushcross Grange. She was totally attracted by the wealth of the family, and especially attached to the noble and mild young Edgar. Hindley's life, however, was not all plain sailing. A short time after giving birth to a son, Hareton, his wife Frances died. Jarred by the sad news, Hindley then began to indulge in drinking. With the time passed, Edgar and Catherine became close friends. Edgar proposed to Catherine some years later. Immersed in happiness, Catherine agreed immediately without telling Heathcliff. Hearing the news, Heathcliff quickly ran away. Catherine then, due to the disappearing of Heathcliff, became seriously ill. Thanks to the meticulous care of Edgar, she recovered, and finally married Edgar.

Heathcliff returned to Wuthering Heights some years later. To everyone's surprise, he became a very wealthy gentleman. He began to revenge those who had ever lived with him. First of all, by enticing Hindley into playing card games, he made Hindley in debt, and took the ownership of Wuthering Heights in a matter of course. In the second place, in order to ruin his rival in love—Edgar, he lured Edgar's sister Isabella to elope with him and premeditated to inherit Thrushcross Grange. As to his true love Catherine, he broke her heart by pretending to love Isabella. Utterly fatigued, Catherine became very ill and died after giving birth to a daughter who was also named Cathy. Catherine's death was a great shock to Heathcliff, and from then on, he became more cold-blooded and ruthless. He tormented everybody around him. He madly abused Isabella. Mentally and physically exhausted, Isabella escaped from the house. Later, Isabella bore a boy, Heathcliff's son, named Linton. After taking the ownership of Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff controlled Hindley's son Hareton. He treated Hareton ruder and crueller than he had suffered in his early years in Wuthering Heights. Some years later, when Isabella died, Heathcliff took the sickly child Linton to Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff also treated his own son savagely and cruelly. Vengeance let Heathcliff continue to do evil things. He cheated young Cathy to marry Linton. Linton was a weak and sick boy, shortly after marriage, he died of illness. As a result, Cathy became a widow and Heathcliff gained complete control of both Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

Crazy revenge had not brought happiness to Heathcliff, he still led a lonely live. As a matter of fact, he was not happy at all. He never married or had friend again and always dreamed of living with Catherine. He chose death in the end. Maybe only in this way would he live together with his honey and true love Catherine forever.

2. ABRAHAM H. MASLOW'S MOTIVATION THEORY

Motivation is an important concept in psychology. Hundreds of theorists have studied it and put forward plenty of understandings from different perspectives. Among them, Abraham H. Maslow's Motivation Theory is acknowledged to be one of the most influential and popular theories. Therefore, guided by his theory, the paper tries to analyze the motives of Heathcliff's revenge.

2.1 The Relationship Between Motivation and the Basic Needs of Human Beings

Maslow proposes his famous theory of "hierarchy of needs" in the paper *A Theory of Human Motivation* (1943). The hierarchy of needs is composed of five needs (self-actualization needs, esteem needs, love/belong needs, safety needs and physiological needs), and is usually portrayed in the shape of a pyramid, with the need for self actualization at the top and the other four fundamental level of needs at the bottom. From the perspective of him, the satisfaction of the needs have great influence on the moods of human being. He also points out although the most basic level of needs must be met before desiring for the higher level of needs, the motivations from different levels may occur at the same time. In the book *Motivation and Personality* (1954), he illustrates his theory of motivation, which connects the motives of human's behaviors to these basic needs. Firstly, he analyzes how the aspects such as body condition, culture, environment, etc. influence the behavior of human beings. Then, he points out that motivation study must be "in part the study of the ultimate human goals or desires or needs" (Maslow, 1954, 1999, p. 22). On the basis of these, he puts forward the famous "holistic theory". As he mentions, this theory is "in the functionalist tradition of James and Dewey, and is fused with the holism of Wertheimer, Goldstein, and Gestalt psychology, and with the dynamicism of Freud, Fromm, Horney, Reich, Jung, and Adler". And he calls the theory "a holistic theory" (Maslow, 1954, 1999, p. 35). It contains five basic needs which are closely related to the motives of human beings. The basic needs are, "the physiological needs", "the safety needs", "the esteem needs", "the needs for self-actualization", and finally, "the aesthetic needs" (Maslow, 1954, 1999, pp. 35-51). In his opinion, all behaviors of human beings have motives and the motives can be attributed to the five basic needs.

2.2 The Illustration of the Five Needs

As the five needs are so important to human beings and directly influence human beings' behavior and personality, it is quite necessary to illustrate them at first.

