

## A love that never changes: Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*

<sup>1</sup> Chaitanya Gadhiraaju, <sup>2</sup> L Manjula Davidson

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Colleges of Arts and Commerce, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup> Research Supervisor, Head and Professor, Department of English, Colleges of Arts and Commerce, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India

### Abstract

Emily Brontë, the nineteenth century writer penned her one and only novel, *Wuthering Heights* in the year 1847. The novel delineates the trials and tribulations of Catherine Earnshaw and Heathcliff, a couple whose love story becomes the focus of the entire novel. However, the love that they share does not seem very healthy and borders on obsession as far as Heathcliff is concerned. Though Catherine too shares the same viewpoint, the fact that she manages to keep her emotions in check adds a modicum of sanity to the narrative. The name of the title comes from the manor that Catherine and Heathcliff grow up in. The love that Catherine and Heathcliff, share transcends the rigid class boundaries that existed in England during the nineteenth century. However, one needs to understand that the love that these two characters share ends not in gratification but in deprivation. It is the destructiveness of their love that moves the plot forward. Brontë's life too was equally troubled, which might explain her pessimistic approach to the narrative in *Wuthering Heights*.

**Keywords:** Obsession, destruction, love, passion, revenge, gothic

### 1. Introduction

Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847) is seen by many critics to be a perfect example of a work that encompasses manifold genres such as the gothic, the romantic and the supernatural. This work is considered to be a classic work of literary art in English literature and places Emily Brontë in the same league as that of maestros such as Charles Dickens and Jane Austin. This novel of Brontë's, won wide appreciation because of its innovative and experimental nature. However, this work did not achieve popularity when it was first published and was grossly misunderstood by many a critic. According to the editor, Carl Rollyson, who in his work, *Notable British Novelists, Volume 1*:

The literary achievement of *Wuthering Heights* lies in its realistic portrayal of a specific place and time and in its examination of universal patterns of human behavior. (92)

*Wuthering Heights* begins in the year 1801, with Lockwood renting the manor, Thrushcross Grange. After moving into the manor, Lockwood meets his landlord, Heathcliff and becomes interested in finding out the history behind how Heathcliff has come to own the manor. Lockwood also gets to know that Heathcliff lives in a manor, the *Wuthering Heights* along with his son, daughter-in-law and a couple of servants.

Lockwood gets to know about the story of Heathcliff from Nelly Dean, the house keeper, who was also the housekeeper of *Wuthering Heights*. Lockwood begins to write about the strange happenings and the even stranger inhabitants of *Wuthering Heights* in his diary. Nelly Dean's reminiscences form the basis of Lockwood's diary notes, which in turn gives one the detailed origins of Heathcliff.

Nelly's recollections take her back to her life as a servant in *Wuthering Heights* when it was owned by Mr. Earnshaw, the father of Catherine Earnshaw and Hindley Earnshaw. Mr.

Earnshaw on a trip to Liverpool meets an orphan child, Heathcliff and brings the boy home to *Wuthering Heights*. Though initially both the Earnshaw children treat Heathcliff with a lot of derisiveness, Catherine soon begins to like Heathcliff and begins to treat him with affection, which soon changes to love. Catherine and Heathcliff's childhood is filled with their love that soon becomes legend and people around the manor get used to seeing Catherine and Heathcliff playing around the moors. Mr. Earnshaw also becomes quite attached to the young Heathcliff after the death of his wife and seems to prefer him over his own son, Hindley, a fact that does not sit well with him. However, it is Mr. Earnshaw's love for Heathcliff that makes Hindley treat him with cruelty and scorn. Mr. Earnshaw sends Hindley away for his education but keeps Heathcliff quite close to him.

Three years later, Mr. Earnshaw passes away and Hindley along with his wife, Frances comes back to *Wuthering Heights* as its new owners and to claim what he believes is rightfully his. With Mr. Earnshaw dead, Heathcliff has no one to protect him and he bears the brunt of Hindley's long repressed hatred that he had been developing right from his childhood, because of Mr. Earnshaw's affection for Heathcliff. However, one can see no change in Heathcliff's and Catherine's relationship, a relationship that seems to offer the only solace that Heathcliff will ever come across while he is growing up in the manor, *Wuthering Heights*. This once-pampered orphan is denied any kind of education and is made to work in and around the manor like a labourer.

