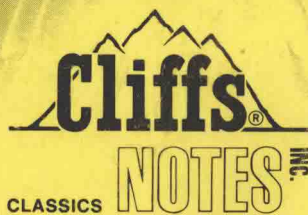


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- *Character Analyses*
- *Theme, Style, and Structure*
- *Questions for Review*
- *Selected Bibliography*

by

Janet C. James, Ph.D.
University of York,
Hesslington, England



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LINCOLN, NEBRASKA 68501

Editor

Gary Carey, M.A.
University of Colorado

Consulting Editor

James L. Roberts, Ph.D.
Department of English
University of Nebraska

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Wuthering Heights Notes

LIFE OF THE AUTHOR

“Stronger than a man, simpler than a child.” These are the words Charlotte Brontë used to describe her sister Emily Jane, author of *Wuthering Heights*, a strange and powerful book, said by many to be the finest novel in the English language.

Emily, the truly “free spirit” of her family, one who could not live away from her beloved moors, was the fifth child of Reverend Patrick Brontë and Maria Branwell Brontë. She was born in Thornton, Yorkshire, in 1818; Charlotte, Anne, and Branwell were also born there, while Elizabeth and Maria were born in Hartshead. When Emily was two years old, the family moved to the parsonage at Haworth. The moors, part of the Pennine chain of mountains — sometimes called The Backbone of England — swept bleakly and magnificently right to their door. This was to be her home until she died in December, 1848, at the age of thirty.

There were many conflicting influences that shaped the Brontë character and genius. Patrick Brontë, the father, was of Irish stock and was known for his picturesque, free-flowing speech, poetry, and imagination. He was born in northern Ireland in 1777, the eldest of ten children. Patrick, a brilliant young lad, attracted the attention of a Methodist clergyman, who financed his education. At sixteen he became schoolmaster of a Presbyterian church school. Through the kind offices of an Anglican minister, he entered Cambridge, where he took his degree and was ordained into the Church of England in 1806.

Maria Branwell was a Methodist from Cornwall. She had literary leanings, having published an essay entitled “On the Advantages of Poverty in Religious Concerns.” Patrick, himself, wrote four books and also some poetry. His last book, *The Maid of Killarney*, was published in 1818. None of these literary attempts was successful, but we can see that the urge for written expression was present in both Maria and Patrick Brontë.

In 1821, a year after arriving at Haworth, Mrs. Brontë died of cancer, leaving the six children motherless. Her sister, Elizabeth Branwell, came from Cornwall to act as housekeeper, and it was she who trained the girls meticulously in all the household arts. Mr. Brontë retreated to his study after the death of his wife, emerging only to fulfill his pastoral duties and to tutor his brilliant young children.

These, then, were the parental influences that helped to mold Emily's character, and those of her sisters and brother: the temperament of the Irish — melancholy, passionate, proud, restless, eloquent, and witty — and the Methodist religious fervor and enthusiasm shown by the followers of John Wesley.

Environment also played its part in creating the uniqueness of Emily Brontë. The village of Haworth was very isolated and intensely Yorkshire, and the people living there were in strong contrast to the Celtic temperament. They were blunt, practical, stubborn, sparing of speech, vigorous, and harsh to the point of brutality. "Hear all, see all, and say nothing. Eat all, drink all, and pay nothing. And if you do anything for nothing, do it for yourself." This is said to be the Yorkshire creed, and a reverence for money, or "brass," as they call it, is deeply embedded in the Yorkshire soul. These people, then, were the product of the moors — those tracts of rocky land, where the north wind shrieks mercilessly, and the only softening influence is the sheep, the purple heather, and the ferny bracken. It was these moors that exalted the spirit of the Brontës and filled their souls with the love of liberty. This was particularly true of Emily.

In 1824 the four eldest girls were sent to Cowan Bridge School, a school for the daughters of impoverished clergymen. Conditions there were frightful, and as a result Maria and Elizabeth died and Charlotte became very ill. Maria was twelve and Elizabeth was eleven. All the Brontë children were delicate, with a tendency toward consumption.

