

Wuthering Heights

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Emily Bronte (1818-1848)

- Charlotte, Emily, Anne (all authors)
- Father was a church rector; religious aunt largely raised them
- Grew up in Yorkshire, a setting similar to WH



Background

- Published in 1847, the height of the Victorian age, it was ill received and did not sell many copies; more of a Romantic text than a Victorian one.
- Charlotte Bronte: “Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know. I scarcely think it is.”
- Pseudonyms: Charlotte wrote as Currer Bell, Emily as Ellis Bell, and Anne as Acton Bell.

Narrative Layering

- Lockwood, who rents Thrushcross Grange, hears the story from an old letter and in most detail from the serving woman Nelly Dean. He then writes the narrative in his diary.
- One question to keep in mind is how reliable of a narrator Nelly is. Nelly was in the midst of all the drama she describes. She is a complex narrator, because at times she expresses love for Heathcliff and Catherine, and other times she expresses dislike for their characters.
- Her “masters” were the Old Mr. Earnshaw, his son Hindley, and then Mr. Edgar Linton.
- The reader, like the narratee, Lockwood, is completely outside of the world of the narrative and listens attentively but without judgement. His reaction may model or mirror the reader’s own. He will leave TG as a result of the story.

Cast of Characters: Heathcliff

- An a dark skinned orphan, described as a “gypsy,” his struggles catalogue the difficulty of a low class person and person of different ethnicity in 19th c. England.
- Passionate, independent, vengeful: he loves and hates passionately, though in the end even his hatred is driven by love.
- Resembles the Romantic hero—dangerous and cold—but with a hidden virtue that gradually reveals itself. (Eg Mr. Darcy or Tom Jones)
- His cruel character reveals Upper class fears of working class people rising out of poverty and gaining power and influence.

Cast of Characters: Catherine Earnshaw

- Passionate like H.
- Self-centred Egoist. She wants everyone to love her.
- When she accepts Edgar Linton's proposal she tells Nelly that she plans to continue her friendship with H. and that she loves both men.
- She is wild and uncontrollable, perhaps, she represents the natural beauty and heartlessness of the northern English countryside itself.

Catherine's Divided Love

‘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. Nelly, I am Heathcliff!’

Isabella Linton

- Isabella serves as a foil to Catherine
- If Catherine represents the beauty and cruelty of the natural, wild landscape, Isabella represents the refinement and weakness of civilization
- But she defies social convention and her family, and marries Heathcliff
- The marriage is unhappy and H. treats her badly

Edgar Linton

- He is a foil to Heathcliff: educated, civilized, and yet weak
- He allows Catherine and H. to meet
- When he confronts H. (chapter 11), he doesn't fight him like a man but tries to get his servants to turn him out. Even Catherine humiliates the weakness of Edgar in contrast to H.
- Is he a sympathetic character, who represents “constancy and tenderness” as Charlotte Bronte wrote in her preface to the 1850 edition? Or is he symbolic of the weak impotence of the old gentry class in England?

Plot Overview

- Mr. Earnshaw brings back an orphan from Liverpool, Heathcliffe
- Heathcliff is the favorite of Mr. Earnshaw and becomes a close playmate of Catherine
- Hindley is jealous and is sent away to college; he returns with a wife, Frances, and proceeds to brutalize H.
- Catherine ends up staying at the neighbors, the Lintons, and becomes friends with Edgar and Isabella
- Catherine marries Edgar, though she also loves H. H. disappears.
- Three years later H. returns and is received warmly by C. but coldly by Edgar. H. lends money and wins money in gambling from Hindley and gains control of WH estate.
- H. marries Isabella, putting himself in line to inherit Thrushcross Grange as well.

Plot continued

- Catherine dies in childbirth and H. begs her spirit to stay and haunt him.
- Isabella flees to London and gives birth to H.'s son, Linton.
- Young Catherine grows up and meets the son of Hindley, Hareton; these two play as Catherine and Heathcliffe had
- Linton comes to live with his father when I. dies, and H. treats him badly.
- Young Catherine begins a correspondence with Linton. H. encourages Linton in this as he wants to own Thrushcross G. He forces them to marry.
- Soon Edgar dies and then the sickly Linton, and H. controls TG and forces Young Catherine to live as a servant at WH.

