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# Emily Brontë's **WUTHERING HEIGHTS**

E. L. Gilbert

艾米莉·勃朗特的

**呼啸山庄**



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## INTRODUCTION

**THE BRONTËS** It is impossible to speak of Emily Brontë without also speaking of her family, "that family of poets," as Thackeray described them, "in their solitude yonder on the gloomy Northern moors."

After filling a number of minor clerical positions, the Reverend Patrick Brontë, born "Brunty" in County Down, Ireland, became curate of Haworth, a lonely parish set in the wild moors of Yorkshire. There he lived with his wife, Maria Branwell, and their six children, Maria, Elizabeth, Charlotte, Patrick Branwell, Emily Jane, and Anne. In 1821, the mother died of cancer, after which the children were raised by their aunt, Elizabeth Branwell, and by a kindly Yorkshire servant, Tabby.

The young Brontës had their lessons to learn, under the guidance of their father, and their household duties to perform, but for the rest, they were thrown back upon themselves for companionship and upon their vivid imaginations for pleasure and excitement, as together they roamed the beautiful, desolate moors, or pored over the volumes in the local lending library. In 1824, the four oldest girls were sent off to a boarding school for clergymen's daughters at Casterton. As a result of the treatment they received there, Maria and Elizabeth died, and Charlotte herself came perilously close to death. She lived, however, to confer a terrible immortality upon the school, describing it in detail under the name of Lowood, in *Jane Eyre*.

In 1826, the Reverend Brontë returned from a trip to Leeds with some toys for his children, never dreaming that this simple, fatherly gesture was to have an enormous impact on the history of English Literature. Among the toys was a set of wooden soldiers. Immediately the children's imaginations created around these toys the history of two rival kingdoms, Angria and Gondal. Charlotte and Branwell became the historians of Angria, and Emily and Anne composed the *Gondal Chronical*, a long and complex account, embellished with verses by Emily, of a mysterious northern kingdom. Most of this material was later to be destroyed, but enough has survived, notably Emily's poetry, to suggest the elaborateness and the seriousness of the project, a project which occupied the Brontës well into their adult lives, and which foreshadowed much that was to appear later in their mature work.

As they grew older, the children spent short periods of time away from Haworth. Emily and Charlotte sought to supplement the family income by becoming teachers, and in 1842 they lived for eight months in Brussels, learning French, German and music. But from these absences Emily, especially, always returned with an overwhelming sense of relief to her beloved moors, to which she felt an almost mystical attachment. By 1845 the three girls were once more together at Haworth, their aunt having died and the dissolute Branwell failing rapidly under the influence of drink and drugs.

It was at this time that the girls discovered their mutual preoccupation with poetry. Each had been writing in private, but in 1846 they pooled their work and brought out, at their own expense, the volume entitled *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell*. The book sold only two copies but its authors were not discouraged. They turned to the writing of fiction, and after many disappointments saw

the publication, in 1847, of Charlotte's novel, *Jane Eyre*. The work was well received and late in the same year Emily's *Wuthering Heights* and Anne's *Agnes Grey* were also published, under the same pseudonyms as had appeared on the book of poems. Critics immediately began to speculate that the novels were all the work of the same author, and Charlotte took the occasion of the second edition of *Wuthering Heights*, in 1850, to lay the facts before the world.

By this time, however, Anne and Emily had both died (in 1848), as Branwell had before them, and Charlotte's *Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell* took on many of the aspects of an eulogy. Of her sister Emily's last illness, she wrote:

Day by day, when I saw with what a front she met suffering, I looked on her with an anguish of wonder and love. I have seen nothing like it; but, indeed, I have never seen her parallel in anything. Stronger than a man, simpler than a child, her nature stood alone. The awful point was, that, while full of ruth for others, on herself she had no pity; the spirit was inexorable to the flesh, from the trembling hand, the unnerved limbs, the faded eyes, the same service was exacted as they had rendered in health.

And of Emily's character, Charlotte produced a paragraph that might well have appeared in *Wuthering Heights*.

