

# THE LIFE OF EMILY BRONTË AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HER MASTERPIECE “WUTHERING HEIGHTS”

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## ABSTRACT

Emily Brontë is best known as for authoring the “Wuthering Heights”. She was the sister of Charlotte and Anne Brontë, also famous authors. She was born in Thornton, Yorkshire, England, on July 30, 1818, lived a quiet life in Yorkshire with her clergyman father; brother, Branwell Brontë; and two sisters, Charlotte and Anne. The sisters enjoyed writing poetry and novels, publishing under pseudonyms. As “Ellis Bell,” Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* (1847) her only published novel - garnered wide critical acclaim. Emily Brontë died in Haworth, Yorkshire, England, on December 19, 1848 in the same year her brother, Branwell, passed away. The main theme in *Wuthering Heights*, the nature of love, both romantic and brotherly but, oddly enough, applies to the principal characters as well as the minor ones. The most important relationship in the novel is the one between Heathcliff and Catherine. The nature of their love seems to go beyond the kind of love most people know. In fact, it is as if their love is beyond this world, belonging on a spiritual plane that takes place anything available to everyone else on Earth. They both, however, do not fully understand the nature of their love, for they betray one another: Each of them marry a person whom they know they do not love as much as they love each other. Instead of symbolizing a particular emotion, characters symbolize real people with real, oftentimes not nice emotions. Every character has at least one redeeming trait or action with which the reader can empathize. This empathy is a result of the complex nature of the characters and results in a depiction of life in the Victorian Era, a time when people behaved very similarly to the way they do today.

**Keywords:** Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff, Catherine, love, hatred, revenge



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Authors's Life

Emily was born at Thornton near in July 1818. She was the fifth child of Patrick and Maria Bronte. In 1820 the family moved to Haworth in Yorkshire, eighteen months later Mrs. Bronte died and her husband turned to a maiden aunt, Miss Elizabeth Branwell who came from Plymouth to bring up his children in a strict and authoritarian way. The Bronte children with the exception of Charlote, suffered from tuberculosis or consumption. The first to die was, the eldest sister, Maria on may 1825 she had become a little mother to her brother and sister. The boy Branwel declared after her death that he had heard her crying outside the windows at night. Perhaps this provided the inspiration for frightening sequence in Wuthering Heights where the ghost of Catherine Earnshaw disturbs the peace of Lockwood.

Another sister Elizabeth died in the same year.In 1831 Charlotte was sent away to school, leaving behind an unfinished Island story: there after Emily and Anne decided to make their own Island chronicles and the place Gondal, was created.Emily briefly attended the school at Cowan Bridge, but was wretched and homesick for Haworth and the Yorkshire Moors, and returned home after only three months. Emily became a governess in Halifax but planned with Charlotte to set up a school at Haworth and together went to the PensionnatHeger in Brussels to increase their qualifications.

Emily returned home on the death of her aunt in 1842 and remained there for the rest of her life.Emily Bronte's life is of a particular type of artist. She lived passionately in the world of her imagination but never lost her grip on reality. She had a profound knowledge of emotion but as an artist she was never overwhelmed by it.She died from tuberculosis in 1848 and Wuthering Heights was published in 1847 under the pseudonym of Ellis Bell.

## **2. CONCEPTUALLY AND METHODOLOGICALLY DETERMINATION**

One of the most famous love stories in the English language, the passionate tale of Catherine and Heathcliff is presented here and examined the qualities and reviews that make it such a powerful and compelling novel. The methodology of the study is based on the critical analysis referring the reviews of the style and Narrative art, the plot and the main Wuthering Heights.

## **3. THE STYLE AND NARRATIVE ART IN WUTHERING HEIGHTS**

Style and narrative art are linked in Wuthering Heights, for the voice and vocabulary of each of the narrations differs as it should be expected and thus style is an index to character as well. Another aspect of style is the dialect of Joseph, seen to good effect in the religiosity and reiterative rages in which he indulges. He represents the other end of the social scale from Lockwood and thus instances the width and objectivity of Emily's social and moral context. The major part of Emily's style consists of graphic immediacy, where the physical presence of character is felt either through the heightened imaginative treatment or with a directly physical power like nothing else in fiction.