Mr. Brontë brought Emily and Charlotte home, and it was about this time that Branwell received a box of twelve soldiers. These inspired the children to begin writing what they called "Young Men" plays. These had extremely involved plots which eventually turned into the tales of Angria and Gondal, which were chronicled in tiny books (now on display at the Brontë museum). The four young writers worked on these serial stories until they were in their twenties, developing many ideas, characters, and plot lines that appeared in their later works. Charlotte and Branwell wrote the history of the Angrians, while Emily and Anne wrote the *Gondal Chronicle*. Many of Emily's finest poems were incorporated in these stories.

When Charlotte was fifteen she was sent to school at Roe Head, and when she returned she acted as a tutor to Emily and Anne. In 1835 she returned to Roe Head as a teacher and took Emily with her as a student. But Emily could not live away from her beloved moors. She became violently homesick and returned to Haworth Parsonage. Apart from a six-month period of teaching in Halifax, in 1837-38, and an eight-month stay with

Charlotte at school in Brussels (Pensionnat Heger) in 1842-43, Emily remained happily in the seclusion of the parsonage and the wild and lonely moors.

Emily was passionately fond of nature and animals and could be seen striding through the heather and bracken with her bulldog, Keeper. At fifteen, she was described as being tall and slight, with a slouchy, loose-jointed gait like that of a boy. She had a pale complexion, dark, beautiful hair, and lovely hazel eyes. Her features were irregular and she had a large mouth. All her life she persisted in wearing clothes that were completely outmoded.

She was strongly opposed to formal religion, possibly because of Aunt Branwell's fanaticism, and seldom attended church; but her writings suggest that she may have had a mystical experience which had a profound effect on her work, especially her poetry. Although she is best known for her fiction, Emily was essentially a poet, and her "Remembrance," "The Old Stoic," and "Last Lines" are considered excellent poetry.

While keeping house, Emily worked on her poetry in secret. One day in 1845, Charlotte discovered some of her poems and revealed that she had also written some verse. Anne shyly produced some of her work. Together, they had enough poetry for a small book. Knowing the prejudice against women writers, the girls had their poems published at their own expense under the title *Poems by Currer* [Charlotte], *Ellis* [Emily], and *Acton* [Anne] *Bell*. Only two copies were sold — one being bought by the publisher. Undeterred by this failure, all three started work on novels: Emily on *Wuthering Heights*, Charlotte on *Jane Eyre*, and Anne on *Agnes Grey*.

While Charlotte's and Anne's writings were in a more conventional vein, Emily's masterpiece showed her to be a complete individualist. She used the stark Yorkshire setting, not to create suspense and horror, as in the typical Gothic novel, but as a natural part of her story. All her characters were human — they had good and bad qualities. They could hate and love with equal intensity. The plot was completely different from any that had been created before.

The publishing firm of Smith, Elder had previously rejected a book called *The Professor*, which Charlotte had written, but they accepted *Jane Eyre* and published it in 1847. It was an immediate success. Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* were published in 1848 by another firm. Another novel by Anne, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, was published in the same year.

Wuthering Heights went almost unnoticed. Anyone who did read it was repulsed by the brutality and violence of the characters and by the fact

that it differed so much from the romantic novels of the day. They did not want realism as Emily depicted it, and they did not want wild, fierce anti-heroes like Heathcliff — who was more like a villain — or willful, passionate heroines like Catherine.

During this period Branwell had fallen prey to drink and drugs and was dying. Emily, who had always been closest to him, was the only one who withheld judgment and tried to help him. It was Emily who beat out the flames with her bare hands when he wrapped himself in a sheet when drunk and deliberately set himself afire. It was Emily who mourned Branwell most when he died in September, 1848, at the age of thirty.

Emily caught cold at Branwell's funeral and never left the house again. Failing visibly every day, she insisted on keeping up her regular round of duties, although Charlotte and Anne knew she was dying. She died on December 19, 1848, at the age of thirty. She knew nothing of the success which was to be finally accorded *Wuthering Heights*.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

Mr. Earnshaw, a brusque Yorkshire farmer and owner of Wuthering Heights on the moors, brings home a waif from Liverpool. The boy is given the name Heathcliff and is brought up with the Earnshaw children, Catherine and Hindley. Catherine loves Heathcliff but Hindley hates the stranger for supplanting him in his father's affection. After the death of Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw, Hindley subjects Heathcliff to every indignity, and Heathcliff becomes brutal and morose. Despite the love that still persists between her and Heathcliff, Catherine turns to Edgar Linton, a young gentleman who lives in Thrushcross Grange in the valley.

