

40. A Comparative Analysis of the Characters Heathcliff and Edgar Linton through Reaction Formation Mechanism

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Abstract

Many authors including Anna Freud have studied Defense Mechanisms, brought up by Sigmund Freud, and many papers have been written on them. There are approximately 30 defense mechanisms. One of the most notable one is Reaction Formation. This mechanism conveys some other structures such as repression and denial. Defense mechanisms, which can be considered an indispensable part of human structure, can also be seen in the characters in many literary works. These characters, which also carry parts of the authors themselves, are literally reflections of the readers. In particular, it is possible to observe intense personality disorders and defense mechanisms in the characters of Emily Bronte, who is claimed to have had some psychological problems. *Wuthering Heights*, Bronte's first and only novel, is a kind of bridge between psychology and literature because of its characters. Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, the characters of gothic novel, are vivid examples of the Reaction Formation mechanism. This study aims to compare the characters, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, and to reveal the effects of the mechanism on mentioned individuals. An introductory information about defense mechanisms was given, then Reaction formation was examined in detail, and the points of reconciliation with the characters of Heathcliff and Edgar Linton were discussed. As a result of the comparisons, it was determined that it emerged in both characters in different ways.

Keywords: Defense Mechanisms, Reaction Formation, *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff, Edgar Linton

Tersine Çevirme Mekanizması Üzerinden Heathcliff ve Edgar Linton Karakterlerinin Karşılaştırmalı Analizi

Öz

Sigmund Freud tarafından ortaya atılan Savunma mekanizmaları, yıllar içerisinde kızı Anna Freud da dâhil olmak üzere birçok kişi tarafından çalışılmış ve üzerine birçok makale yazılmıştır. 30 civarında savunma mekanizması bulunmaktadır. Bunlar arasında en çok göze çarpanlardan biri ise Tersine Çevirme (Reaksiyon-Formasyon) mekanizmasıdır. Bu yapı kendi içerisinde bastırma ya da yok sayma gibi farklı mekanizmaları da taşır. İnsan yapısının vazgeçilmez bir parçası olarak değerlendirilebilen savunma mekanizmaları birçok edebi eserdeki karakterlerde de görülebilmektedir. Yazarların kendi kişilik özelliklerinden de parçalar taşıyan bu karakterler, adeta

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okuyucuların da yansımalarıdır. Özellikle, bazı psikolojik problemlere sahip olduğu iddia edilen yazar Emily Brontë'nin karakterlerinde yoğun kişilik bozuklukları ve savunma mekanizmaları görmek mümkündür. Brontë'nin genç yaşlarında yazdığı ilk ve tek romanı *Uğultulu Tepeler* barındırdığı karakterlerden dolayı adeta psikoloji ile edebiyatın buluşma noktasını oluşturmaktadır. Gotik tarzdaki bu çarpıcı romanın karakterleri olan Heathcliff, ve Edgar Linton ise Tersine Çevirme mekanizmasının canlı birer örneğidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı Heathcliff ile Edgar Linton karakterini karşılaştırarak bu mekanizmanın bireyde gösterdiği etkileri ortaya koymaktır. Savunma mekanizmalarına bir giriş yapılmış, daha sonra Tersine Çevirme mekanizması detaylıca incelenmiş ve Heathcliff ile Edgar Linton üzerinden karakterleri ile bağdaştığı noktalar ele alınmıştır. Karşılaştırmalar sonucunda her iki karakterde de farklı yollarla ortaya çıktığı saptanmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Savunma Mekanizmaları, Tersine Çevirme, *Uğultulu Tepeler*, Heathcliff, Edgar Linton

