



Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and Irigarayan Ethics of Love

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Abstract

This paper examines Emily Brontë's masterpiece *Wuthering Heights* (1847) through Irigarayan non-possessive and irreducible love of dual subjects in terms of non-duality within duality to argue how Brontë's main characters, Catherine and Heathcliff, challenge the traditional hierarchical dualities of patriarchal society of Victorian age through their love relationship. As romantic lovers, they act upon their feelings and desires in contrast to Victorian restrictions and Christian religious tradition that give importance to the soul rather than the body. Catherine and Heathcliff try to express their emotional desire and autonomous being and subjectivity by sharing the same air in the natural landscape of *Wuthering Heights*, the moors, which allow them the possibility of love. However, they cannot achieve the full measure of non-dual love at the end of the novel due to Catherine's marriage to Edgar and acceptance of patriarchal dualities represented by the Lintons' world.

Key words: Irigarayan ethics of love; Victorian restrictions; Emotional desire; Subjectivity; Non-duality within duality; Non-dual and non-possessive love; Dual subjects; Autonomous being

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Irigarayan love, the mediation between the two genders and the dynamic movement towards the other for mutual

relation, sustains the difference between them. It allows for true intimate connection with oneself and the other. Irigaray believes that "[It] helps us to develop fully into ourselves, and to live fully our relation to the other, to others, and to the world around us. In that case, there would be no more being, fixed once and for all, but rather a changeable, perfectible way of being, thus an indeterminate absolute that determines us nonetheless" (2004, p.172). Irigarayan love creates a free space of separation and alliance between two irreducibly different subjects, when the caress does not transgress the boundaries of the beloved, while "abiding by the outlines of the other" (1993, p.186). The recognition of the one through the other and the communication between the sexes in Irigarayan non-dual love are made possible by "the recognition of the limits" (1996, p.56). This differentiation between a man and a woman, which will never reach the point of the true union, is the prerequisite to enter into a relationship with the other of the other. For Irigaray:

Love, the mediator, is a 'shared outpouring', a 'loss of boundaries', 'a shared space', 'a shared breath', bridging the space between two sexes; it does not *use* the body of the other for its *jouissance*; each is irreducible to the other. The loss of boundaries does not lead to fusion in which one or the other disappears, but to a mutual crossing of boundaries which is creative, and yet where identity is not swallowed up. (Whitford, 1991, p.166)

Appreciating the self-limitation creates the condition for the possibility of recognizing and respecting the other's alterity. For Irigaray, the self needs to accept its limits before being able to recognize the otherness of the other to respect the mystery of the other: "Neither I nor *you* are everything, that each of us is limited, non-hierarchically different" (1996, p.117).

Many feminist and psychoanalytic studies have been done on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*; however, none of these scholars address non-possessive love through Irigaray-inspired notion of non-duality within duality, which is the focus of this study. By reading Emily

Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) through Irigarayan love, I explore how Brontë tries to create a space for her female protagonist in love relationship, to allow her female character to define her own subjectivity and feminine desire beyond the boundaries of the patriarchal world, and to seek co-existence with the "other", just as Irigaray attempts to revise the masculine discourse in relation to 'the other' which has been repressed since the early stage of modern times.

Irigaray's non-dual love of dual subjects is figured in Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* when Brontë rejects the patriarchal logic of the same and addresses the non-possessive love of Heathcliff and Catherine beyond the conventional boundaries and heterosexual standards of the Victorian love which is "one of purity...devoid of sexuality and passionate longing" (Mitchell, 1981, p.63). Heathcliff and Catherine's love, akin to Irigarayan love beyond dualities, which "limits the reabsorption of the other in the same" (1993, p.169), has haunted them from the first time Heathcliff takes the young Catherine in his arms, to their final lasting embrace beyond the grave. Cecil holds that love relationship of Emily Brontë's characters are the expressions of their spiritual sameness (1958, p.47). Mary Visick refers to their love "as a metaphor for a communion of the individual being with vitality itself" (1967, p.41). Although Catherine and Heathcliff are seen as soul-mates and inseparable part of each other in the natural world of *Wuthering Heights*, they cannot achieve the full measure of non-dual love when Catherine marries Edgar Linton and enters into the conventional Victorian world. Catherine's being a socially acceptable lady and finally Heathcliff's revenge for Catherine's marriage and betrayal lead to Catherine and Heathcliff's isolation.