In Emily's nature the extremes of vigour and simplicity seemed to meet. Under an unsophisticated culture, in artificial tastes, and an unpretending outside, lay a secret power and fire that might have informed the brain and kindled the veins of a hero; but she had no worldly wisdom; her powers were unadapted to

the practical business of life; she would fail to defend her most manifest rights, to consult her most legitimate advantage. An interpreter ought always to have stood between her and the world. Her will was not very flexible, and it generally opposed her interest. Her temper was magnanimous, but warm and sudden; her spirit altogether unbending.

Emily Brontë was perhaps not so unworldly, not so unadapted to the practical business of life as her sister suggested she was. At any rate, in *Wuthering Heights* she gives evidence of having had a very firm grasp of those realities of life with which she came into contact every day, and beyond that, of those realities whose mastery we might even be surprised to find in the average man of affairs. In his essay "The Structure of *Wuthering Heights*," C. P. Sanger marvels at the precision with which Emily handles the passage of time in her novel, the gradual aging of her characters, the intricate family relationships, the topography and the botany of the area, and, perhaps, most surprising, the complex laws of property. Much of the plot of *Wuthering Heights* turns on the rules of inheritance of the day and Emily's understanding of these rules seems to have been all that the most practical man could desire.

**WUTHERING HEIGHTS** Still it would clearly be wrong to speak of *Wuthering Heights* as a worldly book. The chief qualities of Emily Brontë's mind, as they emerge from the story, are its lyrical bent and its mysticism. By mid-nineteenth-century standards, *Wuthering Heights* is indeed the rude, insular book a number of its first critics found it. For where such authors as Jane Austen, George Eliot, Thackeray and Trollope were representing man's chief struggle as essentially a social one, Emily Brontë saw the principal human conflict as one between the individual and the dark, questioning uni-

verse, a universe symbolized, in her novel, both by man's threatening and hardly-to-be-controlled inner nature, and by nature in its more impersonal sense, the wild lonesome mystery of the moors.

Thus the love of Heathcliff and Catherine, in its purest form, expresses itself absolutely in its own terms. These terms may seem, to a conventional mind, violent, and even repellent. But having been generated by that particular love, they are the proper expressions of it. The passionately private relationship of Heathcliff and Catherine makes no reference to any social convention or situation, and, indeed, it is doomed only when Cathy begins to be attracted to the genteel ways and the social graces of Thrushcross Grange, and is led, through them, to abandon her true nature. Whether or not we try to account for this extraordinary inwardness of Emily Brontë's book by noting the author's gloomy, isolated childhood, that inwardness, that remarkable sense of the privacy of human experience, is clearly the central vision of *Wuthering Heights*.

Inwardness is also the key to the structure of the novel. The book begins in the year 1801, on the very rim of the tale, long after the principal incidents of the story have taken place. We are far, then, from the heart of the novel in the first pages, and our guide, Mr. Lockwood, is also, like us, very far removed from the central experience of the narrative. We blunder along, under Lockwood's sadly unperceptive direction, and only very slowly begin to understand, in spite of, rather than because of, our guide's help, what it is that has happened at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange. Gradually we spiral in toward the center. In a few chapters, Nelly Dean, a person who has actually participated in the story, takes over from Lockwood, and we are a little closer to the truth. Still Nelly is herself unperceptive and we must struggle hard before we can actually



achieve the true center of the novel, the passionate last meeting of Heathcliff and Cathy in Chapter Fifteen, in which, for a moment, we are permitted to stare into the heart of the fiery furnace.

**HEATHCLIFF AND THE SATANIC HERO** Such inwardness, both of content and of structure, is particularly characteristic of writers of the Romantic Period. And as such writers came more and more to concentrate in their work on man's inner nature, they came more and more to discover the hard core of darkness and violence in every man. Thus there began to appear, in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, a new kind of hero, the so-called Satanic hero, a figure of strength and creativity, like older heroes, but now a creature of darkness and rebellious passion as well.

For example, it was during the early nineteenth century that there first began to appear, in literary criticism, the idea that Satan, and not God, might be the true hero of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Milton describes Satan in terms that would surely seem appropriate as a description of Heathcliff.