Catherine marries Edgar Linton, and Heathcliff leaves Wuthering Heights. Heathcliff returns, rich and looking like a gentleman. His return, and Edgar's jealousy, make Catherine distracted. She and Heathcliff are more madly in love than ever. She gives birth to Edgar's child, Cathy, and dies. Heathcliff is determined to be avenged on Hindley Earnshaw and Edgar Linton. He marries Edgar's sister Isabella and turns Hindley into a drunkard and a gambler, winning all his property from him; as a result, Hindley's son Hareton becomes a pauper. Isabella has a weakling son, Linton, and after her death Heathcliff marries Linton off to Cathy. His plans are thwarted, however, as Linton dies and Cathy falls in love with and marries Hareton.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION OF *WUTHERING HEIGHTS*

I have just read over *Wuthering Heights*, and, for the first time, have obtained a clear glimpse of what are termed (and, perhaps, really are) its faults; have gained a definite notion of how it appears to other people — to strangers who knew nothing of the author; who are unacquainted with the locality where the scenes of the story are laid; to whom the inhabitants, the customs, the natural characteristics of the outlying hills and hamlets in the West Riding of Yorkshire are things alien and unfamiliar.

To all such, *Wuthering Heights* must appear a rude and strange production. The wild moors of the north of England can for them have no interest; the language, the manners, the very dwellings and household customs of the scattered inhabitants of those districts, must be to such readers in a great measure unintelligible, and — where intelligible — repulsive. Men and women who, perhaps naturally very calm, and with feelings moderate in degree, and little marked in kind, have been trained from their cradle to observe the utmost evenness of manner and guardedness of language, will hardly know what to make of the rough, strong utterance, the harshly manifested passions, the unbridled aversions and headlong partialities of unlettered moorland hinds and rugged moorland squires, who have grown up untaught and unchecked, except by mentors as harsh as themselves. A large class of readers, likewise, will suffer greatly from the introduction into the pages of this work of words printed with all their letters, which it has become the custom to represent by the initial and final letter only — a blank line filling the interval. I may as well say at once that, for this circumstance, it is out of my power to apologise; deeming it, myself, a rational plan to write words at full length. The practice of hinting by single letters those expletives with which profane and violent persons are wont to garnish their discourse, strikes me as a proceeding which, however well meant, is weak and futile; I cannot tell what good it does — what feeling it spares — what horror it conceals.

With regard to the rusticity of *Wuthering Heights*, I admit the charge, for I feel the quality. It is rustic all through. It is moorish, and wild, and knotty as a root of heath. Nor was it natural that it should be otherwise; the author being herself a native and nursling of the moors. Doubtless, had her lot been cast in a town, her writings, if she had written at all, would have possessed another character. Even had chance or taste led her to choose a similar subject, she would have treated it otherwise. Had Ellis Bell been a

lady or gentleman accustomed to what is called "the world," her view of a remote and unreclaimed region, as well as of the dwellers therein, would have differed greatly from that actually taken by the homebred country girl. Doubtless it would have been wider — more comprehensive: whether it would have been more original or more truthful is not so certain. As far as the scenery and locality are concerned, it could scarcely have been so sympathetic: Ellis Bell did not describe as one whose eye and taste alone found pleasure in the prospect; her native hills were far more to her than a spectacle; they were what she lived in, and by, as much as the wild birds, their tenants, or as the heather, their produce. Her descriptions, then, of natural scenery, are what they should be, and all they should be.

