

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A Deleuzian Reading of *Wuthering Heights*: The Micropolitics of Minorization

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Abstract

This paper revisits *Wuthering Heights*, a great yet controversial nineteenth-century novel, by adopting a Deleuzian perspective/micropolitics of (minor) literature in the sense that all great literature in a broader sense is minor literature, for it deconstructs and dislocates the long-established tradition and its “language seems foreign, open to mutation, and the vehicle for the creation of identity rather than the expression of identity”. In other words, in this novel, the protagonists’ identities are rather created, not just expressed. Looking further into the underlying transforming forces in this novel, the spectator/reader could perceive a variety of minoritarian “becomings”/mutations in *Wuthering Heights*, the process of liberating/deterritorializing a work of art, in Deleuzian terms, from the hierarchy or subjugation of a privileged/majoritarian mode of representation.

Keywords: Minor literature; Deleuzian; minoritarian; majoritarian; deterritorializing.

1. Introduction

Wuthering Heights can be considered one of the greatest British or world classic novels. There has been a mass of published material on it. In addition, there have been varied critical approaches to it, such as textual and historical perspectives, feminism, deconstruction, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and (post)structuralism. Several critics like Martin Day argue that the appeal of Brontë’s controversial novel *Wuthering Heights* does not lie in the vivid representation of a conventional love triangle but in visualizing “a struggle of archetypes representing universal forces” [1]. The protagonists, especially the emotionally tempestuous Heathcliff, do not seem to be conventional fictional characters in the nineteenth century, as Patsy Stoneman observes,

The violence and tyranny exercised by Hindley and Heathcliff have led many readers to see *Wuthering Heights* in the context of the ‘Gothic’ novels of the late eighteenth century, so called because they were typically set in a gloomy medieval castle whose massive, grotesque Gothic architecture reflected the repressive power of its baronial villain. [2]

Rather, the main characters in this novel reflect some universal forces that are embodied in *Wuthering Heights* by two manors—Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

To further the existent scholarship on *Wuthering Heights*, this essay intends to revisit this great yet controversial nineteenth-century novel by adopting a Deleuzian perspective/micropolitics of (minor) literature, namely for Deleuze and Guattari, all great literature in a broader sense is **minor literature**, for it deconstructs and dislocates the long-established tradition and its “language seems foreign, open to mutation, and the

vehicle for the *creation* of identity rather than the *expression* of identity” [1]. In other words, in this novel, the protagonists’ identities are rather *created*, not just *expressed*. Looking further into the underlying transforming forces in this novel, the spectator/reader could perceive a variety of minoritarian “becomings”/mutations in *Wuthering Heights*, the process of liberating/deterritorializing a work of art, in Deleuzian terms, from the hierarchy or subjugation of a privileged/majoritarian **mode of representation**.

2. Minoritarian versus Majoritarian

There several minoritarian flows or intensities (becomings), in Deleuzian terms, toward deterritorialization of the majoritarian forces that keep subjugating Heathcliff and Catherine and their counterparts (e.g. the young Catherine and Hareton) in this novel. The minoritarian forces or mode of representation is visualized in the manor Wuthering Heights, whereas the majoritarian forces another manor—Thrushcross Grange. Those becomings in this novel are mainly “animal-becoming,” “woman-becoming,” and “imperceptible-becoming” that integrate the two protagonists—Catherine and Heathcliff—into the minoritarian universal forces inherent in *Wuthering Heights* in their reaction against the hegemonic/majoritarian forces or images as manifested in Thrushcross Grange. In Lockwood’s vision, the senior Catherine’s ghost, after a long spiritual odyssey, has to endeavor to return to Wuthering Heights, for it is her soul home:

“Let me in—let me in!”

“Who are you?” I asked, struggling, meanwhile, to disengage myself.

“Catherine Linton,” it replied, shiveringly (why did I think of *Linton*? I had read *Earnshaw* twenty times for *Linton*). “I’ve come **home** [my emphasis], I’d lost my way on the moor!” [3]¹

Moreover, Catherine’s ghost strongly expresses her deep grief and regret toward her doomed wandering and her strong desire to the belated homecoming:

“It’s twenty years,” mourned the voice, “twenty years, I’ve been a waif for twenty years!” [3]

Interestingly, it is “Catherine Linton” that has been lost, not the other two Catherines (i.e. Catherine Earnshaw and Catherine Heathcliff)². Given the above-mentioned, it could be inferred that Catherine ultimately regrets her subjection to her earthly desire for social advancement and material enjoyment by marrying Edgar Linton. That is to say, though betraying or resisting the minoritarian forces of *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine eventually undergoes some becomings (so does Heathcliff) that are generated by the minoritarian impulse toward deterritorialization of the majoritarian forces embodied in Thrushcross Grange, which is highlighted by Stoneman’s observation of their metamorphosis:

As ‘Mrs. Linton, the lady of Thrushcross Grange,’ Catherine becomes a prisoner of gentility, starving herself, gnashing her teeth, and showing in an extreme form the symptoms of hysteria, a characteristically feminine disorder.³ Heathcliff, on the other hand, by combining his legal and financial power with physical violence and sadistic tortures, exposes the twin poles of masculine power. Their originally androgynous mind is catastrophically split by socialization

¹ All the references to the novel *Wuthering Heights* hereafter, if not otherwise indicated, will be only marked by their pagination of the Oxford text: Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976).