“In her eagerness she rose and supported herself on the arm of a chair. At that earnest appeal, he turned to her, looking absolutely desperate. His eyes wide and wet at last, flashed fiercely on her: his breast heaved convulsively. An instant they held a sounder: and then how they met I hardly saw, but Catherine made a spring and he caught her and they were locked in an embrace from which I thought my mistress would never be released alive. In fact, to my eyes she seemed directly insensible. He flung himself into the nearest seat, and on my approaching hurriedly to ascertain if she had fainted, he gnashed at me and foamed like a mad dog, and gathered her to him with greedy jealousy. I did not feel as if I were in the company of creature of my own species: it appeared that he would not understand, though I spoke to him: so I stood off, and held my tongue, in great perplexity”.(Chapter 15)

This is given in full because it typifies Emily Brontë's style in Wuther-

ing Heights and summarizes to the central method of that novel. It is direct, graphic, simple, physical without sexuality, dramatic without melodrama, unique in the quality of its straight appeal to the senses and sympathies, it breaks rules of control and decorum; “foaming at the mouth” would be ridiculous in another context, or even bathetic, while here it further defines the person of Heathcliff and the associations, we have with him. The passage transcends literary convention, despite the fact it is described by the conventional observer, Nelly Dean. Her mannered style almost a mark of her own gentility in being a member of the Linton household—contrasts effectively with the sheer force of what she is seeing. Her reaction reflects her bewilderment and her limitations: “approaching hurriedly to ascertain if she had fainted” are the words of the drawing-room, but the scene is unbearably emotional, too emotional for an observer to witness.

### **3.1. An Account of the Plot**

Emily Bronte does not tell her story in a simple way, she does not start at the beginning and take us straight through to the end. Instead, she begins almost at the climax of her tale. She wants to build up an atmosphere of mystery and suspense. She wants to awaken our curiosity about her strange, unfriendly characters. Only when we have been introduced to them can she allow Nelly Dean to explain why they are so bitter.

## **4. CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

The morality of this novel has been focus of interest, as have the nature of its structure and aspects of its narrative arts. Charlotte’s preface to the 1850 edition of the novel tries to explain Emily as well as apologizing for her: this is because, Charlotte reacted against critics who found the work distasteful or went so fast as to consider it “odiously and abominably pagan” or “repellent” or “a fiend of a book” or found the characters unattractive. She obviously had her doubts about the morality, saying, “Whether it is right or advisable to create beings like Heathcliff. Charlotte was far more tied to convention than she realized for the moral law which separates Jane from Rochester could not exist in the relationship of Catherine Earnshaw, later Linton and Heathcliff. Cathy’s much quoted. Nelly, I am Heathcliff” sufficiently underlines the difference, and Heathcliff stresses it in his reactions and his force of will. When Cathy dies Heathcliff faces a life which is a kind of death until he wills himself to die, and he renews

his life with her beyond grave.

Emily’s artistic awareness and her strong structural sense have also received their share of critical attention; one contemporary noted the novel’s affluence of poetic life even pointing out the parallel between Ophelia’s madness in Hamlet and Cathy in her last illness, thus indicating the level of association and awareness to be found in the author. Others have found reminders of Greek tragedy in its form and concerns. The coherent structure of Wuthering Heights is seen in the neat and careful finishing off of everything.

In Wuthering Heights, the writers need to explore the depths of human passion and emotion has either forced or enabled her to avoid being over-concerned with the conventions of private and public morality. What people are to themselves (particularly Cathy and Heathcliff) is more important to Emily than whether they must be judged bad or good by normal standards. The decision is left: to the reader whether or not to judge them on a moral ground, but the reader will find that if too much attention is paid to make judgments, more important considerations will be missed. Neither Cathy nor Heathcliff judge themselves, and any outraged judgments, made about them by others seen to slight to accommodate the case.

Emily Brontë’s novel stand apart and alone for a number of reasons, but pre-eminently because no other novels approach it in the richness of its embodiment of so many of the aspects of what we call human passion (hatred, anger, love, lust, affection, revenge, envy, grief, frustration). It may be observed, as a last example of the qualities which give Wuthering Heights its status in the canon of Western novels, that it has that uncommon characteristic in its style of writing that we call “inevitability”.

## **CHARACTERS**

**Heathcliff:** At the beginning he was a poor but later he became rich but no one could learn where he gained all his wealth. He was very bad person, he didn’t love anyone except Catherine.

**Catherine Earnshaw (Linton):** she was a selfish woman. Although she was in love with Heathcliff she chose Edgar as a husband because of his being a rich man, also her career was very important for her.

**Hindley Earnshaw :** He was a rebel. He was fond of gambling and

alcohol. He lost all his wealth in gambling and he lost his life because of drinking.

**Edgar Linton :** He was very good hearted man and a real gentleman. Till the end of his life he loved his wife Catherine and also his daughter.

**Linton Heathcliff:** He was a very selfish boy and cared only about himself.

**Catherine Linton:** She was a pure girl and full of human love and liked to help everyone. She was very beautiful with her black eyes and yellow hair.

