

A Character Study of Little Linton in Wuthering Heights

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Abstract: As the second-generation protagonist of Wuthering Heights, Little Linton's appearance rekindled the conspiracy and love between two families. Under the guidance of his father, Heathcliff, he was forced to marry Cathy and eventually died tragically in Wuthering Heights. Looking at the whole classic, Little Linton played a crucial role in the development of the plot. By using relevant theories including "Gothic" character characteristics, repeated narration, and initiation stories, this paper analyzes Little Linton's character, its forming factors, and his role in this work as well as explores the practical significance behind this character on the basis of an in-depth summary of his short life.

Keywords: Little Linton; Character; Forming factors; Wuthering Heights

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1. Introduction

The novel "Wuthering Heights" mainly tells of the love and hatred experienced by two generations represented by Catherine and Heathcliff as well as Hareton and Cathy. The tragic love between Heathcliff and Catherine and the perfect ending between Cathy and Hareton have become classics in this book. However, there is a character, who neither appeared at the beginning of the novel nor gotten to the finale. In his short life of more than ten years, he became as sad as a puppet due to his father's demonic manipulation, and his congenital weakness and illness engendered people's constant pity. However, he played an important role in the novel; his appearance revealed the real intersection of the second generation in Wuthering Heights. His death marked the end of Heathcliff's crazy revenge endeavor. This character is Linton Heathcliff, the son of Heathcliff and Isabella, and he was known as Little Linton.

2. An analysis of Little Linton's character

Linton's appearance began with his mother Isabella. After she eloped and became the wife of Heathcliff at Wuthering Heights, her life was engulfed with suffering. "I gave my heart to him, but he took it, crushed it to death, and threw it back to me^[1]." Isabella clearly and frankly expressed her pain and desolation at that time, and she realized that she was just a victim of Heathcliff's love for Catherine. The former distinguished lady resolutely decided to go to London and gave birth to her son, Linton, an innocent and poor child.

From here on, Linton began his simple and extraordinary life. His unique personality can be explained through the events he experienced in his life.

2.1. Weak and delicate

When Little Linton was first mentioned in the novel, he was in a carriage after being picked up by his uncle.

“He fell asleep in a corner of the carriage... A pale, thin, and weak little boy with a morbid and surly look.” As soon as he appeared, everyone, including Cathy, felt pity for him. The family carefully protected the child who had just lost his mother, but the next day, under the pressure of his father, his uncle Edgar Linton asked Mrs. Dean to send the child back early in the morning. When Linton first met his father, he looked like this: “pale face, thin frame, tired eyes... It made him look sick.” The theory of American initiation stories holds that the protagonists have to go through a series of major changes and turns to gradually grow. They usually have to experience a spiritual crisis to grow and realize their position and role in the world ^[2]. As a father, Heathcliff did not have much favor for his own flesh and blood, which foreshadowed his vulnerability and cowardice for becoming a pawn at the mercy of his father.

2.2. Helpless, hateful, and cruel

When he saw his cousin Cathy again, it was three years later. Cathy, at 16, became a pawn in Heathcliff’s revenge against the Linton family by marrying her and securing the inheritance of Thrushcross Grange.

After that, Cathy often braved the severe cold to ride a horse in secret to visit the weak Little Linton. The kind Cathy loved him like his mother, but his vicious father did not hesitate to kill him in order to achieve his goal. In order to save his own life, Linton could only take Cathy as his lifeline: “Dear Cathy, my life is in your hands, you said you love me – if you do, it will not harm you.” However, after Cathy realized his trick, Little Linton sat there drinking tea leisurely and said something in a painless manner. When Cathy was ready to stand up, Linton got up in panic for his precious life and began to cry and beg her. After being affirmed by his father, he was “like a dog begging for mercy, for fear that the door keeper would deliberately do evil and pinch him.” Little Linton’s weak nature and selfish nature were exposed together, which was disgusting and detestable.