² Zillah led Lockwood into a long deserted room from which Heathcliff has long forbidden visitors. It is actually the old Catherine’s maiden’s chamber at *Wuthering Heights*. Then Lockwood happens to discover some words repeatedly inscribed on a ledge by the bed: Catherine Earnshaw, Catherine Linton, and Catherine Heathcliff, which are the three identities of the old Catherine at three different periods of her life journey (17).

³ Here Stoneman is referring to some other critiques on *Wuthering Heights*— Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *For Her Own Good: 150 Years of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (London: Pluto, 1979), and Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady* (London: Virago, 1987).

into sadistic male and masochistic female. [2]

In other words, the imposing forces in the Grange are the territorializing powers of gentility and formality of the contemporary civilized world as manifested in socialization, which is characteristic of material abundance.

Furthermore, the focus of this novel, judged from its title, is rather drawn onto the former, Wuthering Heights, where Heathcliff and Catherine are integrated into Mother Nature:

Because we think of Catherine and Heathcliff in particular as denizens of the moor, it is astonishing to realize that there are only three brief descriptions of them together out of doors. . . . These passages, though few in number, suggest another, rather different, pattern of opposition, in which the 'stormy' Catherine and Heathcliff are either contained by or excluded from 'normal' society. [2]

The "normal" society is visualized in the Grange, which is the territorializing (majoritarian) universal forces that keep oedipalizing humanity to such an extent that they are not only detached from the real/natural world but also cast into a world of artificiality, materialism, and formality. Their "desiring production" is blocked by the oedipalizing forces embodied in the Grange (characteristic of hegemonic patriarchy).

On the other hand, in the minoritarian Heights there has been even a domineering power of territorialization incarnated in Hindley's merciless patriarchy, which is finally subverted and deterritorialized by Heathcliff's reactionary lines of flight. It seems to imply that the majoritarian/hegemonic powers are incompatible with the liberating minoritarian impulses in the Heights. Later, after Heathcliff is in power and takes full command of the two manors, he tries to replicate Hindley's tyranny, but finally before he dies Heathcliff realizes it is not what he really desires, just like Catherine, whose ghost laments her betrayal of the minoritarian impulses of the Heights. In fact, Heathcliff's heart or soul never leaves or take flight from Wuthering Heights and his beloved. His revenge on the Linton family and Hindley happen to certify his true/overpowering love for Catherine. That is why after Heathcliff, coming back from his three years' self-exile, challenges the seriously-ill Cathy for her betrayal of him and Wuthering Heights, their source of soul and life:

Why did you despise me? Why did you betray your own heart, Cathy? I have not one word of comfort—you deserve this. You have killed yourself. . . . Because misery, and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart—you have broken it—and in breaching it, you have broken mine.
[3]

Heathcliff argues that their love for each other is the very essence or soul that their lives consist of. Betraying Wuthering Heights and its values in pursuing her desire for social advancement, Catherine also ruins the source of her life.

3. Becomings or Deterritorialization as the (Micro)Politics of Minorization

As what I have mentioned earlier in this essay, the protagonists' becomings or lines of flight are their strategies to fight against the hegemonic/majoritarian forces or images as manifested in the Grange. Heathcliff is more thoroughgoing in forming lines of flight from the subjugation of the civilized world, as Deleuze has pointed out, "To leave, to escape, is to trace a line . . . The line of flight is a deterritorialization" [4]. Heathcliff not only endeavors to fight against the tyrannical powers of Hindley and the gentility world of the Lintons, but also searches for some "weapon" (the revenge plan) to thoroughly deconstruct the whole majoritarian system in his *odyssey* (flight) after he temporarily leaves his beloved and territory Wuthering Heights. Therefore, according

to Deleuze's conception of becoming, Heathcliff's flight is not a passive act. Rather, it is an active move/movement: "But to flee is not to renounce action: nothing is more active than a flight. It is the opposite of the imaginary. . . . To fly is to trace a line, lines, a whole cartography. One only discovers worlds through a long, broken flight" [4]. To be more specific, the lines of flight enable the agent to gain some new weapon to destroy his/her enemy. In other words, Heathcliff has become a traitor to his home and beloved while searching for a weapon to deterritorialize the majoritarian powers:

The traitor is the essential character of the novel, the hero. A traitor to the world of dominant significations, and to the established order. This quite different from the trickster: for the trickster claims to take possession of fixed properties, or to conquer a territory, or even to introduce a new order. The trickster has plenty of future, but no becoming whatsoever. The priest, the soothsayer, is a trickster, but the experimenter is a traitor. [4]

The above-mentioned could be better illustrated by referring to Heathcliff's emotional and spiritual attachment to the old and not well-furnished manor Wuthering Heights. Even after he has owned the two manors, he chooses to stay in the Heights instead of the more well-established Grange until he dies; that is, he does not really desire to possess the manors in his plans of revenge on the Linton family. To control both manors is just an act of his deterritorialization of the majoritarian forces.