**Hareton Earnshaw :** although he was grown in bad conditions, he was very nice and handsome young man. He was also very clever, he had learnt how to read by himself.

**Nelly Dean:** She was at the centre of novel, she was a narrator. She was very nice and good hearted woman. She was working in Thrushcross Grange as a servant.

**Joseph:** He was a faithful servant in Wuthering Heights. He finds the world a space of misery and all men suffering.

**Mr. Green:** He was a clerk innotary public, he could do everything for money.

**Dr. Kenneth:** He was a plain and rough man. He was very curious man and liked to make gossips.

**Mr. Lockwood.** He was a real gentleman and good hearted man. He was a tenant in Thrushcross Grange.

### **Themes**

**Love:** Love takes the main part in personal interaction in the story. Sometimes love puts any of lovers in dilemmas like Catherine, Edgar and Heathcliff. But sometimes love praises the couples, as Hareton and Catherine Junior. Isabella is the one who was even despised because of her love to her first sweetheart and also her husband.

**Hatred:** It is quite obvious that the two major themes in social affairs are love and hate. Hate will be the reason for death or even being murdered. Also the illnesses which may change their way of life. Hatred is sometimes known as the mother of all wreckage.

**Revenge:** Heathcliff's life was set up on revenge. In his childhood he

hardly lived well days. He lived under bad circumstances and had been treated badly. This has made him revengeful. After many tricks he took his revenge from all “Linton”s and “Earnshaw”s. He destroyed each member’s life in the family and obtained their houses and all their wealth.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Wuthering Heights is risen upon not only the accumulated tensions and part-formed characters of adolescent fantasy (adumbrated in the Gondal sagas) but upon the very theme of adolescent, or even childish, or infantile, fantasy. In the famous and unfailingly moving early scene in which Catherine Earnshaw tries to get into Lockwood’s chamber (more specifically her old oak-paneled bed, in which, nearly a quarter of a century earlier, she and the child Heathcliff customarily slept together), it is significant that she identifies herself as Catherine Linton though she is in fact a child; and that she informs Lockwood that she had lost her way on the moor, for twenty years. As Catherine Linton, married, and even pregnant, she has never been anything other than a child: this is the pathos of her situation, and not the fact that she wrongly, or even rightly, chose to marry Edgar Linton over Heathcliff. Brontë’s emotions are clearly caught up with these child’s predilections, as the evidence of her poetry reveals, an imaginative elasticity, that challenges the very premises of the Romantic exaltation of the child and childhood’s innocence.

Wuthering Heights was Emily Brontë’s only novel, and it is considered the fullest expression of her highly individual poetic vision. It contains many Romantic influences: Heathcliff is a very Byronic character, though he lacks the self pity that mars many Byronic characters, and he is deeply attached to the natural world. When the novel was written, the peak of the Romantic age had passed: Emily Brontë lived a very isolated life, and was in some sense behind the times. *Wuthering Heights* expresses criticisms of social conventions, particularly those surrounding issues of gender: notice that the author distributes “feminine” and “masculine” characteristics without regard to sex. Brontë had difficulties living in society while remaining true to the things she considered important: the ideal of women as delicate beings who avoid physical or mental activity and pursue fashions and flirtations was repugnant to her. Class issues are also important: we are bound to respect Ellen, who is educated but of low class, more than Lockwood.

Any reader of *Wuthering Heights* should recognize immediately that it is not the sort of novel that a gently-bred Victorian lady would be expected to

write. Emily Brontë sent it to publishers under the masculine name of Ellis Bell, but even so it took many tries and many months before it was finally accepted. Its reviews were almost entirely negative: reviewers implied that the author of such a novel must be insane, obsessed with cruelty, barbaric. Emily's sister Charlotte's novel *Jane Eyre* was much more successful. Emily was always eager to maintain the secrecy under which the novel was published, understandably. She died soon after the publication, and Charlotte felt obliged - now that secrecy was no longer necessary - to write a preface for the novel defending her sister's character. The preface also made it clear that Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell were, in fact, different people: some readers had speculated that *Wuthering Heights* was an early work by the author of *Jane Eyre*. It appears that Charlotte herself was uncomfortable with the more disturbing aspects of her sister's masterpiece. She said that if Emily had 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." Her apology for Emily's work should be read with the realization that Charlotte's character was quite different from Emily's: her interpretation of *Wuthering Heights* should not necessarily be taken at face value.

*Wuthering Heights* does not belong to any obvious prose genre, nor did it begin an important literary lineage. None of its imitations can approach its sincerity and poetic power. However, it has still been an important influence on English literature. With the passing of time, an immense amount of interest has grown up about the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, and they have achieved the status of the centers of a literary epoch.

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