It is at this juncture the Brontë introduces the other major characters in the novel, Edgar Linton and Isabella Linton, the snobbish and snooty children residing in Thrushcross Grange. In an attempt to tease the Linton children Catherine and Heathcliff cross the moorlands and it is then that Catherine,

bitten by a dog falls sick and spends five weeks recuperating in Thrushcross Grange along with the Linton children. Catherine, a girl growing up without a mother gets influenced by Mrs. Linton, who attempts to turn the tomboyish Catherine into a proper young lady. Catherine upon returning from Thrushcross Grange begins to see Heathcliff as an uneducated beast and prefers the company of the well-mannered Edgar Linton, with whom she gradually gets infatuated with. Her interaction with Heathcliff suffers as a result of this infatuation and from here begins a growing alienation of Heathcliff and Catherine.

After Frances' death, while giving birth to her son, Hareton, Hindley's antagonistic attitude towards Heathcliff, grows to never before reached levels, due mostly because of his alcoholism. To make matters worse for Heathcliff, Catherine too abandons Heathcliff in order to see herself as a proper young woman of high society and gets engaged to Edgar. Even though Catherine loves Heathcliff she nevertheless gets married to Edgar after which, Heathcliff runs away from *Wuthering Heights*.

Heathcliff returns to *Wuthering Heights* after amassing huge and mysterious wealth after three years. He at once begins to lend money to Hindley knowing full well that the alcohol addled mind of Hindley's will not allow him to pay back the money lent to him by Heathcliff. In a bid to avenge his traumatic childhood, Heathcliff makes sure that Hindley's alcoholism grows by leaps and bounds and ultimately leads to the death of Hindley, after which he marries Isabella Linton. However, the cruel treatment meted out to Isabella, makes her run away to London and gives birth to Heathcliff's sickly child, Linton.

It is at this time that Catherine falls sick and dies giving birth to her daughter, who is also named Catherine. The death of Catherine delivers a huge blow to Heathcliff, who madly raves about Catherine and how badly he wants her to remain with him in any manner and in any form whatsoever. Heathcliff's despair is quite different from that of Edgar's, who at least maintains a semblance of sanity even though he is crushed by the death of Catherine. Heathcliff's pain and madness is quite palpable as witnessed by his tormented words that once again prove the undying love and desire that he has for Catherine.

"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 say I killed you-haunt me, then! The murdered *do* haunt their murderers, I believe. I know that ghosts *have* wandered the 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!" (Brontë 148)

The narrative now jumps thirteen years and one can see the young Catherine living at Thrushcross Grange with the aging Edgar. Nelly narrates to Lockwood about how she was employed as a nursemaid to Catherine, who takes after her mother, Catherine. Isabella dies leaving Linton in the care of her brother, Edgar. However, Heathcliff gets custody of Linton, since he is Linton's biological father. Heathcliff forces the sickly Linton to leave Thrushcross Grange and join him at Wuthering Cross, since he lives there after inheriting the manor following the death of the debt ridden Hindley. Young Catherine meets Heathcliff, who encourages Catherine to come to *Wuthering Heights* and nurse her young and sickly cousin, Linton back to health. Heathcliff forces Linton to pretend that he is in love with Catherine, in a bid to hurt Edgar, who soon

falls sick and dies, without ever knowing the intensity of Heathcliff's vengeful nature.

Heathcliff's attempts to draw Linton and Catherine closer does not succeed, and the option available to him was to trick both Nelly and Catherine into coming to *Wuthering Heights*, after which he holds them captive till Catherine gives on and marries Linton. Linton soon dyes leaving Catherine to fend for herself in *Wuthering Heights*. With the death of Edgar, Catherine inherits the manor; however, since Linton is dead the control over Thrushcross Grange soon passes onto Heathcliff.

Thus, with this marriage Heathcliff manages to inherit Thrushcross Grange too and lends it to people who for one reason or the other come to spend some time in the moors. However, Catherine suffers in the hands of Heathcliff, who forces Catherine to come and live at *Wuthering Heights* and begins to treat her no better than as a common servant.

Nelly's account ends here and the reader is brought back to the present, a present that houses the abuse of both Catherine and Hildley's son, Hareton. The vindictive nature of Heathcliff's is once again highlighted and the reader can see Heathcliff treating Hareton in the same manner in which Hindley had treated him. Hareton too is illiterate and is made to work as a labourer and is forced to work in the moors. Though Catherine initially is acutely derisive of the rough nature of Hareton, they soon develop an intimacy that recalls the relationship that Heathcliff had with the long dead Catherine.