Introduction

Defense Mechanisms, suggested by Sigmund Freud, are used by all people unconsciously to protect themselves from anxiety, conflict. Defense Mechanisms are defined as "Behaviors that people use to separate themselves from unpleasant events, actions, or thoughts. The idea of it comes from psychoanalytic theory, a psychological perspective of personality that sees personality as the interaction between three components: id, ego, and super-ego. These psychological strategies may help people put distance between themselves and threats or unwanted feelings, such as guilt or shame." (Holland, 2022). Around 30 defense mechanisms are listed (Di Guiseppa & Perry, 2021). One of the most remarkable mechanisms among these is the Reaction Formation Mechanism. Reaction Formation (RF), a protective process, replaces an egodystonic or threatening idea or feeling with its exact opposite (Perry, 1990). Defense Mechanisms are seen as a normal and common part of all individuals' developments (Minges, Starrs & Perry, 2017). Research on defense mechanisms is important because it reflects human nature. On the other hand, literary works and fictional characters are the reflections of people as well, thus it would be logical to investigate the defense mechanisms through them. In this study, Heathcliff and Edgar Linton, from *Wuthering Heights*, will be discussed and compared. *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Brontë's one and only novel and often referred to as the best romance novel ever by many, has been the focus of many studies in terms of its characters, however, completely opposite impulses underlying the behavior of these two characters have not been touched or compared. In some studies, the character of Heathcliff was discussed from various perspectives. They saw Heathcliff as an Irish, Black, an even Roman (Joffe, 2023). In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff's childhood is full of neglect, and losings. Mrs. Earnshaw, Hindley Earnshaw, and neighbours constantly refer to him in bad words, such as "gypsy brat", "dog," and a "naughty, swearing boy" (Blosenski, 2023). Mr. Earnshaw's act of saving Heathcliff from the streets of Liverpool initially appears to be fine. Nevertheless, it turned into a family tragedy. Mr Earnshaw's protective attitude toward Heathcliff really made particularly Mr. Earnshaw's descended, Hindley angry (Peter, 2019). Heathcliff grew up as hated by everyone but Mr. Earnshaw and Catherine. Therefore, it can be said that he grew up with a hunger for love and a need to be cared. However, due to RF mechanism, he reflected his inner will of love as a complete lack of love to other people. On the other hand, Edgar Linton is a high-society, esteemed and cultivated gentle man. He is actually seen as the weakest figure between the love triangle of Heathcliff, Catherine and himself (Tytler, 2017) The reason why people may have negative opinions about Edgar is because of his bias against Heathcliff due to his family and the social superiority to other two main characters (Tytler, 2017). Edgar, who has been loved and respected throughout his life, reflects his wild feelings out as calmness, with the same defense

mechanism. Nevertheless, the dark motives in him are visible, especially in the punch he threw at Heathcliff. Namely, these two characters have opposite behaviours to their inner impulses, but how they do it and the comparison about it is really important to be investigated.

Method and Findings

Defense mechanisms (DMs) are unconscious reactions to diverse things including disturbing thoughts and behaviours (Panfil et al., 2020). Disturbing thoughts and behaviours are thought to be in contrast with a person's moral values. When a person has contrast motives with moral values, self-esteem can be damaged because of the superego. Namely, DMs are basically used to preserve the self-esteem (Fenichel, 1945). The ego is in the charge of them (Perrotta, 2019). Having DMs is normal, moreover healthy, until a certain point. They could be viewed as disorder when they damage someone's mental health or social functioning (Walker & McCabe, 2021). When it happens, clinicians apply psychodynamic therapy. With the therapy, patients are expected to recognize their unconscious processes. Patients to relieve internal conflicts occurring between id and superego frequently use these processes. DMs were introduced firstly in the 19th century by Sigmund Freud in the paper of "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1998c). In the 20th century, Anna Freud, Sigmund Freud's daughter, provided a more explicit definition and analysis of the basic DMs (Bailey, 2022). The basic DMs include RF, displacement, splitting, isolation, denial, etc. Sigmund Freud first suggested RF as an ego DM. Then, Anna Freud, known as constructor of child psychoanalysis, developed the term with the book "The Ego and the Mechanism of Defense". She made a big contribution to ego psychology (Noor, 2023).

RF is basically a kind of defense mechanism used by people to ease anxiety caused by an inside desire, belief, attitude, etc. (Regueira, 2011). When a person feels an egodystonic thing, they behave exactly in the opposite way due to RF. There are seven different categories of DMs conveying psychotic, action, major image-distorting, disavowal and autistic-fantasy, minor image-distorting, neurotic, hysterical, obsessional, and high adaptive ones (Minges, Starrs & Perry, 2017, Perry, 2014). RF is in the neurotic category. The neurotic mechanisms regulate the inner desire instead of vanishing it (Minges, Starrs & Perry, 2017). The main point of RF is to be "acceptable" and "forced to". While all the defense mechanisms do not have robust evidence, RF is held up by several researches. For instance, in 1998, Baumeister, Dale and Sommer found that people behaved just as Freud alleged (Vinney, 2022).

Wuthering Heights by Emily Bronte can be considered as one of the best sample novels in which RF is clearly observed on the main protagonists. She is considered one of the greatest writers and poets of all time. She left behind many poems and her only novel, Wuthering Heights, as a masterpiece of her 30-year life. She never fell in love. Her sister, Anna Bronte, was her priority in her life (The History Press, n.d.). However, Wuthering Heights tells a stormy love containing hate and violence, besides pure feelings. The owner of the pure feelings is Edgar Linton, and the owner of the hate is Heathcliff. Edgar Linton descended from a noble family. He is always respected man, and known for his gentle nature.