Having married Edgar, Catherine conforms to the patriarchal world of the Lintons, performing what Irigaray defines as a "masquerade of femininity", a social construct imposed on women by men (1985, p.134). By her marriage, Catherine is separated from her childhood nature and her soul-mate, Heathcliff; is engulfed in the cultural world of the Lintons; and is transformed into an isolated character in Thrushcross Grange. Catherine cannot live torn between the denial of "passion" with Heathcliff and the loveless marriage to Edgar. Her real death occurs when she is separated from Heathcliff. Catherine's marriage to Edgar "tore their souls asunder as surely as if that had been one soul" (Braithwaite, 1950, p.179). She cannot live without Heathcliff when the imposed social factors and gender roles create obstacles in the way of her self-development. She feels regret and unhappiness in the social world of the Lintons; required to abandon her passion and desire for Heathcliff, she confesses that "in my soul and in my heart, I'm convinced that I'm wrong!" (Brontë, p.156).

Catherine's relations with Heathcliff and Edgar are in conflict. She finds her subjective identity through her

intersubjective love relationship with Heathcliff, a man free of all conventions and limitations of social norms: "Her conflict is that in the dark-skinned gypsy Heathcliff she finds an equal, she finds the other half of her own wild self who should never fully express itself freely" (Kettle, 1970, pp.205-206). While Heathcliff accepts Catherine as she is, Edgar Linton wants to change her into a socially accepted lady, a defined woman. Catherine with her energetic feminine power in the early parts of *Wuthering Heights* is changed to an isolated individual at Thrushcross Grange and performs the role accepted socially. She is engulfed in the prison of patriarchy, "in a trap that was set by her own fear of facing society and herself" (206). She cannot release herself from the social imprisonment of Edgar Linton's patriarchal world which vitiates her self-realization. She has been posited within a space framework which has been formulated according to the Lintons' expectations, which denies her love of Heathcliff. Catherine thinks that marrying Edgar will make her an acceptable lady and "the greatest woman of the neighborhood" (Brontë, p.155), while she starves her body and soul by her separation from Heathcliff. When Nelly asks Catherine, "Have you considered how you'll bear the separation, and how [Heathcliff will] be deserted in the world?" (p.158), Catherine responds that her decision to marry Edgar will not affect the love that she and Heathcliff share. She believes that the bond of her love with nature, Heathcliff, is stronger than her relation to culture, Edgar. It originates from their childhood in the natural landscape of *Wuthering Heights* beyond social conventions.

In contrast to Catherine's loveless relationship with Edgar, love between Catherine and Heathcliff is the most extreme instance of self-consciousness, as Irigaray addresses the divine love: "We are perhaps confronted with the unveiling of another relation with the divine than the one that we already know, a divine not only living with humans but in them, and to be greeted and listened to between us" (Irigaray, 2002, p.50). Catherine explains to Nelly her true love of Heathcliff by responding to the distinction between Edgar and Heathcliff, and confessing her love of Heathcliff to Nelly; "Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same, and Linton's is as different as a moonbeam from lightning, or frost from fire" (Brontë, p.182). While Heathcliff's love is fire-like, Edgar's love lacks depth and his soul is as a moonbeam and frost. It is the difference between heat and cold, and passion and indifference. Catherine tells Edgar, "your cold blood cannot be worked into a fever; your veins are full of ice-water, but mine are boiling" (p.207). Contrasting Heathcliff with Edgar, Nelly says: "The contrast resembled what you see in exchanging a bleak, hilly, coal country for a beautiful fertile valley" (p.81). Catherine wants a love based on mutual participation and not on submission and possession. She distinguishes the non-possessive love of Heathcliff with

the submissive and possessive love of Edgar in terms of natural phenomena:

My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter changes the trees — my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath — a source of little visible delight, but necessary. (p.182)

“The foliage in the woods” is subject to change but Heathcliff and Catherine’s love as “the eternal rocks” stands firm and immutable. When Catherine is absorbed into the patriarchal world of the Lintons and becomes “the lady of Thrushcross Grange,” “a very dignified person” in “fine clothes” (Brontë, p.146), she cannot embrace her natural part, Heathcliff. She wishes to join the culture, and civilized society of the Lintons, yet she has the desire of returning to her childhood, to nature, of being with Heathcliff. Nelly describes Catherine’s firm hold on her relationship with Heathcliff: “I vexed her frequently by trying to bring down her arrogance... she had a wondrous constancy to old attachments” (p.165). Heathcliff’s love is stronger than Edgar Linton’s, as it can be seen when he expresses his pleasure in being with Catherine as follows:

Two words would comprehend my future--*death* and *hell*: existence, after losing her, would be hell. Yet I was a fool to fancy for a moment that she valued Edgar Linton’s attachment more than mine. If he loved with all the powers of his puny being, he couldn’t love as much in eighty years as I could in a day. And Catherine has a heart as deep as I have: the sea could be as readily contained in that horse-trough as her whole affection be monopolized by him. (p.209)

Catherine confesses her love of Heathcliff to Nelly, “striking one hand on her forehead, and the other on her breast” and feeling regret in her soul and in her heart for selecting Edgar for marriage instead of Heathcliff (p.256). Heathcliff also affirms his strong love for Catherine by telling Nelly:

You suppose she has nearly forgotten me? Oh, Nelly! You know she has not! You know as well as I do, that for every thought she spends on Linton she spends a thousand on me! At a most miserable period of my life, I had a notion of the kind: it haunted me on my return to the neighbourhood last summer; but only her own assurance could make me admit the horrible idea again. (p.209)

Heathcliff is unable to tolerate his separation from Catherine after she leaves the Heights and marries Edgar. He struggles with Edgar’s patriarchal bourgeois society to reach his beloved, Catherine. Nelly tries to persuade Heathcliff by describing Catherine as a noble lady in the house of the Lintons and says:

I’ll inform you Catherine Linton is as different now from your old friend Catherine Earnshaw, as that young lady is different from me. Her appearance is changed greatly, her character much more so; and the person who is compelled, of necessity, to be her companion, will only sustain his affection hereafter by the remembrance of what she once was, by common humanity, and a sense of duty! (Brontë, p.218).

Heathcliff, forcing himself to seem calm, answers

Nelly, “That is quite possible that your master should have nothing but common humanity and a sense of duty to fall back upon. But do you imagine that I shall leave Catherine to his *duty* and *humanity*? and can you compare my feelings respecting Catherine to his?” (p.118). Here, it is clear that Heathcliff sees in Catherine something more than humanity and duty. Heathcliff confirms that his love of Catherine is prior to socialization, existing before gender roles have been imposed upon them. In the cultural world of Thrushcross Grange, Catherine feels loneliness, and tries to find an opportunity to release herself from the social restrictions of the Lintons and to join her lover. However, her transformation into a socially accepted lady, and her motivation of being a respectable, well-mannered and civilized woman of the Grange lead her to the loss of identity and the separation from her nature, Heathcliff. Catherine’s loss of identity is apparent when, in her delirium at the Grange, she is incapable of recognizing her own face in the mirror, unable to recognize her own reflection. Gilbert and Gubar refer to the mirror image of Catherine as a “symbol of the cell in which Catherine has been imprisoned by herself and society” (1979, p.284). In the cultural world of the Lintons, Catherine cannot discover her autonomous identity, and therefore becomes an other to herself. She is engulfed by the symbolic mirror of Victorian society, as Irigaray defines man-made mirrors:

[Mirrors] give access to another order of the visible. Cold, icy, frozen-freezing, and with no respect for the vital, operative qualities of laterality. I see myself in the mirror as if I were an other. I put that other that I am in the mirror between the other and myself, which disconcerts this experience of the inversed laterality of the other. Making me more passive than any passivity of and within my own touch. Forcing me into the within and the beyond of my horizon. Of all possible mastery. (1993, p.170)

Catherine’s dark and shattered image and identity in the mirror, which is the result of adaptation to given and traditional gender roles, recalls Irigaray’s frozen-freezing image in the mirror or ‘speculum’ that reflects the masculine back to himself, confirms his desire and his identity, and shows women’s repression of desire and declined function in the patriarchal world. Catherine loses her autonomous identity and is bewildered and haunted by her antithesis, Catherine Linton, in the restrictive patriarchal world of the Lintons. In the mirror, it is Catherine Linton whose desire for standing in the visible and cultural world, in the role of motherhood and defined womanhood, now stands between her and Heathcliff. Irigaray posits that “women as ‘the other’ excluded from the symbolic exchange can be visible with a ‘mirror’ (*speculum*) reflecting their own experience and voice” (Irigaray *et al.*, 1995, p.98). Catherine cannot reflect her own voice in the man-made mirror when her otherness is not appreciated in relation to Edgar Linton. She gazes at the mirror and tells Nelly, “Don’t you see that face? It

is behind there still! Who is it?" Shortly afterward, she suddenly interprets her own error: "Oh dear! I thought I was at home ... lying in my chamber at Wuthering Heights. Because I'm weak, my brain got confused, and I screamed unconsciously" (Brontë, p.220). She observes herself as an 'other' in the mirror, yet she cannot deconstruct the patriarchal image of mirror. Wion explains Catherine's disintegration of identity at gazing in the mirror:

What seems to be happening to Catherine in this episode is a disintegration of an identity composed precariously of partially incompatible identifications.... But the depth and intensity of her confusion suggests that her dilemma of choosing between Edgar and Heathcliff screens a deeper problem, that of accepting the fact that she is indeed a separate, individual person, unable to find again the primal oneness with the symbiotic other she has lost. (2003, p.146)

Catherine is caught between the dualities of culture, accepted by Edgar Linton who attempts to make her over according to conventional female role-stereotypes; and nature, Heathcliff, who represents her desire and love but whom society does not accept. Deliriously, having married Edgar, 'Catherine Earnshaw' is alienated from her nature, Heathcliff, and is attached to the patriarchal world of Edgar Linton as 'Catherine Linton':

But, supposing at twelve years old, I had been wrenched from the Heights, and every early association, and my all in all, as Heathcliff was at that time, and been converted, at a stroke, into Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange, and the wife of a stranger; an exile, and outcast, thenceforth, from what had been my world; You may fancy a glimpse of the abyss where I groveled! (Brontë, p.221)

Catherine in Thrushcross Grange addresses herself as Catherine Earnshaw, her girlhood name in Wuthering Heights where she appreciates her autonomous identity, freedom, and love. She does not desire to be called by her married name, Catherine Linton, and suffers a stifling life physically and emotionally in Thrushcross Grange: "I'm tired of being enclosed here. I'm wearying to escape into that glorious world, and to be always there: not seeing it dimly through tears, and yearning for it through the walls of an aching heart: but really with it, and in it" (p.260). She wishes for her love, Heathcliff, in Wuthering Heights. She begs Nelly to open the window to free herself from the restrictions of the Lintons' world to feel herself in nature beside Heathcliff.

Oh I am burning! I wish I were out of doors. I wish I were a girl again, half-savage and hardy, and free . . . I'm sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills . . . Open the window again wide, fasten it open! (p.226)

Catherine tries to release herself from the restrictions of patriarchal world through the window to "come home" and "be myself" (p.226), to return to Heathcliff, to Wuthering Heights, and to her childhood nature by "a rough journey" (p.222). She wishes to unite with Heathcliff and find her lost identity: "I'm not wishing you greater torment than I have, Heathcliff, I only wish us

never to be parted. You are my soul" (p.237). Catherine and Heathcliff are "the creation of a powerful romantic imagination" supported by their companionship with nature (Bhattacharyya, 2007, p.8). Catherine's childhood happiness is lost by adopting the restrictions of the Lintons' world within a stifling room. "The confining spaces of her life become so restricting that even her own body becomes a prison to her, in trying to erase boundaries to find freedom from her marriage and everything that confines and restricts her" (Apter, 1976, p.215). Catherine cannot achieve her identity in being with Edgar and wishes death. "Catherine seeks death as a release from the undesirable tension created by her inability to synthesize a fragmentation necessitated by the constricting environment which provides no outlet for her psychic energy" (Gold, 1985, pp.70-71). The cause of her death lies in "her rage against the restrictive bonds.... the role of conventional wife and mother" (Thaden, 2003, p.307). Nelly describes Catherine and Heathcliff's strong love on the deathbed: "An instant they held asunder; and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring, and he caught her, and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive" (p.257). Nelly also narrates: "He bestowed more kisses than he ever gave in his life before... but then my mistress had kissed him first" (p.252). In their silence, "their faces hid against each other, and washed by each other's tears" (p.254). At her deathbed, Heathcliff begs Catherine "Kiss me again; and don't let me see your eyes! I forgive what you have done to me. I love my murderer--but yours! How can I?" (p.254). Catherine and Heathcliff's love in their silence at the deathbed is compared to Irigarayan silence between lover and beloved marked by non-possessive love: "I am listening to you" and "I give you a silence" (Irigaray, 1996, 58), and "made possible by the fact that neither I nor you are everything, that each of us is limited" (p.58).

