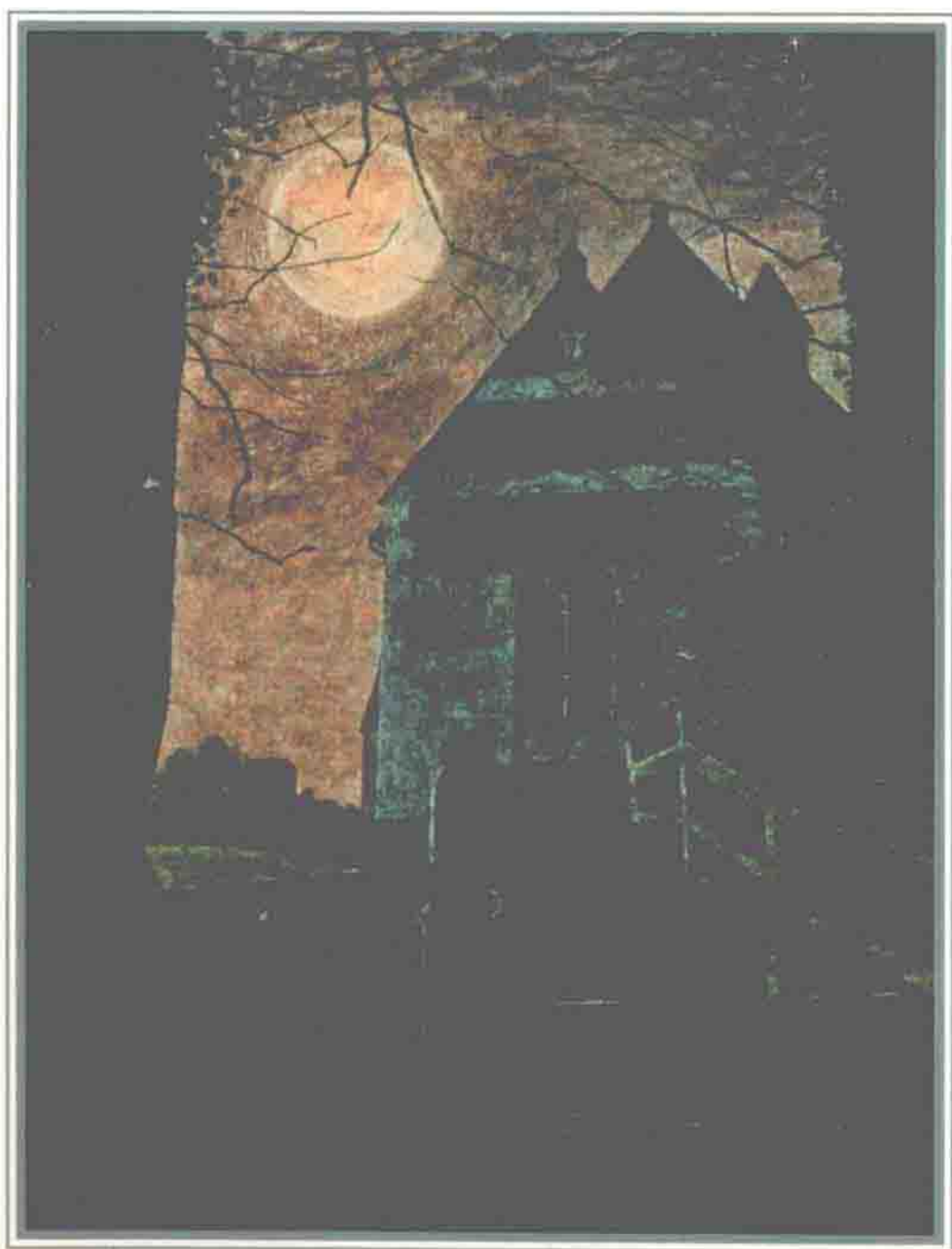


*Signet Classic*

EMILY BRONTË



W U T H E R I N G  
H E I G H T S



WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION  
BY ALICE HOFFMAN

*Wuthering  
Heights*

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Alice Hoffman

A SIGNET CLASSIC

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**Emily Brontë** (1818–48) was the second of the three famous Brontë sisters. Along with their brother, they grew up in the isolated Yorkshire village of Haworth with no real schooling and little care. Sensitive, shy, fiercely reserved, and absolutely unable to bear any regimentation, Emily Brontë wrote one volume of carefully guarded poems. She poured the secret thoughts of her tormented soul into *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the book that established her as a major figure in English literature.