Conclusion of Story

- The narratee leaves TG out of moral repulsion
- He returns six months later to find Young Catherine and Hareton are in love
- Heathcliffe is mad with love for the ghost of the elder Catherine and dies after a night of wandering the moors.
- Young Catherine and Hareton inherit both estates
- Lockwood visits the graves of Heathcliffe and Catherine

Young Catherine and Hareton Earnshaw's Love is Balanced and Healthy

The intimacy thus commenced grew rapidly; though it encountered temporary interruptions. Earnshaw was not to be civilized with a wish, and my young lady was no philosopher, and no paragon of patience; but both their minds tending to the same point—one loving and desiring to esteem, and the other loving and desiring to be esteemed—they contrived in the end to reach it.

Parallelism

- Young Catherine vs Catherine
- Linton vs Heathcliffe
- Hareton vs Hindley
- Love triangles
- The main difference is that the second generation manages to find some sort of resolution and peace when Hareton and Young Catherine wed at the end.

Psychological Motivation

- Heathcliff's abusiveness toward Hareton is an attempt to recreate his own difficult childhood under Hareton's father, Hindley.
- On one level it is revenge, and on another is a sort of narcissistic self-hatred, a duplication of himself in the role of the uncouth and uneducated Hareton.
- His cruelty toward the young Catherine is driven by dual emotions of love and hate, recognizing Catherine in her.

Heathcliff's desire for revenge

- In the second half of the novel, the passion of Heathcliff, which was expressed as possessive love toward Catherine in the first part, is expressed as obsessive revenge in the second part.
- He desperately wants to revenge himself upon Edgar for having married Catherine, and does so by controlling Edgar's daughter and nephews.
- But in addition to his revenge being driven by his love for Catherine, it is also class based.

Influence of Social Class

- Heathcliff was raised by his adoptive father to believe that he was the equal of Catherine, Hindley, and Edgar, so when he was reduced to the state of a servant it unleashed a violent sense of inferiority, which can only be allayed by bringing other people down to his perceived level of incivility and uncouthness on the one hand.
- Also he seeks to become the lord and master of both the principle estates, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Metaphorically, the two estates represent the two aspects of Catherine's character. She is wild and passionate like Wuthering Heights, and that is the Catherine who loves to wander in the moors with Heathcliff. But she is also civilized and cultured and capable of polite reserve, like Edgar and like Thrushcross Grange.

Romance to the End

- Catherine is buried between her husband and her lover.
- She truly is connected to both men, just as her character reflects aspects of both men's temperaments and both estates. Thus it is fitting that he orders the sexton to open her coffin on the side that will face his, which is also open on that side. He wants their remains to mingle in the earth.
- Yet, at the same time Catherine is not totally the same as Heathcliff, despite what she and he say. She is one part Edgar as well, and so her burial is fitting. It is also echoed by a scene in which Heathcliff replaces Edgar's lock of hair in Catherine's locket, before her burial, with a lock of his own hair. When she discovers it, Nelly entwines Edgar's lock of hair with Heathcliff's lock of hair, representing the fact that Catherine is united to both men, in death as in life.

Heathcliff and the Graves

“I got the sexton, who was digging Linton’s grave, to remove the earth off her coffin lid, and I opened it. I thought, once, I would have stayed there, when I saw her face again—it is hers yet—he had hard work to stir me; but he said it would change, if the air blew on it, and so I struck one side of the coffin loose, and covered it up—not Linton’s side, damn him! I wish he’d been soldered in lead—and I bribed the sexton to pull it away, when I’m laid there, and slide mine out too. I’ll have it made so, and then, by the time Linton gets to us, he’ll not know which is which!” “You were very wicked, Mr. Heathcliff!” I exclaimed; “were you not ashamed to disturb the dead?”

Order and Reason overcome Passion?

- In the passion of the main characters and in the powerful influence of Nature, this novel gives expression to some of the principle ideas of romanticism.
- But the ending is anything but the explosive and destructive and tragic ending so often associated with romanticism.
- Heathcliff turns to the ghost of Catherine and removes himself more and more from the action, until he eventually dies and finds peace at last.
- Then the two vigorous remnants of the second generation, Hareton and young Catherine, marry each other, unite the two estates, and seem to put the tension and conflict and tragedy of the first generation to rest.

Conclusions

- Romantic love is represented as wild and powerful but ultimately destructive
- The natural setting of the moors reflects the passion and wildness of the characters
- Race and class division provokes cruelty and the desire for revenge
- While the text reflects Romantic characteristics such as Love, Nature, and the Supernatural, the resolution with the balanced and steady marriage of Young Catherine and Hareton offers a counterpoint
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