

Supernaturalism in Wuthering Heights

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Abstract:

Supernaturalism can be a part of a particular culture. Prevailing belief system of a society manages a place in the literature. It does not necessarily mean the particular culture is living in dark ages believing the supernatural beings. Such super human features can be used purposefully for various reasons. Emily Bronte's novel **Wuthering Heights** is one of the remarkable novels of the Victorian era. The novel is noted for the narrative technique which was very new at that time. Apart from such experiment, some kind of supernatural elements are to be found in the narration which gives the novel a scent of gothic novel. The objective of the paper is to examine the nature and the purpose of the supernatural elements used in the novel **Wuthering Heights**.

Key words: supernaturalism, symbol, societal belief.

Introduction

Supernaturalism, as opposed to naturalism, is a belief in the supernatural in interpreting the world or attempting to control it. In other words, the event, incidents, figures, atmospheres which do not occur in the natural world can be regarded as supernatural. Since the 'epic' of Beowulf, there has been a continuing presence of supernatural elements in literatures. In its broadest definition, supernatural fiction includes the examples of weird fiction, horror fiction, and such sub-genre as ghost story. Supernatural is used for difference purposes. In **Hamlet**, supernaturalism is used as the witness of Claudius' killing of Hamlet's father. However, **Wuthering Heights** cannot be categorised as a supernatural fiction in its truest sense. But there are number of supernatural elements in this novel. Although, **Wuthering Heights** is realistic in its portrayal of the characters and scenes, yet a

supernatural atmosphere seems to brood over it. The objective of this paper is to discuss the symbolical analysis of the supernatural elements used by the novelists.

It is a library research. Analytical method has been used.

Wuthering Heights is the only novel written by Emily Bronte written between Oct. 1845 and June 1846, and published by T. C. Newby. It revolves round the story of two family Earnshaw and Linton residing in Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange respectively. Mr Earnshaw has two children- Catherine (who is referred as Cathy) and Hindly and he also adopted Heathcliff as his own. Heathcliff was not treated well by Hindly. In the course of the time, Catherine and Heathcliff fell in love but refused to marry him as he belongs to lower caste. Edgar, son of Mr Linton, married Catherine and Heathcliff disappears from the scene. After three years, Heathcliff returned and undertakes his mission of revenge. For that purpose he married Isabella, sister of Linton, and proceeds his task. The later part of the novel is on how Heathcliff fulfilled his revenge even to the next generation of the two families. Nelly, the servant who was of the same of Heathcliff, was the silent witness of the story.

The first reference of the supernatural comes through the dreams of Lockwood. Lockwood is the first narrator of the novel who introduces us to the Wuthering Heights and throws lights on the characters of Catherine, Hareton and Heathcliff. Then suddenly are informed the strange dreams dreamt by Lockwood in the beginning of the novel. In the first dream, Lockwood listens to a sermon in a church in the company of Joseph. When the preacher has finished talking about the most of the sins and proceeds to dwell upon another sin, Lockwood rises in his dream and urges his fellow-martyrs to drag the preacher down and crush him. In reply, the preacher orders the assembly to chastise Lockwood. After few moments, the situation turns into severe. Everybody stands against his neighbour. The whole chapel resounds with rapping and counter rapping. In his second dream, Lockwood finds that his hand has been grasped by a small, icy-cold hand of a little girl who introduces herself as Catherine Linton. Lockwood pulls her wrist to the broken glass-pane, and rubs it to and fro until it begins to bleed and his bedclothes are soaked in blood.

So far as the thematic purpose of these dreams is concerned, Emily Bronte prepares the mind of the readers for the later part of the novel through it. The violent atmosphere in the chapel might foresee the inherent themes of violence, revenge that develop later in the **Wuthering Heights**. Through the moments of the counter attacks in the chapel, the novelist again gives a glimpse of the theme of counter revenge, counter ill-treatment, counter hatred

etc among the characters such as Hindly, Heathcliff, Edgar, and Catherine etc. Moreover, the significant fact of the dreams is that at that time Lockwood knows nothing about the story of Catherine and her love for Heathcliff. The dreams give rise to supernatural suggestion in our minds as well as it foresees the outcome of the love story of Heathcliff and Catherine.

The second instance of supernatural elements in **Wuthering Heights** is found when Heathcliff disappeared from the Heights after over hearing Catherine's words of him to Nelly. In spite of their deep love, Catherine refused to marry Heathcliff due to social discrimination because she considered it as degradation of her. She refused to marry him for being lower caste belonging. Having heard the rejecting words, Heathcliff stayed to hear no words further. On that night, there was a furious storm as Nelly describes "about midnight, while we sat up, the storm came rattling over the Heights in the full fury. There was violent wind, as well as thunder. We thought that it must be a judgement on us also"(chap.9, Bronte). Although, a rain and wind cannot be claimed as supernatural, but the context and the way that it is used has a supernatural touch. It has something to do with the wounded feelings of Heathcliff and agitation in Cathy's heart resulting from Heathcliff's disappearance. On the other hand, it can also be interpreted as the novelist very symbolically conveys the disaster to be fallen upon them afterwards. This is proved to be true as Heathcliff brings misery to almost all the characters even to the next generation.