Heathcliff's love of Catherine is so strong that he prays her soul haunts him after her death when he says; "I won't rest till you are with me. I never will!" (Brontë, p.355). When Nelly reports Catherine's death to Heathcliff, he "endeavored to pronounce the name, but could not manage it; and compressing his mouth he held as silent combat with his inward agony" (p.353). On hearing the news of Catherine's death, Heathcliff beats his head against a tree until blood comes out of his head. Heathcliff seems to have been maddened by the passion of his love for Catherine. He says how he cannot live without her:

I have to remind myself to breathe – almost to remind my heart to beat!... I know that ghosts *have* wandered on earth. Be with me always--take any form--drive me mad! only *do not* leave me in this abyss, where I cannot find you! Oh, God! It is unutterable! I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul! (p.354)

Heathcliff's strong love for Catherine makes him see hallucinations. "He cried, with frightful vehemence, stamping his foot, and groaning in a sudden paroxysm

of ungovernable passion” (p.356). He cannot tolerate his separateness from Catherine and is eager to die due to Catherine’s death, to “be lost in one repose” (p.352). He feels her body beside himself: “I felt her by me - I could almost see her, and yet I could not! I ought to have sweet blood then from the anguish my yearning” (p.348). He sees her ghost besides the window and sobs: “Come in! Come in!... Catherine do come. Oh do. Oh do - once more! Oh! My heart’s darling! Hear me this time, Catherine, at last!” (p.320). While Catherine was alive, Heathcliff warns Catherine before she dies, “what kind of living will it be when you - Oh, God! Would you like to live with your soul in the grave?” (p.317). Heathcliff does not believe in Catherine’s death when he tells Nelly: “In every cloud, in every tree filling the air at night, and caught by glimpses in every object, by day [he is] surrounded with her image!... The entire world is a dreadful collection of memoranda that she did exist, and that [he has] lost her” (p.358). He wants to be haunted by Catherine’s ghost:

Why, she’s a liar to the end! Where is she? Not *there*--not in heaven--not perished--where? Oh! you said you cared nothing for my sufferings! And I pray one prayer--I repeat it till my tongue stiffens--Catherine Earnshaw, may you not rest as long as I am living; you said I killed you--haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. (p.354)

Heathcliff’s desire for Catherine is so strong that he exhumes Catherine from the grave on the night of her funeral: “I’ll have her in my arms again! If she be cold, I’ll think it is this north wind that chills me; and if she be motionless, it is sleep” (p.340). He “breaks down the barrier surrounding her body, opening her coffin” (pp.349-350) and embraces the cold corpse of his beloved sharing a moment in the wild wind and cold earth. Heathcliff exhumes his beloved for the second time after eighteen years when: “Of dissolving with her, and being more happy still!” he answered, “Do you suppose I dread any change of that sort? I expected such a transformation on raising the lid, but I’m better pleased that it should not commence till I share it” (p.369). Heathcliff believes that Catherine survives, in flesh as well as in spirit, and according to his declaration for upwards of twenty years her face was “hers yet” (p.369). Catherine cannot truly die while Heathcliff lives and Heathcliff cannot truly live with Catherine dead. Catherine is unable to rest in her ‘eternal bed’ and is forced to fight her way back through the small opening to her “natural paneled bed” (p.325) in her room at the Heights and to return to Heathcliff. Catherine Earnshaw haunts *Wuthering Heights* with her unquiet desire, and her soul wanders between Thrushcross Grange and *Wuthering Heights* in the quest for her lover Heathcliff. In the last part of the novel after Heathcliff’s death, Catherine and Heathcliff’s souls wander the moors, as reported by a passing shepherd boy: “There’s Heathcliff and a woman yonder, under t’ nab, he blubbered, ‘un’ I darnut pass ‘em” (p.385).

CONCLUSION

The study of Irigarayan non-possessive love in Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* emphasized Catherine and Heathcliff’s erotic desire and reciprocal love relation in the natural world of *Wuthering Heights* beyond the stifling confines of Victorian patriarchal society. The non-possessive love of Catherine and Heathcliff in the early part of the novel was beyond the given and hierarchical duality of patriarchal society where human experience was patterned according to the predefined male and female roles. Although Emily Brontë’s female protagonist, Catherine, was able to release herself from patriarchal definition of femininity by expressing her desire and love to Heathcliff in the early part of the novel in the natural world of *Wuthering Heights*, she did not achieve the full measure of non-duality with Heathcliff at the end of novel, because she married Edgar and accepted the gender dualities and the restrictive social norms of the Victorian age.

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