Where delineation of human character is concerned, the case is different. I am bound to avow that she had scarcely more practical knowledge of the peasantry amongst whom she lived, than a nun has of the country people who sometimes pass her convent gates. My sister's disposition was not naturally gregarious; circumstances favoured and fostered her tendency to seclusion; except to go to church or take a walk on the hills, she rarely crossed the threshold of home. Though her feeling for the people round was benevolent, intercourse with them she never sought; nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced. And yet she knew them: knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them with detail, minute, graphic, and accurate; but *with* them, she rarely exchanged a word. Hence it ensued that what her mind had gathered of the real concerning them, was too exclusively confined to those tragic and terrible traits of which, in listening to the secret annals of every rude vicinage, the memory is sometimes compelled to receive the impress. Her imagination, which was a spirit more sombre than sunny, more powerful than sportive, found in such traits material whence it wrought creations like Heathcliff, like Earnshaw, like Catherine. Having formed these beings she did not know what she had done. If the auditor of her work when read in manuscript, shuddered under the grinding influence of natures so relentless and implacable, of spirits so lost and fallen; if it was complained that the mere hearing of certain vivid and fearful scenes banished sleep by night, and disturbed mental peace by day, Ellis Bell would wonder what was meant, and suspect the complainant of affectation. Had she but lived, her mind would of itself have grown like a strong tree, loftier, straighter, wider-spreading, and its matured fruits would have attained a mellower ripeness and sunnier bloom; but on that mind time and experience alone could work: to the influence of other intellects, it was not amenable.

Having avowed that over much of *Wuthering Heights* there broods "a horror of great darkness"; that, in its storm-heated and electrical atmosphere, we seem at time to breathe lightning, let me point to those spots where clouded daylight and the eclipsed sun still attest their existence. For a specimen of true benevolence and homely fidelity, look at the character of Nelly Dean; for an example of constancy and tenderness, remark that of Edgar Linton. (Some people will think these qualities do not shine so well incarnate in a man as they would do in a woman, but Ellis Bell could never be brought to comprehend this notion: nothing moved her more than any insinuation that the faithfulness and clemency, the long-suffering and loving-kindness which are esteemed virtues in the daughters of Eve, become foibles in the sons of Adam. She held that mercy and forgiveness are the divinest attributes of the Great Being who made both man and woman, and that what clothes the Godhead in glory, can disgrace no form of feeble humanity.) There is a dry saturnine humour in the delineation of old Joseph, and some glimpses of grace and gaiety animate the younger Catherine. Nor is even the first heroine of the name destitute of the certain strange beauty in her fierceness, or of honesty in the midst of perverted passion and passionate perversity.

Heathcliff, indeed, stands unredeemed; never once swerving in his arrow-straight course of perdition, from the time when "the little black-haired swarthy thing, as dark as if it came from the Devil," was first unrolled out of the bundle and set on its feet in the farmhouse kitchen, to the hour when Nelly Dean found the grim, stalwart corpse laid on its back in the panel-enclosed bed, with wide-gazing eyes that seemed "to sneer at her attempt to close them, and parted lips and sharp white teeth that sneered too."

Heathcliff betrays one solitary human feeling, and that is *not* his love for Catherine; which is a sentiment fierce and inhuman; a passion such as might boil and glow in the bad essence of some evil genius; a fire that might form the tormented centre — the ever-suffering soul of a magnate of the infernal world; and by its quenchless and ceaseless ravage effect the execution of the decree which dooms him to carry Hell with him wherever he wanders. No; the single link that connects Heathcliff with humanity is his rudely-confessed regard for Hareton Earnshaw — the young man whom he has ruined; and then his half-implicit esteem for Nelly Dean. These solitary traits omitted, we should say he was child neither of Lascar nor gipsy, but a man's shape animated by demon life — a Ghoul — an Afreet.

Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff, I do not know: I scarcely think it is. But this I know: the writer who possesses

the creative gift owns something of which he is not always master — something that, at times, strangely wills and works for itself. He may lay down rules and devise principles, and to rules and principles it will perhaps for years lie in subjection; and then, haply without any warning of revolt, there comes a time when it will no longer consent to “harrow the valleys, or be bound with a band in the furrow” — when it “laughs at the multitude of the city, and regards not the crying of the driver” — when, refusing absolutely to make ropes out of sea-sand any longer, it sets to work on statue-hewing, and you have a Pluto or a Jove, a Tisiphone or a Psyche, a Mermaid or a Madonna, as Fate or Inspiration direct. Be the work grim or glorious, dread or divine, you have little choice left but quiescent adoption. As for you — the nominal artist — your share in it has been to work passively under dictates you neither delivered nor could question — that would not be uttered at your prayer, nor suppressed nor changed at your caprice. If the result be attractive, the World will praise you, who little deserve praise; if it be repulsive, the same World will blame you, who almost as little deserve blame.

Wuthering Heights was hewn in a wild workshop, with simple tools, out of homely materials. The statuary found a granite block on a solitary moor; gazing thereon, he saw how from the crag might be elicited a head, savage, swart, sinister; a form moulded with at least one element of grandeur — power. He wrought with a rude chisel, and from no model but the vision of his meditations. With time and labour, the crag took human shape; and there it stands colossal, dark, and frowning, half statue, half rock: in the former sense, terrible and goblin-like; in the latter, almost beautiful, for its colouring is of mellow grey, and moorland moss clothes it; and health, with its blooming bells and balmy fragrance, grows faithfully close to the giant’s foot.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Mr. Earnshaw

He discovers a young waif, takes a fancy to him, and thus Heathcliff is introduced into the Earnshaw family. Being a kind man, he dotes on the unfortunate Heathcliff, eventually to the detriment of his own son.

Mrs. Earnshaw

We know little about her, except that she is not fond of Heathcliff.

Hindley Earnshaw

From the beginning, Hindley hates Heathcliff because he is an intruder; furthermore, Hindley loses both his father's love and his sister's to the dark and sullen waif. When he is finally able to claim the family estate, he sets out to brutalize and demean Heathcliff.

Frances Earnshaw

Hindley's wife is a sickly, rather silly woman. She dies after Hareton is born; because Hindley is so grief-stricken, he allows himself to be manipulated and ruined by Heathcliff's schemes.

Hareton Earnshaw

Hindley and Frances's only son is reared by Heathcliff as part of his plan to punish the Earnshaws. Hareton reflects Heathcliff's cruel nature, but when he has the chance to better himself, he tries to learn to read and express affection for others.

Catherine Earnshaw

As a child, she could "ride any horse in the stable"; she is a wild, impetuous, arrogant girl. Despite her feelings for Heathcliff, she decides to marry Edgar, knowing full well that "I am Heathcliff's; he's always in my mind." Before she dies, she says that she wants both Edgar and Heathcliff to suffer — Edgar, because he never understood her affection for Heathcliff; and Heathcliff, because he never understood why she married Edgar.

Heathcliff

An adopted member of the Earnshaw family. As a child, he was sullen and impatient; as a young man, he is sullen, impatient, vengeful and cruel. He has an all-engrossing passion for Catherine Earnshaw, and when she marries Edgar Linton, he spends the remainder of his life in spiritual torment.

Linton Heathcliff

The son of Heathcliff and Isabella Linton. He is sickly and unmanly. His death is hastened because of Heathcliff's neglect.

Mr. and Mrs. Linton

We know little about them; they seem to be kindly people who die shortly after Catherine convalesces at their home.

Edgar Linton

A devoted suitor of Catherine, he becomes a recluse after her death. He develops a fondness for young Cathy, but he is no match for Heathcliff, who is determined to make Cathy pay for her mother's caprices.

Cathy Linton

Edgar's darling; she inherits her mother's pride and determination and outwits Heathcliff; she also accomplishes a happy marriage with young Hareton.

Isabella Linton

Heathcliff's insubstantial wife who shows surprising spunk when she leaves her husband and tries to raise their child alone in a strange city.

Nelly Dean

The faithful, devoted servant at the Grange; as a narrator, she is sensible and usually reliable.