... He, above the rest,  
In shape and gesture proudly eminent,  
Stood like a tower. His form had not yet lost  
All her original brightness, nor appeared  
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess  
Of glory obscured: as when the sun new-risen  
Looks through the horizontal misty air  
Shorn of his beams, or from behind the moon,  
In dim eclipse, disastrous twilight sheds  
On half the nations, and with fear of change  
Perplexes monarchs. Darkened so, yet shone

Above them all the archangel; but his face  
Deep scars of thunder had entrenched, and care  
Sat on his faded cheek, but under brows  
Of dauntless courage, and considerate pride  
Waiting revenge. Cruel his eye, but cast  
Signs of remorse and passion, to behold  
The fellows of his crime, the followers rather  
(Far other once beheld in bliss), condemned  
Forever now to have their lot in pain. . . .

Of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the visionary poet, William Blake, one of the earliest Romantics, said, "The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels and God, and at liberty when of Devils and Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it." And the Romantic leader Shelley wrote, "Milton's Devil, as a moral being, is. . . far superior to his God."

One of the earliest of the Satanic heroes, built in part on the model of Milton's creation, is the character of Father Schedoni in Ann Radcliffe's 1797 novel *The Italian, or The Confessional of the Black Penitents*, a Gothic tale of the kind very popular with the Romantics. Mrs. Radcliffe's description of Schedoni is in the best tradition of the type.

His was not the melancholy of a sensible and wounded heart, but apparently that of a gloomy and ferocious disposition. There was something in his physiognomy extremely singular, and that cannot easily be defined. It bore the traces of many passions, which seemed to have fixed the features they no longer animated. An habitual gloom and severity prevailed over the deep lines of his countenance;

and his eyes were so piercing that they seemed to penetrate, at a single glance, into the hearts of men, and to read their most secret thoughts; few persons could support their scrutiny, or even endure to meet them twice.

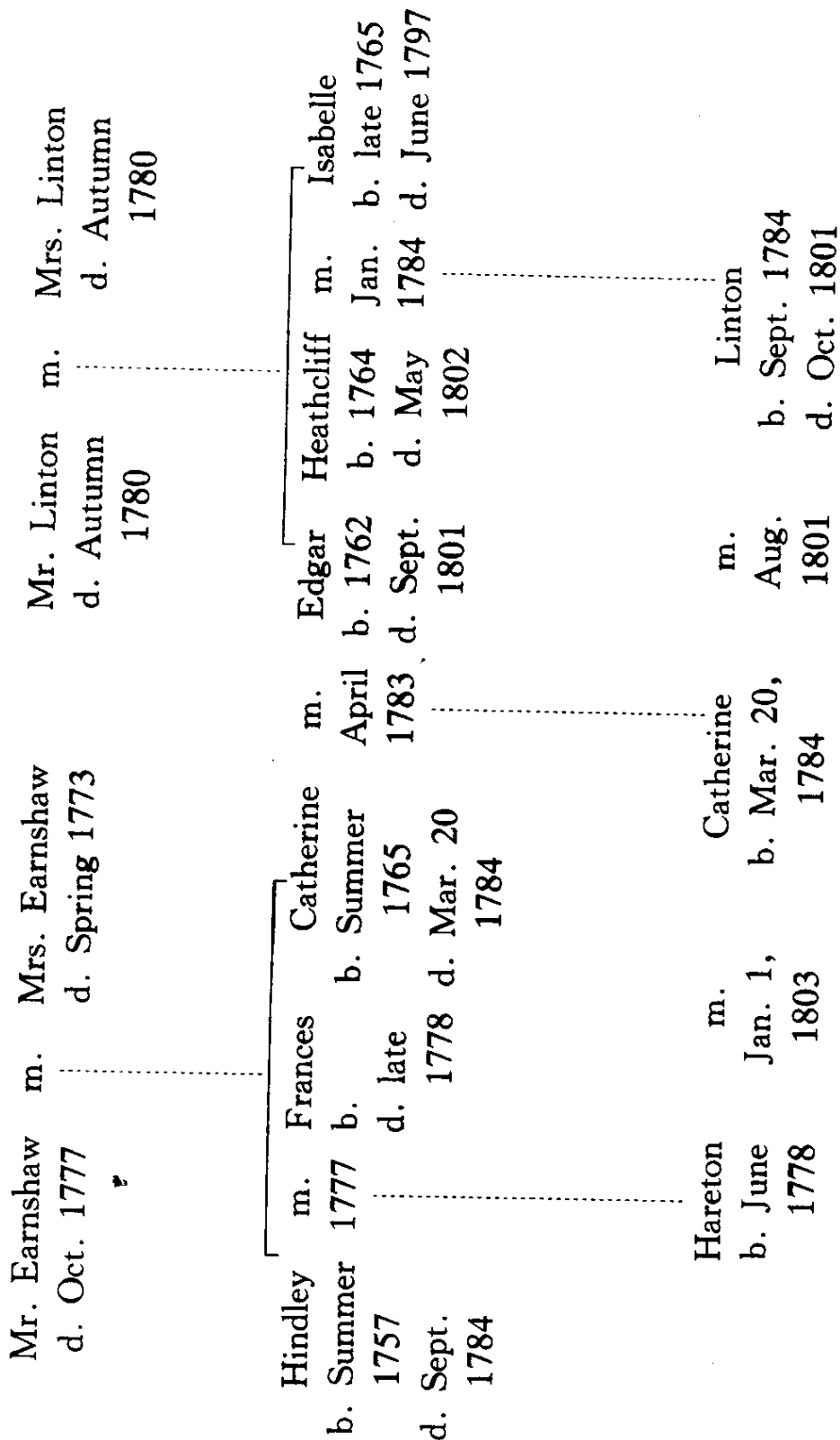
Emily Brontë's Heathcliff is plainly in the Satanic-Napoleonic-Byronic tradition of Byron's Manfred, Shelley's Prometheus, Pushkin's Eugen Onegin and Melville's Captain Ahab. Indeed, when we compare Heathcliff with Charlotte Brontë's Rochester in *Jane Eyre*, we can appreciate with special intensity how rich and many-layered a creation the former is.