**Alice Hoffman** was born in New York and earned her graduate degree at Stanford University. She is the author of fifteen novels—including *Turtle Moon*, *Practical Magic*, *Here on Earth* (modeled on the themes of *Wuthering Heights*), and *The Probable Future*—as well as a book of short fiction, *Local Girls*, and five books for children, including *Green Angel*.

# Introduction

**W**UTHERING HEIGHTS is one of the greatest novels of all time, and arguably the greatest psychological novel ever written. It is a novel that defies definition. In a gothic landscape of moors where ghosts roam and love never dies, there is also a realistic presentation of the social landscape of the turn of the nineteenth century, when the novel is set, and the Victorian era, when it was written. The ultimate rebel's treatise written by a woman who rarely ventured farther than her own village and whose own life was tragically short, *Wuthering Heights* is a domestic drama, a ghost story, a romance, a spiritual journey, a diary of dreams and visions, and above all else, an examination of the nature of humanity.

At the novel's core is the deep and complicated attachment between Heathcliff and Cathy, a remarkable study of guilt, loss, power, and erotic love. Here is a work that is set apart from all other novels of its time, and of ours, by the complexity of the text and the astounding virtuosity and assurance of a master fiction writer. Heathcliff's great love for Cathy and her passion for him are what elevate the book to greatness: Love is a natural force in *Wuthering Heights*, wild as the moors, unpredictable as the weather, paradoxical not only to the characters in the novel, but to the reader as well. Love defies all logic and common sense; it is a mystery that is both unanswerable and endlessly fascinating.

That this great novel, so complex in both emotional depth and in structure, was written by a young woman with very little obvious life experience—published when she was twenty-nine, only a year before her death from tuberculosis in 1848—is a literary miracle that has astounded readers since its publication. Several critics

were not only amazed by the work but offended by the content and the intensity of *Wuthering Heights*, shocked that a woman could indeed write so fiercely. In 1850, a reviewer in the *Leader* said:

Curious enough it is to read *Wuthering Heights* and *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* [by Anne Brontë], and remember that the writers were two retiring, solitary, consumptive girls! Books, coarse even for men, coarse in language and coarse in conception, the coarseness apparently of violent and uncultivated men—turn out to be the productions of two girls living almost alone, filling their loneliness with quiet studies. . . .

How then did a great feat of creative imagination such as *Wuthering Heights* arise from such a “small” life? Born in 1818, at Thorton in Yorkshire, Emily Jane Brontë’s father, Patrick Brontë, was the curate of Haworth; the parsonage was Emily’s universe until the day she died on the couch in the parlor. In this world of ideas and books, Emily lived a sheltered, circumscribed life, and yet one must clearly state: Just as she was no stranger to the moors she wrote of, she was no stranger to grief. Emily’s mother died when she was three, two older sisters died of malnutrition while away at boarding school (the cruelty of such schools echoes throughout Charlotte Brontë’s own extraordinary novel *Jane Eyre*). Branwell, the only son, of whom so much was expected, wasted his talents, ruined any future he might have had, and became an alcoholic and drug addict.

As children, the Brontës established their own literary society, writing poems, journals, and tales. Charlotte and Branwell created the imaginary epic world of Angria. Emily and Anne created Gondal; only a few poems in the Gondal cycle have survived. Literature was part and parcel of daily life, as was the ever-changing landscape of the moors, which was woven into every inch of Emily’s fiction and poetry. In creating the heroic world of Gondal, Emily constructed an ongoing history that included the prototypes for Heathcliff, Catherine, and Edgar. Through the juvenilia, there are hints of what is to come: Tales of a fair girl and a dark boy who are

drawn to each other prefigure the vital and exceptional world of *Wuthering Heights*.