2.3. Good-natured and self-liberation

Cathy’s pain finally aroused Little Linton’s conscience. He risked his life to help Cathy escape. Finally, with the death of Little Linton, Cathy could not help but think, “He’s safe, and I’m free.” The dispute between love and conspiracy around them also came to an end.

Although Little Linton’s nature was weak, he was unyielding to fate. He had no choice but to be imprisoned in the brave pursuit of love. His selfish and cruel nature had made him widely criticized, but his kind nature finally freed him from himself. In this sense, Little Linton’s character has been endowed with profound connotation and has become a three-dimensional image because of his complex character.

3. Development of Little Linton’s character

Throughout Little Linton’s life, his unique character was formed under the interweaving of various factors, which gradually led to his sad fate.

3.1. “Congenital” environmental factor: Miserable life experience and growing up in a broken family

Little Linton is just a child but with a sad life. He has not seen his father before returning to Thrushcross Grange. After his mother died, he became an unattended single-parent child. His uncle took him to his father, but his father did not hesitate to torture him cruelly for his own selfish desires, which made him unable to become a physically and mentally sound person.

Wuthering Heights highlights Emily’s basic philosophy of life through the repetition of characters, scenes, and plots – “Life is a cycle that goes round and round.” Natural changes, the alternation of the four seasons, the cycle of human life, and human history are often surprisingly similar. Therefore, literary works, as storytelling, often adopt the way of repeated narration ^[3]. Emily Bronte frequently and skillfully used

the technique of repeated narration in her works in order to highlight her outlook on life; that is, life is a cyclical process. As for Linton, it can be seen that on one hand, from the perspective of blood and genetic inheritance, Heathcliff's selfishness as well as the weakness and incompetence of the Linton family are vividly reflected in Little Linton. Under the manipulation of his father, he pulled Cathy into the dark abyss little by little, but indifferently gloated aside when she was in danger, which is the embodiment of repeated narration in the character's nature. On the other hand, from the perspective of scene repetition, the story mainly alternates between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, which represent two completely different environments – nature and civilization. After the death of his mother, Little Linton was forced to return to Wuthering Heights, which was stained with wild breath and cold color; coupled with his father's hysterical adjustment and control, he became as selfish and indifferent as his father. This is the embodiment of repeated narration in environment and plot, showing the circumstance of “a typical character in a typical environment.”

By using repeated narration, Emily Bronte meant to show that all life, including Little Linton's, is cyclical. Linton's birth and growth environment forced him to accept rather than actively choose. Under the influence of this “innate” environmental factor and personality factor, he was doomed since the beginning to be even able to rise up and resist, leaving him with no choice but to be a sad child. Therefore, tragedy has become part of him.

3.2. “Acquired” growth factor: Being fortunate and living under warm care

Cathy, alike Little Linton, had gone through unfortunate life experiences and a repressive growth environment. The American initiation story theory holds that due to the limitations of the social system or the lack of family education, young individuals are forced to live in the framework of the adult world and are not able to successfully form their individual subjectivity ^[4]. Therefore, when Cathy and Little Linton met again as adults, there was a sense of sympathy in emotion and soul. Cathy was attracted by Little Linton's elegant demeanor, and Little Linton was moved by Cathy's kind character. The two had a long time of correspondence and realistic communication. They showed their innocent nature by teasing Hareton in Wuthering Heights. They also had a short rendezvous in the field where flowers bloom in midsummer, which was one of the few unforgettable memories for Little Linton in his fleeting life.

Cathy played the role of a guide in Little Linton's growth. As an important factor in the initiation story theory, the guide plays a positive guiding and enlightening role in the protagonist's spiritual growth. The guide helps the protagonist to come out of the growth dilemma as soon as possible. Although Little Linton humiliated her at his father's instigation, Cathy still insisted on her original intention. She said, “I have learned to tolerate his selfishness and resentment like his illness, and there is little disgust.” It was Cathy's sincerity and kindness that evoked the protagonist's conscience and responsibility, making Little Linton feel the warmth and goodwill of the world, thus finally achieving self-redemption.