Charlotte's Rochester is, like Heathcliff, a dark, forbidding figure. Yet the reason for his gloominess is essentially external. The past which haunts him every day takes the form of his mad wife. And though that past is a terrible burden, a warping influence on his life, it nevertheless is capable of being removed. Fate can carry that wife away, and with the wife, a large portion of the guilt. Thus Rochester's restoration involves the removal of an external pressure and as such is a comparatively simple matter, just as the story in which he appears strikes readers today as a little superficial and old-fashioned.

The pressures on Heathcliff, on the other hand, are internal. True, they are in part the products of external circumstances—the orphan years in Liverpool, the vicious treatment at Wuthering Heights. But what these events have done is to develop and to exaggerate, Emily Brontë suggests, the darkness and violence that was in Heathcliff from the beginning, as it is in every man. And because this darkness is so primal and so universal, it can never be overcome. It persists, implacable and unchangeable, a comment not just on one man's spe-

cial sorrow but on every man's dark heritage. Heathcliff is a powerful figure not only because he is rooted in the traditions of his own time, from which he draws strength, but also because he makes a universal statement about man's nature, which continues to strike readers today as remarkably fresh and modern.

# GENEALOGICAL TABLE



## BRIEF PLOT SUMMARY

When Mr. Lockwood, new tenant at Thrushcross Grange, goes to pay his first call on his landlord, he finds himself badly treated by the dogs, the servants and the landlord himself, Mr. Heathcliff. Heathcliff seems a strangely paradoxical figure. Dark-skinned and brooding like a gypsy, he nevertheless exhibits the dress and manners of a country squire. He is as handsome and erect in form as he is gloomy and reserved in behavior.

The name of the landlord's house is Wuthering Heights, a strongly built but battered old farmhouse, its name "descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its exposed position subjected it in stormy weather."

Lockwood, his interest aroused in the curious inmates of the Heights, visits again the next day and this time is snowed in and is forced to stay the night despite Heathcliff's obvious displeasure. In the course of his stay he meets the other members of the household: Heathcliff's widowed daughter-in-law, young and pretty but her every glance full of scorn and hatred, and a clumsy young man whose name—Hareton Earnshaw—is to be found carved over the door of Wuthering Heights along with the date "1500."

When it is time for bed, Lockwood is led to a disused bedroom where he finds, scratched in the panelling of a large, enclosed window seat, the names "Catherine Earnshaw," "Catherine Heathcliff," and "Catherine Linton." Idly, the guest turns over the

pages of some old books stored in the window seat and discovers diary-like entries on the blank pages. These entries, dated some twenty-five years before and written in the hand of the girl Catherine, tell of her brother Hindley's mistreatment of Heathcliff, of threats to drive Heathcliff away, and of plans that Catherine and Heathcliff have made to rebel against Hindley's tyranny.