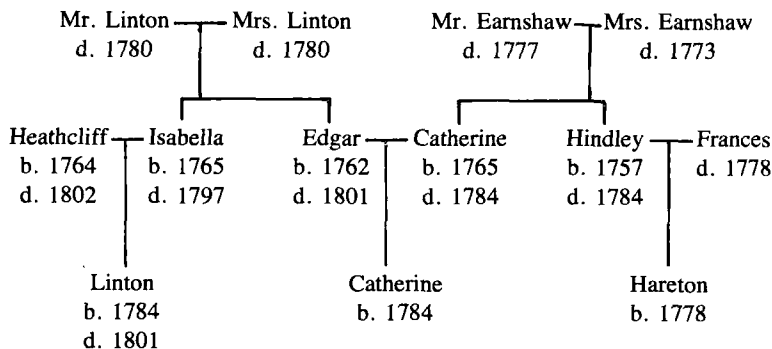
Joseph

Nelly characterizes him as being wearisome and self-righteous; her assessment is accurate. He is a fit companion and loyal servant for Heathcliff.

Zillah

The "lusty dame" who fills Nelly's position at Wuthering Heights.

Genealogical Table of the Principal Characters in *Wuthering Heights*



SUMMARIES AND COMMENTARIES

CHAPTER 1

Summary

Mr. Lockwood, a minor character, tells of his visit to Wuthering Heights, a weatherbeaten farm on the windswept moors, the previous day, to introduce himself to his landlord, Heathcliff.

The setting is the wild Yorkshire moors, to which Mr. Lockwood has retreated from "the social stir" of London for a year. The time is the year 1801. He has rented Thrushcross Grange, situated in the valley. His curiosity is aroused by the brooding quality and crumbling, menacing appearance of Wuthering Heights and by the inscription over the door — the date "1500" and the name "Hareton Earnshaw." He would like to ask his landlord about this, but Heathcliff proves to be unsociable, inhospitable, and brusque. After unlocking the gate, Heathcliff grudgingly tells him to "walk in." This greeting does not disturb Mr. Lockwood, who enjoys solitude himself and feels his host is reserved rather than proud, as he might first appear.

Mr. Lockwood is confused by the furnishings of the home and the appearance of Heathcliff. The furniture is suitable for a farmhouse, and Heathcliff is a strange mixture of the refined and uncouth: slovenly, yet "in

dress and manner a gentleman." Dark and gypsy-looking, he is handsome in a repellent way.

The place is overrun by a pack of ferocious dogs. When Heathcliff descends to the cellar to find out why Joseph, the old servant, has not brought the wine he ordered, Mr. Lockwood amuses himself by winking and making faces at the animals. They attack in a mass, and, barricading himself behind a table, he yells for help. Neither Heathcliff nor Joseph comes to his aid, but a "lusty dame" appears from the kitchen and beats them off with a frying pan.

Mr. Lockwood's spirited account of the attack amuses Heathcliff, who unbends a little and proves an entertaining and intelligent host over the bottle of wine. Mr. Lockwood then invites himself back the following day and although he is aware that Heathcliff will not welcome the intrusion, he realizes that he is looking forward to his second visit to Wuthering Heights.

Commentary

Mr. Lockwood is the narrator and recounts this chapter in diary form several years after the most dramatic events of the story have taken place. This flashback gives a tantalizing glimpse of the strange passions governing the inhabitants of Wuthering Heights, and there are only suggestions here of the violent forces about to be unleashed.

The first chapter is a blending of the dominant elements in the book: setting, atmosphere, character, mystery, passion, and violence. Wuthering Heights, in particular, is vividly described. Only its rugged structure has insured its survival against the onslaught of the incessant winds that have twisted and stunted the surrounding trees. "Wuthering" is a Yorkshire word for "weathering" and therefore is an appropriate name for the house, which is situated on the wild moors.

Thruscross Grange is also mentioned. By contrast, it is nestled in a sheltered valley. The description of the house was drawn from Ponden House, which was owned by the Heatons, a prominent family living in the district at the time of Mr. Brontë's appointment to Haworth. The young Heatons and the young Brontës became friends, and Emily drew on her intimate knowledge of the interior of the house for her description of the Grange, the library particularly. The bookshelves still stand along one wall of the room.

The entire action of the story takes place within the two houses and on the moors which lie between. The principal character, Heathcliff, around whom all the action revolves, emerges as starkly as Wuthering Heights. He