The Brontë family was indeed surrounded by literature. It was not a vocation or an avocation, but as much a part of their lives as the charged atmosphere of the moors. A charming bit of Emily's diary, written when she was sixteen, reveals how closely the real world and her fictional world flowed together:

Anne and I have been peeling apples for Charlotte to make us an apple pudding and for Aunt nuts and apples Charlotte said she made puddings perfectly and she was of quick but limited intellect. Taby said just now Come Anne pilloputate [peel a potato] Aunt has come into the kitchen just now and said Where are your feet Anne Anne answered On the floor Aunt papa opened the parlour door and gave Branwell a letter saying Here Branwell read this and show it to your Aunt and Charlotte the Gondals are discovering the interior of Gaaldine Sally Mosely is washing in the back kitchen. . . .

Just as the domestic and the creative realms reside together in this diary entry, Emily's imagination was not born only of family life at the parsonage; it was her inner life that brought forth the greatness of her writing. Although the sisters eventually wrote separately, with male names to disguise their gender, the Brontës were first considered to be one author, with Charlotte (writing as Currer Bell) garnering most of the praise for her stirring but more traditional novel *Jane Eyre*. In her *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell* (1850) (Emily and Anne Brontë), Charlotte, the lone surviving progeny, explains the choice they made to keep their identities secret when they began to publish.

We had very early cherished the dream of one day becoming authors. This dream, never relinquished even when distance divided and absorbing tasks occupied us, now suddenly acquired strength and consistency; it took the character of a resolve. We agreed to arrange a small selection of our poems, and, if pos-

sible, get them printed. Averse to personal publicity, we veiled our own names under those of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell; the ambiguous choice being dictated by a sort of conscientious scruple at assuming Christian names positively masculine, while we did not like to declare ourselves women, because—without at that time suspecting that our mode of writing and thinking was not what is called “feminine”—we had the vague impression that authoresses are liable to be looked on with prejudice; we had noticed how critics sometimes use for their chastisement the weapon of personality, and for their reward, a flattery, which is not true praise.

*Wuthering Heights* is the story of a haunted house—a structure and a family haunted by grief, by sorrow, by memory, by love denied. Heathcliff himself is the ultimate literary stranger, a character whose very presence changes everything and everyone around him, a fierce storm in human form, an elemental force. The novel follows the complicated and commingled fate of the two families with whom Heathcliff comes into contact. The Earnshaws—Mr. Earnshaw, Catherine, and her weak and vicious brother, Hindley—and the Lintons, who are wealthier and favor a more luxurious life—kindhearted Edgar and his headstrong sister, Isabella. Eventually the third generation includes the young Cathy, daughter of Catherine and Edgar Linton; Linton Heathcliff, the spoiled and manipulated son of Heathcliff and Isabella; and Hareton, the debased son of Hindley.

*Wuthering Heights* is a story set within a story, a nest of tales that come full circle. In many ways, the novel is about the importance of storytelling. The story of Heathcliff and Cathy is revealed to the reader by Lockwood, an outsider who stumbles upon *Wuthering Heights*; he, in turn, learns the complicated history of the residents of the Heights from Nelly Dean, the faithful servant. Just as Heathcliff may have been shaped in part by Branwell Brontë (whose ill-fated romance with the wife of his employer led to a breakdown, addiction, and much like Heathcliff, a physical wasting away), Nelly may have been modeled upon Tabitha (Taby) Ackroyd, a local



woman who was a domestic servant and part of the Brontë family. Taby told the children local gossip, stories, and folk tales, much as Nelly recounts the tales of *Wuthering Heights* and Thrushcross Grange. In doing so, Nelly, like her counterpart in the real world, brings to mind the old women who told kitchen tales, known to us as fairy tales—an oral tradition of storytelling passed on by women who might not read nor write, but who could be counted upon to remember, and therefore to keep these deceptively homely, truth-filled tales alive.

The story of *Wuthering Heights* originates with an act of kindness: Mr. Earnshaw, the father of two, returns from Liverpool, bringing home an orphan of mysterious origins, Heathcliff. Heathcliff is a puzzle, not only to Lockwood, as he hears the story from Nelly, but to the other characters in *Wuthering Heights*, to the reader, and quite possibly to Heathcliff himself. What drives Heathcliff and what formed him are mysteries forevermore. He is perhaps the most enigmatic and paradoxical creation in all of fiction, continually fascinating, not only to Cathy, but to the reader. Heathcliff's strange appearance begins the internal action of the novel; his sudden and unexplained disappearance is the centerpiece (during which time, the abandoned Cathy marries her wealthy neighbor, the more appropriate Edgar Linton); and Heathcliff's insistence on reappearing yet again, after his absence of three years, brings ruin upon the lives of nearly everyone with whom he comes into contact, including, and most especially, himself.