The physiological needs – the most basic needs of human beings are introduced in the first place. It is the physiological drives that decide the physiological needs. Physiological drives are tied up with two factors which are homeostasis and appetites. Homeostasis refers to "the

body's automatic efforts to maintain a constant, normal state of the blood stream", whereas appetites relate to "the lack of some chemical in the body" (Maslow, 1954, 1999, pp. 35-36). Only when the body met these basic needs, can the social communication develop successfully. In the second place, it is quite necessary to talk about the safety needs. As its name implies, the safety needs refer to the need of living environment which is safe, well organized, and full of love. Thirdly, it is essential to discuss the esteem needs. As Maslow proposes, "all people in our society have a need or desire for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others" (Maslow, 1954, 1999, p. 45). That is to say, respect is indispensable, only with mutual respect can people grow up healthily and live happily. The fourth needs to be talked about are the needs for self-actualization. They deal with dreams. Everyone has one or more dreams, through the pursuit of dream, man feel self-fulfillment. Finally, the interpretation of the aesthetic needs. Aesthetic needs are obviously the highest level of these five needs. The needs are connected closely with cognition. Human beings have the needs on judging the things around them.

3. ANALYSIS OF THE MOTIVES OF HEATHCLIFF'S REVENGE

Based on Maslow's motivation theory, the motivations of Heathcliff's revenge can be classified into different categories according to the five basic needs. As can be seen from the plot introduction above, Heathcliff led a lonely and unhappy life. He used to be a foundling, and no one cared about his life. After the adoption by Mr. Earnshaw, he meant to live happily and enjoy life. However, he suffered even more not only in physical but also in mental. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, he became a servant of the family and was treated much rougher. Almost all of the five basic needs talked above were never met by him. He led a horse-like life and did not meet the physiological needs of human beings. People around, except Catherine, all treated him quite rude which made him has little sense of safety. He was rarely esteemed by others. Few people cared about his ideas and what's more, his true love Catherine betrayed him and married Edgar finally. So we can say Heathcliff's revenge mainly owned to the little satisfaction of the five needs.

Although the five basic needs played a great role in shaping the cold-blooded personality of Heathcliff, from his life experiences perspective, it is the safety needs, the esteem needs and the self-actualization needs that influenced him more. Therefore, the motives of Heathcliff's revenge will be discussed on the aspects of these three needs as follows.

3.1 The Motive Originating from the Safety Needs

Except Mr. Earnshaw and Catherine, Heathcliff received

little love from the family members. Besides, his living condition changed time after time. And what's more, Catherine's betray greatly shocked his life.

When firstly introduced to Wuthering Heights by Mr. Earnshaw, Heathcliff was not welcomed by other family members. They all did not like him and these can be seen from their reactions to him: Mrs. Earnshaw wanted to fling him out of doors. "She did fly up, asking how he could fashion to bring that gypsy brat into the house, when they had their own bairns to feed and fend for? What he meant to do with it, and whether he were mad?" (Brontë, 2000, p. 27). The two children "entirely refused to have it in bed with them, or even in their room", and the housemaid "put it on the landing of the stairs, hoping it might be gone on the morrow" (ibid). Although Mr. Earnshaw tried his best to take care of him, Heathcliff was still treated badly by Hindley and other servants. Hindley usually scolded him, cursed him and beat him.

When Hindley inherited the estate of Wuthering Heights, he continued to bully Heathcliff. "He drove him from their company to the servants, deprived him of the instructions of the curate, and insisted that he should labor out of doors instead; compelling him to do so, as hard as any other lab on the farm" (Brontë, 2000, p. 34).

Besides these humiliations, Catherine's betray made him lose himself. After the death of Mr. Earnshaw, Catherine became the only family who cared about him. They loved each other very much and their spirits were closely linked. To some extent, Catherine was him and he was Catherine. However, in order to living wealthy and decently, Catherine betrayed their love and agreed to married Edgar at last. To Heathcliff, Catherine's betray undoubtedly was a kind of ruin of life.

Without the basic love and care, without the feeling of safety, Heathcliff's heart was full of animosity. He hated the family and he had the motivation to revenge.

3.2 The Motive Originating from the Esteem Needs

Besides never met the needs of safety, Heathcliff also never met the needs of esteem.