Nodding over these old records, Lockwood falls asleep and dreams that a miserable young girl is wailing at the window, tapping on it and begging to be let in after twenty years of wandering. Awakening with a scream and telling his dream to his landlord, Lockwood finds himself thrust aside by the almost maddened Heathcliff, who leans far out into the storm and passionately calls upon the now-invisible Cathy to come in.

Back at Thrushcross Grange, Mr. Lockwood, who has fallen ill in the storm, asks his housekeeper Nelly Dean, long a servant both at the Heights and the Grange, to tell him the story of the strange people he has met. Nelly explains that old Mr. Earnshaw—Hareton's grandfather and Catherine's and Hindley's father—returns from a trip to Liverpool one day with a dark little boy he finds abandoned there. He names the boy Heathcliff and is as pleased with the child's silent toughness as he is displeased with his own son's weakness. Catherine is happy to have a new companion but from the first Hindley hates the child who, he thinks, has supplanted him in his father's affection.

With the death of old Earnshaw, Hindley comes into possession of Wuthering Heights and begins his long career as tormentor of Heathcliff. Hindley treats him like a servant and tries to keep him from Cathy, but Cathy and Heathcliff swear to stay together and

grow up like savages on the moors.

During one excursion on the moors, the two approach the refined and beautifully appointed Thrushcross Grange, home of the Lintons, and Catherine, having been bitten by a watchdog, is taken in and kept recuperating for five weeks. It is in these weeks that Catherine becomes acquainted with the Linton children, Isabella and Edgar, and begins to develop a taste for the life of gentility at the Grange. Heathcliff is driven off by the Lintons as if he were an animal.

Not long after this, Hindley's wife dies while giving birth to Hareton, and Hindley, distracted by his loss, turns for solace to drink, and to his favorite sport, the tormenting of Heathcliff. Thus, while Cathy flowers into a beautiful, willful young woman, Heathcliff sinks deeper and deeper into sullen savagery.

One day Catherine tells Nelly Dean that Edgar Linton has proposed to her and that she has decided to accept him. She has made the decision reluctantly, knowing that the refined, placid Edgar is as unlike her as possible, and knowing, too, that the poor, degraded Heathcliff is "more myself than I am." Still, though she feels that what she is about to do is wrong, she rejects Heathcliff as socially beneath her, and consents to marry Edgar.

Heathcliff overhears this conversation and vanishes from Wuthering Heights. Cathy and Nelly search the moors all night for him in vain and the next day the distracted girl falls ill with a dangerous fever, from which she only slowly recovers. As it is, three years are to pass without a word from Heathcliff before Cathy permits her marriage to Edgar to take place.



After the marriage Heathcliff reappears, well-dressed, handsome and with plenty of money, the source of which we are never told. Cathy is a good deal more delighted to see him than Edgar is, and strangely enough, Hindley is happy to take him on as a paying guest at the Heights. Hindley, given over entirely to dissipation now, begins to gamble with Heathcliff and very soon falls deeply into debt to the man he only slowly comes to realize is his worst enemy.

Meanwhile, Heathcliff makes frequent visits to the Grange to see Cathy and when, on one occasion, he is ordered from the place by Edgar, who threatens physical violence, he takes his revenge by eloping with Linton's sister Isabella, who has become infatuated with him. Now, if Edgar should die without a male heir, all of Thrushcross Grange will pass, through Isabella, into the hands of Heathcliff.

Isabella soon comes to see that she has married a devil. She begs Nelly Dean to visit her and when the housekeeper appears at Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff takes advantage of the visit to arrange a meeting with Catherine, who has been ailing ever since the quarrel between the two men.

The moment Heathcliff sees Catherine he knows that she is dying. Distracted, he accuses her of having killed him and herself by betraying her true nature and her real love. When, later that night, the girl dies, having given birth to a daughter, Catherine, Heathcliff beats his head against a tree in his agony, calling upon his dead love to haunt him always.

Soon afterward, Isabella escapes to London, where Heathcliff's sickly son Linton is born, and where she dies a dozen years later.