As the novel is divided into two sections, Heathcliff's inner being is divided in two as well. He is a torn soul, a man ruled by emotion, much as the moors are ruled by storm and atmosphere. He is the powerless hero in the first half of the novel; the exploitative and wealthy antihero in the second half. Of the first Heathcliff, the as yet uncorrupted boy, Cathy utters the most soul-stirring admission of love and erotic desire in all of literature:

My great miseries in this world have been Heathcliff's miseries, and I watched and felt each from the begin-

ning; my great thought in living is himself. If all else perished, and *he* remained, I should still continue to be; and all else remained, and he were annihilated, the universe would turn to a mighty stranger; I should not seem a part of it. . . . Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff!

(p. 80)

Here is a love that defies not only the rules of mankind, but the rules of heaven:

If I were in heaven, Nelly, I should be extremely miserable. . . . I dreamt once that I was there . . . heaven did not seem to be my home, and I broke my heart with weeping to come back to earth; and the angels were so angry that they flung me out into the middle of the heath on top of Wuthering Heights, where I woke sobbing for joy. That will do to explain my secret. . . . I've no more business to marry Edgar Linton than I have to be in heaven. . . .

(p. 78)

And yet, hoping for power and wealth for herself and Heathcliff, she does exactly that. To the modern reader, Cathy can seem headstrong and foolish, but she, like Heathcliff, is a divided soul, torn between what she truly desires and what a woman of her time and place should want. When Heathcliff returns to find that Catherine has indeed married Edgar Linton and that the fortune he earned to win her is useless, he is embittered and quick to seek revenge. He is becoming the other Heathcliff, the dark, disturbed specter who seeks only retribution. He marries Linton's naive sister, Isabella, the deluded creature who believes she knows who Heathcliff is, yet sees nothing of his true self.

Cathy, on the other hand, though nearing death, ruined by nature and by circumstance, clearly understands that this twisted Heathcliff is not the same person she fell in love with: "That is not *my* Heathcliff. I shall love mine yet; and take him with me—he's in my soul" (p. 155). As for Heathcliff, even Cathy's death cannot extinguish the single unwavering thread in his life: his great

love for her. “I *cannot* live without my life! I *cannot* live without my soul” (p. 162).

Power corrupts in the world of *Wuthering Heights*. The notion of class and all it implies is the subtext of the novel, and struggle is everywhere: between the ruling class and the disenfranchised, between men and women, between servants and masters, between man and nature. In the first half of the novel, a pure love is torn apart by class distinctions. Cathy marries Linton in search of power, both socially and economically, in order to help Heathcliff. It is the uses and misuses of power that set in motion the action that will define the present and the future. In the first half of the novel, the cruelty of the social rules and regulations of civilized society induce Heathcliff to seek revenge. In the second half, revenge is put forth; in Heathcliff’s hands, there is the destruction of that civilized, but unfair, world. In repayment for Hindley’s treatment of him, Heathcliff turns Hindley’s son, Hareton, into his own servant. But this abasement of the Earnshaw line fails to bring Heathcliff any more satisfaction than does his humiliation of the young Catherine, whom he forces to marry his progeny, Linton, in order to gain control of Thrushcross Grange. Against the backdrop of degradation and cruelty, young Catherine manages to educate Hareton and in doing so initiates a rebuilding of the civilized world. As Heathcliff wastes away and Hareton and the second Catherine fall in love, a more fair and even sort of world is formed, one that, for many readers, is also a far less interesting section of the tale, but one that brings the story full circle in theme and in structure.

When Heathcliff, the orphan, manages to get his hands on all of the property belonging to the two families, the orphan becomes the master, and in the process, he is ruined. He has become antisocial, selfish, jealous—a man willing to destroy himself in order to destroy others. And yet we understand the humanity of this “fierce, pitiless, wolfish man” (p. 99) precisely because we know his emotional history. We have seen the cruelty heaped upon him by Hindley. We have been witness to the unfair limits of his place in society and the uncivilized man-

ner in which he has been treated in the civilized world. This is the beginning of the psychological novel, in which we understand how the protagonist's history and inner life combine to make him the man that he is.

