



EMILY BRONTE'S WUTHERING HEIGHTS "A MORBID NOVEL OF LOVE AND SUFFERING"

V. Beulah Rani

Lecturer in English, Hindu College, Guntur, Andhra Pradesh, India

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.12.3.32](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.12.3.32)



Article info

Article Received: 16/06/2024
Article Accepted: 20/07/2024
Published online: 27/07/2024

Abstract

Emily Bronte, novelist of the Victorian age, is best known for her novel *Wuthering Heights* as it is a strong but morbid novel of love and suffering. Under the pseudonym of Ellis Bell, she wrote this novel. It is the story of the children of two families skillfully arranged and told by two narrators, Nelly and Lockwood. They narrate the story of three generations of these families spread for forty years of time duration. Almost from the beginning to the end the story presents the intense love of Heathcliff and Catherine. Emily Bronte found relief from loneliness and sadness of her own lot by creating a new world of imagination. She was grief-stricken by her family tragedy.

Wuthering Heights is a kaleidoscopic view of Heathcliff at different angles, his love, frustration, hatred, revengeful passion and his reconciliation with life. Catherine found in him the true companion of her soul. Both of them express deep anguish at not being united in life, in spite of their deep love for each other.

Key words: Violent passion, intense love, vindictive, conscious rebel, mystic's vision.

William J Long lists Emily Bronte in the minor novelist of the Victorian age. The Bronte sisters turned to literature because they found relief from loneliness and sadness of their own lot by creating a new world of imagination. Both Emily and Charlotte were grief-stricken by family tragedies. This will help us understand their novels in the right perspective. Behind them we see their aching heart.

Emily Bronte is best known for her Novel *Wuthering Heights*. It is a strong but morbid

novel of love and suffering. Charlotte in her novel *Sherley* describes Emily,

"In the bleak solitude she found many and dear delights and not the least and best loved was liberty. Liberty was the breath of Emily's nostrils, without it she will be perished". She died of consumption at 31 years after the publication of her only novel *Wuthering Heights*.

Under the pseudonym of Ellis Bell, Emily wrote this novel. It is a story of the children of

two female's skillfully arranged and told by two narrators; Mrs. Ellen Dean (popularly known as Nelly Dean) an old governess and Mr. Lockwood tenant at Thrush cross grange. They narrate the story of three generations of three families, the Earnshaws, the Lintons and the Heathcliffs spread for 40 years of time duration. The narrators bring about a quick tempo. The story offers to our view along succession of scenes of violent passion. This emotional intensity absorbs the reader's interest so deeply in the story that he is hardly conscious of along passage of time. Almost from its beginning to the end the story presents the intense love and attachment of Heathcliff and Catherine.

The central figure of this sombre and highly imaginative story is Heathcliff, a gipsy waif of unknown parentage picked up by Mr. Earnshaw in the streets of Liverpool and brought home and reared by him as one of his own children. After the death of the elder Earnshaw, his son Hindley Earnshaw humiliates and bullies him. Heathcliff's passionate and ferocious nature attracts Earnshaw's daughter Catherine. He falls passionately in love with her. Over hearing her say that it would degrade her to marry him, he leaves the house. Returning three years later he finds Catherine married to one Mr. Edgar Linton, Heathcliff becomes vindictive. His violent love for Catherine brings her to her grave, after giving birth to little Cathy prematurely she dies. Heathcliff marries Edgars' sister Isabella not for love but to satisfy his cruelty and vengeance. He gets Hindley and his son Hareton completely under his power, brutalizing the later in revenge for Henley's treatment of him when he was a child. Later he lures the young Cathy to his house and forces a marriage between her and his own sickly and repulsive son, with a view to get control of Linton's property too. After his son's death Cathy marries Hareton her cousin. By this time Heathcliff's aggressive nature cools down. His revenge wears out. He longs for the death that will reunite him with Catherine. His attempts to

destroy the houses of Earnshaw and Linton fails and in death he deserves peace.

The point of view of the story is wonderful. The narrators, Nelly and Lockwood narrate the story from two opposing angles. Wuthering is a significant provincial objective descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which it's station is exposed in stormy weather. The story opens in such a stormy night, when at Wuthering Heights on that night an ice-cold small hand clutches the fingers of Mr. Lockwood in a rattling window which he tries to close it. A weeping voice begs him to let her into the room. She tries to force a way through the broken casement, and Lockwood screams. Heathcliff comes in and throws himself upon the bed near the shattered pane and begs the spirit of Catherine Linton to come into him.

Wuthering Heights is nothing but a kaleidoscopic view of Heathcliff at different angles, his love, frustration, hatred, revengeful passion and his reconciliation with life. In a word Heathcliff is the story of the novel. He not only acts and suffers but causes others to act and suffer.

His power for good and evil shocks and surprises us, like the stormy Wuthering Heights, he himself is a storm. He is dark skinned yet a handsome figure. His cheeks are half covered with black whiskers, he is morose and untidy. He wants her to accept him as he is. He is an executioner of punishment to those who insult him. Catherine is not an exception. He meets her after her marriage to Edgar Linton and also tells her that she has done him wrong. Nothing can weigh the gloom in his heart than these words to her –

"I have not one word of comfort. You deserve this. You have killed yourself. You loved me... then what right have you to leave me? what right answer me--- for the poor fancy you felt for Linton?"

The force of love in him has turned to a fierce hatred.

The skill with which he wreaks vengeance makes us wonder whether he is a monster. As a matter of fact Heathcliff he himself conscious that he is a demon in human form. He says to Ellen Dean,

"I have no pity! I have no pity! The more the warms writhe, the more I yearn to crush out their entrails! It is a mortal teething and I grind with greater energy in proportion to the increase of pain."