3.3. Inner struggle factor: Being afraid to resist and betraying under the dark clouds

As discussed earlier, in order to save his life, Little Linton firmly held on to his cousin as “a life-saving straw,” but he was ungrateful at the same time when he turned his crisis into safety, regardless of Cathy's life or death. In this sense, he is a “Gothic” character. Having a villain is one of the main features of Gothic novels. Such awful characters often seduce others, trapping others into making mistakes and ending up miserably because of their own loss. The character is both a victim and a person who hurts others ^[5]. Little Linton's behavior betrayed Cathy and their pure love in spirit. He was not only the victim of that environment and era, but he deeply hurt others. He is a typical “Gothic” character in the novel. It is commendable that Little Linton found his conscience at the last moment, where he released Cathy and made the decision to help others. He embodies not only the evil of human nature but also the spirit and vitality of

human nature ^[5].

4. The role of Little Linton

4.1. Character comparison: Comparison and supplementary explanation

Although Little Linton is only a small figure in the book, we are able to appreciate his personalized characteristics from comparing him with other characters. The first is the comparison between him and his father Heathcliff. As the protagonist of the book, Heathcliff set off the love and hatred between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, especially the cruelty and ferocity he showed in his revenge. In order to achieve his own goal, he even sacrificed his own flesh and blood, which made people despised his actions. As soon as Little Linton appeared, he displayed a weak image. Throughout his life, he was controlled like a puppet by his father, and he cooperated like a clown. When he met the love of his life, he was unable to pursue it. What he got was not what he really wanted. This plight ensues sighs.

4.2. Plot arrangement: Promote the plot and improve the structure

Although Little Linton did not appear in the story frequently, he played an important role in the development of the plot. His appearance relived the gratitude and resentment of the second generation of Wuthering Heights and rekindled the flame of revenge of his father Heathcliff. Later, he became the pawn in his father's plot to seize Thrushcross Grange. When Little Linton was critically ill, his father's indifference showed that he had lost all his value for gain. When Little Linton died in his home that night, no one cared except for Cathy. It was a short and sad life. The death of Little Linton marked the end of Heathcliff's fanatic revenge and the conspiracy between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Alike his parents, the story between Linton and Cathy was full of struggles and helplessness between life and death as well as love and hate. It represented a beautiful relationship full of vitality and sunshine in the civilized era, but it was helplessly mixed with hatred and conspiracy, which eventually led to tragedy.

It can be said that the appearance of Little Linton made the conspiracy and revenge in Wuthering Heights reach a climax. It promoted the development of the story, enhanced the structure of the work more complete, and made image of the character fuller, which contributed to this handed down classic.

5. Conclusion

In the span of 30 years, the love and hatred of two generations have brought the wasteland from tranquility to waves, and then back to tranquility again. As mentioned at the end of the novel, "Watching moths flutter among heather and wind chime grass, listening to the gentle wind blowing through the grass, I thought to myself, who would have thought that people who sleep here are not peaceful in such a peaceful land." The grievances between Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange calmed down, and everything drifted away with the wind, existing only in people's memory; so was Heathcliff, Catherine, and Little Linton. Looking back, his life was only a short dozen years, and he was only a tool for Heathcliff's extortion as well as a prelude and foil to the love between Cathy and Hareton. However, his life still shone with the great glory of human nature as he bravely pursued his love when he was suffering both physically and mentally. Towards the end, he finally found his conscience and dared to fight back. People will inevitably encounter setbacks and tribulations in life, but we should have the courage to move forward, be a fluttering dandelion in the storm, and spread our fragrance in every corner of the world even after leaving the world behind. Perhaps in a few years, we will still remember that on that beautiful spring day, Little Linton was indeed laughing happily in the field with his Cathy.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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