The issue of identity reverberates throughout the novel. Who is Heathcliff? What is the true nature of Cathy's desire? Written on a window ledge at the Heights are the names *Catherine Earnshaw*, *Catherine Heathcliff*, *Catherine Linton*. Read forward, these names outline the story of the first Catherine, Heathcliff's beloved. Read backward, they follow the story of the second Catherine, her daughter, who is born a Linton, marries a Heathcliff, and then finds love with Hareton Earnshaw. The shifting nature of personal identity and the powerful result of erotic attachment can be read in this list of names. One person, yet another. A man who is both the beloved and the harbinger of ruin. A woman who is both real and a ghost, who gives and yet denies love. The dual nature of humanity is echoed in the structure of the novel and in the questions Brontë raises and never answers. In *Wuthering Heights*, are we privy to a nightmare or a dream? Is Heathcliff's love for Catherine the stuff of heaven or hell? Are we given a proper history of the characters? Or is the past transmogrified and rewritten by Nelly, by Lockwood, and perhaps by the players in the drama themselves?

It is no wonder that this visionary tale, so complicated in form, structure, and psychology, was so misunderstood by early critics. The reviews were generally dismal, and reviewers were often repulsed by the characters and the action. In January 1848, a reviewer in the *Atlas* declared:

*Wuthering Heights* is a strange, inartistic story. There are evidences in every chapter of a sort of rugged power—an unconscious strength—which the possessor seems never to think of turning to the best advantage. The general effect is inexpressibly painful. We know nothing in the whole range of our fictitious literature which presents such shocking pictures of the worst forms of humanity. . . . There is not in the entire *dramatis personae* a single character which is not utterly hateful or thoroughly contemptible. If you do not

detest the person, you despise him; and if you do not despise him, you detest him with your whole heart.

The reaction to *Wuthering Heights* was so intense, the debate over its merit so heated, that Charlotte Brontë wrote a preface to the 1850 edition to resolve the “history and mystery of authorship” after Emily’s death. In essence, she was also writing an apology of sorts, doing her best to explain the brutality and beauty of *Wuthering Heights*:

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. . . . 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.

It is Emily Brontë’s imagination that is the true hero of *Wuthering Heights*. Her unearthly ability to be inside a character, and to allow the reader to feel that character’s fears and desires, is a triumph of the greatest order. Brilliant and brutal, a dark and vivid dream, *Wuthering Heights* presents us with nothing less than a map of the soul. The mesmerizing world of the moors, so like the subconscious of a human being, contains all elements: natural and supernatural, the real world alongside the dreamworld, erotic love as well as the practical domain of domestic life. At the close of the novel, Heathcliff and Cathy are spiritually reunited in death, but ultimately, it is the power and originality and raw beauty of Emily Brontë’s storytelling that lives on. However circumspect her personal life, Emily Brontë *knew* humanity at the

deepest level. In creating this single work of genius she has left behind an entire universe, a remarkable work of imagination that has the power to move, to illuminate, and to astound at each and every reading.

—Alice Hoffman

*Wuthering  
Heights*





# Chapter 1

1801—I have just returned from a visit to my landlord—the solitary neighbour that I shall be troubled with. This is certainly a beautiful country! In all England, I do not believe that I could have fixed on a situation so completely removed from the stir of society. A perfect misanthropist's Heaven: and Mr. Heathcliff and I are such a suitable pair to divide the desolation between us. A capital fellow! He little imagined how my heart warmed towards him when I beheld his black eyes withdraw so suspiciously under their brows, as I rode up, and when his fingers sheltered themselves, with a jealous resolution, still further in his waistcoat, as I announced my name.

“Mr. Heathcliff?” I said.

A nod was the answer.

“Mr. Lockwood, your new tenant, sir. I do myself the honour of calling as soon as possible after my arrival, to express the hope that I have not inconvenienced you by my perseverance in soliciting the occupation of Thrushcross Grange; I heard yesterday you had had some thoughts——”

“Thrushcross Grange is my own, sir,” he interrupted, wincing. “I should not allow anyone to inconvenience me, if I could hinder it—walk in!”

The “walk in” was uttered with closed teeth, and expressed the sentiment, “Go to the Deuce”; even the gate over which he leant manifested no sympathizing movement to the words; and I think that circumstance determined me to accept the invitation; I felt interested in a