However, the aging Heathcliff begins to behave in a quiet insane manner and keeps ranting and raving about Catherine. He begins to spend a lot of time on the moors and catches a cold after remaining in the moors throughout the night. His obsession for Catherine becomes an all-encompassing sickness and he begins to see Catherine everywhere. After the night spent in the moors Heathcliff dies leaving the young Catherine and Hareton free to pursue the passion that they have for each other. With the death of Heathcliff, both *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange are inherited by Catherine and Hareton, who plan on getting married.

Nelly's narrative ends here and the novel closes with Lockwood visiting the graves of both Catherine Linton and Heathcliff.

The central concept of *Wuthering Heights* can be divided into two love-centered tales, the love that Catherine and Heathcliff share along with the love that is shared by the younger Catherine and Hareton. The first tale delineates the love that destroys the relationships that Catherine and Heathcliff have with their respective spouses, Edgar Linton or Isabella Linton. Love is an emotion that is largely perceived by people as a nurturing and life-affirming emotion, however, in the case of Catherine and Heathcliff it is this precise emotion that brings them to their knees. Love, especially love between Catherine and Heathcliff is criticized quite harshly by the narrator, Nelly, who sees it as immoral and blasphemous. However, Catherine's and Heathcliff's relationship is so strong and deeply rooted that they are unable to find comfort in anyone other than each other. However, to the modern reader who is not bound by archaic class distinctions prevalent during the nineteenth century, there seems to be nothing immoral in the love that is shared by Catherine and Heathcliff.

Turning to the second love story in *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine and Hareton, though there is an element of antagonism between the principal characters, Catherine and Hareton, they soon begin to like each other. This once again shows that love can blossom in the most hazardous and

unlikeliest of conditions. In the stifling atmosphere of *Wuthering Heights* the younger generation of lovers, blindly gravitate towards each other. Both Catherine and Hareton are love-starved and turn to each other for comfort and strength, proving that love, in their case, is not destructive but constructive, as was the case with the older Catherine and Heathcliff.

Brontë's skill as seen in the case of the novel under study depicts quite vividly the clash of the then prevailing social class distinctions spanning three generations of the Earnshaws and the Lintons. The narrative technique used by Brontë is not straight forward and direct. It is interspaced with constant proleptic and analeptic episodes thereby adding an extra element of novelty and gives the reader a chance to come to his/her own conclusion.

When one looks at the first tale that is centered on Catherina's and Heathcliff's love, one comes to the conclusion that there is no hope for growth or development in their lives. And this makes their tale to be perceived as a rejuvenation of the spirit as far as their emotions are concerned. Whereas, in the case of young Catherine and Hareton, one can see that the love that is shared by them brings out the best in both of them. The reader sees Catherine, a character that has shown nothing but scorn for the uneducated and boorish Hareton, however, as the plot moves forward Catherine soon comes to comprehend the truly gentle nature of Hareton and begins to help him read. Seeing Hareton and the manner in which he responds to Heathcliff leads to her falling in love with him. Catherine's initial impression of Hareton is one of contempt; however, this soon morphs into love. One can infer that it was probably because of their shared experiences and the unfriendly atmosphere of *Wuthering Heights* that has indeed been the driving force behind the affection and trust that they develop towards one another.

One can see the difference between the first couple and the second by considering the fact that the corner stone of the elder Catherine's and Heathcliff's love is their disavowal to change and the second pair's enthusiastic response to embrace the very same change.

## 2. Acknowledgement

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to Prof. L. Manjula Davidson, my research supervisor and Head of the Department, for her rigorous and detailed reading of my manuscript. I would also like to thank The Chief Librarian, Dr. V. S Krishna library, Visakhapatnam. This research paper would not have existed without their recommendations and constant help.

## 3. References

1. Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, Penguin Books. 1994. Google Books, [books.google.co.in/books/about/Notable\\_British\\_Novelist\\_s.html?id=Jtz0JwAACAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Notable_British_Novelist_s.html?id=Jtz0JwAACAAJ&redir_esc=y)
2. Rollyson, Carl. Emily Brontë. *Notable British Novelists*. 2001; 1:92-97.