Heathcliff quarreled with Hindley for changing their horses at one time. Hindley bused and beat him terribly: Hindley "put out his tongue, and cuffed him over the ears. He even threw an iron weight to him". Besides, from the words of Hindley, we can see how contemptuously he spoke to Heathcliff. He never called his name but used the words such as "dog" or "gypsy" instead. He cursed and threatened him, "I pray that the horse may break your neck. Be damned, you beggarly interloper! And wheedle my father out of all he has, only afterwards show him what you are, imp of Satan. And take that, I hope he'll kick out your brains!" (Brontë, 2000, p. 29).

When took over the estate of Wuthering Heights, Hindley treated him much cooler. He was degraded and viewed as low as dumb things. He was not allowed to live inside the house but in the stable.

The people lived in Thrushcross Grange also scorned him. When Catherine and he invaded Thrushcross Grange

at the first time, people there all just cared about the injured Catherine and showed little respect to him. Mrs. even Linton blamed Hindley for his carelessness of allowing Catherine to play with a gypsy. She remarked Heathcliff as a bad boy. "A wicked boy, at all events", she said, "and quite unfit for a decent house!" (Brontë, 2000, p. 37).

Esteem is a basic need to human being. Sadly and unfortunately, Heathcliff never met this basic need. To the people around, he was just an animal-lowed foundling and did not deserve to be respected. Since people had viewed him as an animal, the subsequent animal-liked revenge was a matter of course.

3.3 The Motive Originating from the Self-Actualization Needs

Heathcliff had ever had upward mobility. Like anybody in the world, he also dreamed of success, dreamed of wealthy life, and dreamed of being respected by others. However, it was the vision of a better, the reality was always cruel. Few people cared about his dream and they always made jokes on him.

No one had ever told Heathcliff to pay attention to hygiene, so he was careless and uncared for it. He seldom washed himself and wore the same clothes for quite a long time. When Catherine came back home from Thrushcross Grange, she dressed up well, "A grand plaid silk frock, white trousers, and burnished shoes" (Brontë, 2000, p. 39). Her beautiful appearance formed a great contrast to Heathcliff's dirty and smelly clothes. Heathcliff was shamed about it and he asked for Nelly's help. He said to Nelly, "Make me decent, I'm going to be good" (Brontë, 2000, p. 41). When talked about Edgar with Nelly, he showed his envy on him, "I wish I had light hair and a fair skin, and was dressed and behaved as well, and had a chance of being as rich as he will be" (Brontë, 2000, p. 42). When he in dressed up cleanly and presented in front of them, what he received was only a sneer. The result was, obviously, a tragedy. He could not stand to be laugh at and dashed the thing next to him to Edgar's face. Hindley snatched him up and pulled him to the chamber. He was flogged there.

Lose his honey Catherine, Heathcliff was terribly despairing, his heart was dispersed. Several years later, he became very wealthy and came back to call on Catherine. As Catherine's friend and a rich man now, he meant to have an excellent reception, but Edgar still looked down upon him. These can be reflected from the dialogue between Catherine and Edgar (Brontë, 2000, p. 70):

Cathy: Oh, Edgar darling! Heathcliff's come back – he is!"

Edgar: Well, well, do not strange me for that! He never struck me as such a marvelous treasure. There is no need to be frantic!

Cathy: I know you did not like him. Yet, for my sake, you must be friends now.

Shall I tell him to come up?

Edgar: Here, into the parlor?

Cathy: Where else?

Edgar: I suggest the kitchen as a more suitable place for him.

Heathcliff never received acknowledgement by these people around him. From their perspective of view, he was merely a gypsy, a ploughboy a clown and a foundling. Suffered too much and always lived in misery, revenge is a kind of resistance, a kind of way for relief.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that the motives of Heathcliff's revenge were attributed to the dissatisfaction of the five basic needs, especially the dissatisfaction of the safety needs, the esteem needs and the self-actualization needs. Heathcliff was an ordinary man like all of us; he desired love and care as well. Unfortunately, the childhood traumas distorted his soul and he grew into a cruel man full of hatred. His life was colorless, lack of love, respect, and even hope. He was degraded by the family members and bitten badly by Hindley and the servants. Few people around except Catherine took care of him, and he was always the one to be laughed at. However, Catherine chose to marry Edgar because of vanity. Catherine's betray frustrated him completely, and caused his villain at last. In these cases, he urged to rebel against the unjust world, and his revenge was a kind of resistance, the instinctive resistance to the horrific oppression. As a Chinese saying goes, where there is oppression, there is resistance.

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