In addition, as I had mentioned earlier, Heathcliff's self-exile from the Heights is only physical, not spiritual, for his heart or soul always remains there. Even after he dies, people seem to witness he and Catherine reunited at the Heights [3]. To be more specific, his flight from the oppression of Hindley's dominance and gentility order is undertaken by becoming-animal (demonic), becoming-woman, and finally becoming-imperceptible, an eternal process prompted by his desiring production. And desiring/becoming is a machine, so it is not something metaphysical, but a real functioning everywhere, as Deleuze and Guattari put it:

Everywhere *it* is machines—real ones, not figurative ones: machines driving other machines, machines being driven by other machines with all the necessary couplings and connections. [5]

Becoming is a very important concept in Deleuzian conceptions of schizoanalysis, which is in opposition to Freudian psychoanalysis characteristic of oedipalizing or subjugating man's desiring-production to the organism, the "organic organization of the organs" (e.g. theological system, a territorializing power, *A Thousand Plateaus* 158). Becoming is real, and most importantly,

Becoming can should be qualified as becoming-animal even in the absence of a term that would be the animal become. The becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human becomes is not . . . that a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself; but also that it has no term . . ." [6]

Given the above-mentioned, we can infer that in his lines of flight Heathcliff undergoes some metamorphosis process in which he is integrated into minoritarian forces in reaction to the majoritarian ones through many kinds of becomings that should be recognized as "becoming-animal," which does not mean that he really becomes an animal, but rather becomes *minoritarian* so that he deviates from the world of gentility and morality in forming his revenge plan.

However, his strong passion as revealed in taking revenge really impresses many readers and thus makes them see him as a Satanic figure. In becoming woman Heathcliff is able to fight against the patriarchic order embodied in Hindley's tyranny and the wealth and formality of the social order embodied in the Lintons.

Finally Heathcliff is becoming-imperceptible in returning to or integrating himself into *Wuthering Heights* and thus arouses a sense of sympathy of the readers to an extent that the boundaries between the perceiver and the perceived are destroyed. Moreover, this process of becoming also includes the **double becoming** of Catherine and Heathcliff in which they undergo reciprocal *becomings*, or *lines of flight*—"I am Heathcliff":

My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the beginning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and, if all else remained, and he were annihilated, the Universe would turn to a might stranger. I should not seem a part of it. My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods. Time will change it, I'm well aware, as winter change the trees—my love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, **I am Heathcliff** [emphasis added]—he's always, always in my mind . . . [3]

Furthermore, it is a relationship that is deeper than love and higher than the "lived," as Daniel Smith observes, "a profound passion that traces a zone of indiscernibility between the two characters" [7]. To be more specific, it is a process of "imperceptible-becoming," which makes a work of art, according to Deleuze, become a great work and thus renders itself open to intensities or possibilities of life, a constant process of deterritorialization. It also destroys the boundaries between the perceiver and the perceived. As a result, instead of placing the spectator/reader/audience in a "position of ordering judgement," the impulse toward minorization in *Wuthering Heights* enables the reader to "*become other* through a confrontation with the forces that compose us" [1].

To sum up, in creating a minoritarian work, Brontë also successfully presents a passage of Life, which is open to intensities or potentialities, as Deleuze has indicated in *Essays Critical and Clinical*:

Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of Life that traverses both the livable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming: in writing, one becomes-woman, becomes-animal or vegetable, becomes molecule to the point of becoming-imperceptible. [7]

Heathcliff has consummated his odyssey of metamorphosis/becomings through becoming-animal (demonic) in his revenge plan. But in this novel, both Heathcliff and Catherine have to return to their hearts and spiritual home—*Wuthering Heights*. Likewise, their counterparts—the young Catherine and Hareton—have consummated their becomings in the Heights, for they fall in love there.

As I have mentioned in the introduction, Emily Brontë has created a great piece of work of art—minor literature, because her *Wuthering Heights*, in Deleuzian terms, employs a micropolitics of (minor) literature, for it deconstructs and dislocates the long-established tradition and its "language seems foreign, open to mutation, and the vehicle for the *creation* of identity rather than the *expression* of identity." Looking further into the underlying transforming forces in this novel, the spectator/reader could perceive a variety of minoritarian "becomings"/mutations in *Wuthering Heights*, the process of liberating/deterritorializing a work of art, in Deleuzian terms, from the hierarchy or subjugation of a privileged/majoritarian **mode of representation** of human passions—avarice, wrath, ignorance, and affection, which are predominant motifs throughout many nineteenth-century novels.

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