He is inwardly wrestling with a bitter situation, and is cruelly tortured. But he doesn't become reckless like Hindley nor submit to fate like Linton. He is a conscious rebel. He knows that being penniless and lack of physical charm, he has to fight his way through life single handed. He falls ill and had brushed with death many times, but always kept calm and uncomplaining. True to his name, he is as hard as Cliff all along. This strength of mind is endeared to both Mr. Earnshaw his foster father and his beloved Catherine.

Catherine Earnshaw is the bone of contention between Heathcliff and Edgar Linton. In the symbolic sense the competition represents the confrontation between the haves and have nots she plays an active role in the life of both the competitors.

Nelly describes her as a charming girl. she has the bonniest eye, the sweetest smile and the lightest foot. She develops a platonic attachment with Heathcliff. She could not marry him as she is afraid of that he would become Hindley's target of torture and tyranny. To separate from him is the greatest punishment to her. She has found in him that true companion of her soul.

"whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same".

She asserts " I am Heathcliff".

Life without him means nothing to her.

"If all else perished and he remained I should still continue to be and if all else

remained and he were annihilated, the universe will turn to a mighty stranger. I should not seem a part of it."

In spite of her deep passion for Heathcliff, she deceives herself in believing that by marrying Edgar Linton she would benefit both herself and Heathcliff alike. She is under a wrong notion that by marrying Linton she would have a respectable social status. Nelly is true in her observation that she married Edgar because he is rich and handsome. Catherine confesses

"If the wicked man in there had not brought Heathcliff so low I shouldn't have thought of it. It would degrade me to marry Heathcliff now."

Later she comes to know of her irrecoverable fault in betraying the love of Heathcliff. she says,

"My love for Linton is like the foliage in the woods; time will change it. I am well aware, as winter changes the tree. My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath, a source of little visible delight, but necessary"

She tells Nelly,

"You think me a selfish Witch, but did not never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married we should be beggars? Whereas if I marry Linton, I can aid Heathcliff to rise and place him out of my brother's power".

Prudence cannot compensate passion Catherine forgets it and suffered.

In the end when Heathcliff makes her realize her folly she begs pardon and is not happy till she rejoins Heathcliff as a spirit.

Towards the end of the novel Mr. Lockwood describes the graves of the lovers. The grave of Heathcliff is on the other side of Catherine Earnshaw from her husband. They lay under their three headstones. Catherine in the middle weather discoloured, Edgar partly

moss- grown, Heathcliff still bear. These people slept unsuitably after their stormy passionate lives. There is a legend that shepherds and travelers of High have often observed Catherine and Heathcliff roam the dark moors as they had done so many years before.

In a Victorian novel the love story generally ends with the ringing of the wedding bells. But *Wuthering Heights* is different from a typical Victorian Novel, for one thing it does not picture the Victorian life and the Victorian society, as the other Victorian novels do for example Dickens gives a fantastic description of the Victorian society and atrocities in his novels *A Tale of Two Cities*, *David Copperfield*, *Pickwick Papers* etc. In a way they mirror his times. In the same way in his *Middlemarch*. Novels of Meredith, Jane Austen and Stevenson etc. *Wuthering Heights* in a way is different. She narrates a wild and cruel reality and is originally beyond only other novel in the country. Treatment of love in *Wuthering Heights* is therefore different from the other Victorian novels. it is an un-orthodox novel.

The love in the novel is of unique intensity. Time has no effect on it. It's intensity does not abate even after the heroine's death. Heathcliff's love for Catherine is as strong after her death as it was during her life. So Catherine's death does not separate him from her. He believes that she would ultimately be united to him. He fanatically asks the ghost

"Come in! Cathy do come, oh do- Once more! Oh! My heart's darling! Hear me this time Catherine at last"

These lines are spoken years after Catherine's death.

They justify the words of Shakespeare that -

"Love is not times fool....."

Love alters not within her brief hours and weeks,

But bears it out even to the edge of doom."

So, the love of Heathcliff and Catherine is eternal. It is an imperishable passion, which is not annihilated by the death of the loved one. After his death, the lover and his beloved (both ghosts) are seen together roaming in the Moors, and also in the *Wuthering Heights* during stormy weather. After their marriage Catherine (second one) and Hareton go to live at the Thrush Cross grange and leave the Heights to the ghosts. One night he even digs up the grave of Catherine to take her body into his arms. He even bribes the Sexton so that he might bury him beside her after his death.

The dying words of Catherine to Heathcliff...

"I only wish us never to be parted; and should a word of mine distress you hereafter, I think I feel the same distress underground".

Tells us about her deep platonic love for Heathcliff.

Conclusion

Both of them express deep anguish at not being united in life, in spite of their deep love for each other. They have strong faith in the continuity of their love even after death. It is not just wish but certainty. *Wuthering Heights* therefore is a mystic's vision of life and not a picture of English life in the Victorian age. Emily Bronte uses masterly narrative skill.

Bibliography

- [1]. Emily Brontë. *Wuthering Heights*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.
- [2]. Edward Chitham. *The Birth of Wuthering Heights: Emily Brontë at Work*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001.
- [3]. Juliet Barker. *The Brontës*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
- [4]. Ambiguity in Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" Author: Lisa Ebert E-Book (PDF)

ISBN: 978-3-657-70495-Publication: 25 Aug
2020

- [5]. William J. Long, English Literature-Its History and Its Significance for the Life of the English-Speaking World, Maple Press; New edition (1 September 2012) ISBN-13 : 978-9380005287