The third major supernatural element can be seen when Heathcliff tells Nelly that when Sexton was digging Edgar's grave, he had managed to lift the lid from Cathy's coffin and had seen her face. Since that moment he has been feeling a strange kind of tranquillity. He also tells Nelly that he felt Cathy standing by his side, he could almost see her. There is something supernatural also in his telling Nelly that he is now surrounded with Cathy's image. He sees her in every cloud, in every tree, in every object. These descriptions are in favour of Heathcliff's deep, passionate and sincere love for Cathy. Though, Heathcliff is inferior to Cathy in class, they loved each other deeply. Psychologically, when someone falls in love, she/he is fascinated by the beloved. Heathcliff sees Cathy's images everywhere and this is the finest example of Heathcliff's love. The purpose of this supernatural element is to indicate the deep love of Heathcliff to Cathy.

Heathcliff's behaviours during the last few days before his death increase the intensity of the supernaturalism. In the course of her narration, Nelly says about the horrible vision that she had in a momentary view of Heathcliff's face. She describes "those deep black eyes! That

smile and ghostly paleness! It appeared to me not Mr Heathcliff, but a goblin; and in my terror I let the candle bend towards the wall, and it left me in darkness” (chap. 34, Bronte). This experience raises question in Cathy’s mind whether he is a man or vampire. Nelly’s speculations about the appearance of Heathcliff further contribute to the supernatural atmosphere. When Nelly suggests that he should repent of his injustice and he should read the bible to make up for his past impiety, Heathcliff replies that there is nothing for him to repent of and no priest should be summoned to speak holy words when he dies and is buried. At this moment, it seems that it is the time of catharsis for Heathcliff; he is regretting and repenting for all the excess sins that he has committed in the name of his revenge for only a person that is Hindly. He might have understood that he has done too excess that what he should have to. For these reasons, Heathcliffs is feeling guilty and therefore, he offers instructions to Nelly regarding his funeral.

The supernatural atmosphere probably reaches its climax at the end when references are made to the ghosts of Heathcliff and Cathy. The country folk use to talk that they have seen Heathcliff’s ghost near the church, on the moor and even at Wuthering Heights. An old man affirms that he has seen two ghosts- of Heathcliff and Cathy- on the moor every rainy night since Heathcliff’s death. A shepherd boy has reported that his sheep would not move on because they had perceived the presence of the two phantoms. However, the references of Heathcliff and Cathy’s ghosts together bring the notion of their posthumous successful love relationship. It suggests their eternal union of the souls. Secondly, it might be Emily Bronte’s vision of life, wherein, life does not end with the physical death, but continues to exist in spiritual form even after death. Besides, according to her perception of life, the soul after getting disembodied does not move to an undiscovered region from where no traveller returns; but it lives in this world. Spiritual existence in the world after death is Emily Bronte’s conviction and belief which she envisages in Wuthering Heights. Another purpose of depicting the supernaturalism in the background of moor, church, village is to fascinate her illiterate and rural readers. It is arranged according to the mindset of the people. An interesting aspects regarding it is that some village people, one shepherd have seen the ghosts, Bronte has not mentioned any specific name.

Apart from these, there are some minor references of supernatural features in **Wuthering Heights**. The first description of Heathcliff the novel associated to him is with the devil. Mr Earnshaw, setting down the ragged bundle scooped up from the Liverpool slums, says to his wife “you must e’en take it as a gift of God, though it is as dark almost as if

it come from the devil” (chap 4, Bronte). Again when Catherine discovers Isabella’s infatuation with Heathcliff, she teasingly offers her to him as a wife and withdraws, saying “it is as bad as offering Satan a lost soul” (chap 11, Bronte). Isabella elopes with Heathcliff and writes to Nelly after the honeymoon, making explicit the hitherto implicit questions “is Mr Heathcliff a man?”(chap 13, Bronte). From the moment Heathcliff returned, he is constantly referred to ‘ghoulish’, ‘goblin’, ‘Judas’ etc. Bronte uses them to portray the character of Heathcliff, especially through the simile of Judas and Satan, she wants to express the deceitful and revenging nature of Heathcliff. These also help intensifying the supernatural environment.

Conclusion

The magical elements are also necessary to be familiar with a culture. The belief of the people, their superstitions, conventional faith, psychology etc is exposed through the magical elements. In other words, the supernatural helps one to represent a culture with its uniqueness and distinctive features. Supernaturalism used in *Wuthering Heights* are convincing in that period. She also used them according to her reader and also for certain purpose.

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