Heathcliff, on the other hand, lives with the Earnshaw family as an orphan. He is an aggressive, disrespectful, and hateful man. He is sentenced to servanthood by Hindley, after Mr. Earnshaw's death. What Edgar Linton and Heathcliff have in common is their love for Catherine. Nevertheless, their behavior and attitudes are very different from each other. Heathcliff is full of anger for everyone. He is quite cruel to his wife and son. He is deprived of almost all humanly feelings. Nevertheless, Linton is lovely and understanding to Catherine, and a wonderful father to his daughter. People might think that Edgar is a very good person, so he has very good instincts. Moreover, Heathcliff is really a bad person,

so he has bad motives inside. Indeed, it is not same as it is seen. These two people develop RF, actually, Edgar has the bad instincts, and Heathcliff has the good ones. Heathcliff is hungry for love, while Linton has wild impulses. Because of the way that they are raised, Linton suppresses his inside wild feelings and shows himself as an earnest man, while Heathcliff is scared of love. By this way, he shows himself as a hateful man. For instance, in chapter 8, page 102, Catherine slaps Edgar but he stays calm and polite due to RF (Brontë, 2022).

Moreover, Heathcliff marries Edgar's sister in order to get revenge on Catherine and Edgar. Edgar notices that it is for revenge though he does not try enough to stop it. After Isabella's dies, Heathcliff takes his son Linton with him. Although Edgar promises Isabella to look after Linton, he knows that Heathcliff will torture Linton; he does not stop it either. These reactions are not normal because he can at least resist so that neither event would happen. Edgar always remains silent even though he knows that he was hurt and suffered injustice. Heathcliff saves baby Hareton's life, but later he regrets to have done it. Because he missed the opportunity to take revenge on Hindley. It is an extreme feeling. If a person feels sad since a child is alive, it is clear that it is a psychological problem. In addition, he raises Hareton like a monster; Hareton exactly does not know how to live as a normal human being. Then, Heathcliff takes over all the property from Hareton that he inherited from Earnshaw family.

However, sometimes, they cannot help themselves and show their real impulses. For instance, Edgar bullies Heathcliff when they are child. He humiliates Heathcliff. Once, he slaps Heathcliff very hardly and never regrets it. This is an unexpected act for such a patient and soft person.

Heathcliff loves Catherine so much. When he learns that Catherine and Edgar will get married, he becomes a living dead, and accepts Catherine as his killer. Catherine was deadly ill when he confessed that. He said, "I am in love with my murderer". "How do I live without my soul?" (Uğultulu Tepeler, 2022). Because he regards Catherine as his soul. In fact, Heathcliff wants to show love towards all people who love him. Even though Ellen Dean, the nanny, does not like Heathcliff after he grows up and they have many conflicts. Heathcliff is never so cruel to her because of the affection she shows him as a child. Throughout the book, Heathcliff is described as a hateful character; on the other hand, Edgar is portrayed as a really kind person. Heathcliff behaves as if he did not have any sign of love, and Edgar reacts as if he did not have any hate. Because people expect them to behave in this way, and they want to be accepted by them. It is the only way for them to be respected, so they act under the compulsion of an unconscious system, RF.

Conclusion

It is clear that Heathcliff and Edgar Linton develop RF. Edgar's family is aristocrat, and they expect him to be well behaved and respectful. He always pretends to be gentle; tolerant in fact he is not. He acts in accordance with their expectations and suppresses his wild impulses. He is a good, understanding, caring husband to Catherine and a great father to his daughter, and he is lovely to everyone as well. Heathcliff, on the other hand, is an orphan, almost everyone hates him and they expect him to be a wicked person. He also acts in accordance with people's expectations, and regulates his soft impulses. He tortures his wife and his son psychologically and physically, and he is full of hate for everyone.

Consequently, it seems that Reaction Formation is one of the most frequently used defense mechanisms along with suppression, displacement and denial. In addition, it is one of the most useful ways of protecting self-esteem, because it regulates bad thoughts to make them acceptable by the society.

Reaction Formation and other Defense Mechanisms are mostly seen in real life. However, they may be in the centre of further studies. The characters of movies, series and theatre plays can be studied, as well as characters of literary works. It can be said that DMs will be the fundamental way of understanding each other as human beings and any kind of art.

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