

## WUTHERING HEIGHTS:

### Contextual Information

Biographical context	Why it's relevant
<i>Wuthering Heights</i> was poorly received by critics and readers alike upon its initial publication. Many considered the portrayal of passion, cruelty and violence in the novel to be savage and immoral.	The novel's poor reception highlights the extent to which its content was shocking to Victorian readers. One reviewer from a USA publication, Graham's Lady Magazine (1848), branded it 'a compound of vulgar depravity and unnatural horrors'.
The settings in <i>Wuthering Heights</i> are based on real Yorkshire locations.	The believable settings enhance the novel's realism.
With the exception of short periods spent in Lancashire, Halifax and Brussels as a student and later as a teacher, Emily Brontë spent her whole life at her family's house in Haworth, the Yorkshire village where her father was a curate. The parsonage at Haworth was at the top of a steep hill, surrounded by the church's graveyard on one side and the moors on the other.	Brontë's love of the Yorkshire moors is conveyed through her vivid descriptions of the landscape in <i>Wuthering Heights</i> and her association of the moors with freedom and passion. Her romanticizing of the moors may also reflect a nostalgia for a disappearing pre-industrial way of life at a time when the Industrial Revolution was encouraging mass migration to cities.
By the age of seven, Emily Brontë had lost her mother and her two older sisters, Maria and Elizabeth.	Her experiences of death and grief may have informed her portrayal of death in <i>Wuthering Heights</i> .
Brontë led a solitary, reclusive existence and does not appear to have had any friends outside her own family. She preferred the company of animals to people and on the rare occasion that she travelled, she longed for the freedom of the moors. In her Preface to the Second Edition of <i>Wuthering Heights</i> , Charlotte Brontë remarks: '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'.	Brontë's isolated upbringing is reflected in the isolated setting of <i>Wuthering Heights</i> and the limited set of characters in the novel.
Emily had a capacity for cruelty and violence: she is reported to have beaten her dog, Keeper, leaving him with a badly swollen eye. She also had a will of steel – after being bitten by a dog that may have been rabid, she is said to have cauterized	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brontë's stomach for violence is arguably reflected in the violent incidents in the novel, e.g. Lockwood's attack on Catherine's ghost,</li> </ul>

the wound herself with a hot iron.	<p>Heathcliff's hanging of Isabella's dog, the violent conflict between Heathcliff and Hindley.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brontë's 'unladylike' behaviour (by Victorian standards) is mirrored in Catherine Earnshaw's rebelliousness. Catherine shows herself capable of violence when, during an argument with Heathcliff and Edgar, she pinches Nelly and boxes Edgar's ears.</li> </ul>
While she was brought up in a Christian household, Brontë is said to have had unconventional religious beliefs; she rarely attended church services and, unlike the other Brontë children, never taught in the local Sunday School.	Brontë's nonconformist attitude to religion is arguably reflected in Heathcliff and Catherine's personal visions of the afterlife and conveyed through her satirical portrayal of Joseph's hypocritical sermonizing.
In later life, Emily Brontë's only brother, Branwell, became dependent on drugs and alcohol. He died in 1848, largely as a result of his dissolute lifestyle. Emily became ill at his funeral and died some months afterwards.	There are obvious parallels between Branwell and Hindley's character. Hindley's descent into alcoholism and his eventual death mirrors Branwell's spiraling problems.

Historical context	Why it's relevant
<p>Nineteenth-century English society was characterized by strict class divisions and a rigid social hierarchy. Relationships between classes were discouraged, and a woman adopted her husband's class upon marriage.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catherine's recognition that it would degrade her to marry Heathcliff shows that she remains bound by nineteenth-century class distinctions and attitudes towards marriage, while Heathcliff is ostracized due to his orphan status.</li> <li>• Characters' speech patterns reflect their social status: Lockwood's use of a more formal register reflects his educated background, while Joseph's Yorkshire dialect indicates his working-class roots.</li> <li>• However, Heathcliff also transgresses class boundaries by amassing a fortune and eventually gaining possession of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Middle- and upper-class women did not work and were largely confined to the domestic sphere, where they were encouraged to devote themselves to their roles as housewives and mothers. Unmarried middle-class women were expected to pursue indoor activities like needlework and music which would preserve their innocence of worldly matters and prepare them for their role as wives. The ideal nineteenth-century female was the 'angel of the house' who was innocent, passive and acquiescent to her husband's demands.</li> <li>• A high premium was placed on respectability and reputation, and young women had to be chaperoned at all times.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catherine Earnshaw breaks these prescribed rules of conduct by running wild on the moors instead of pursuing 'ladylike' indoor pursuits, and by aggressively challenging Edgar's authority. However, the fact that she returns from her stay at Thrushcross Grange having been 'civilised' into a 'proper' young lady shows that she is not wholly immune from expectations about female behaviour.</li> <li>• Edgar insists on Nelly chaperoning the younger Cathy's meetings with Linton.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Married women were not allowed to own property in nineteenth-century England. They were completely financially dependent on their husbands and fathers, and expected to submit to their authority.</li> <li>• An 1824 marriage manual by Elizabeth Lanfear entitled 'Letters to Young Ladies on Their Entrance into the World' observed that 'A sensible woman, to preserve the peace and secure the affections of her husband, will often sacrifice her own inclinations to his.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catherine Earnshaw's decision to marry Edgar reflects the limited options available to nineteenth-century women: she views her marriage to Edgar as the only way to secure a comfortable lifestyle for herself and for Heathcliff too.</li> <li>• However, Catherine rebels against patriarchal norms through the way she defies Edgar's wishes by continuing to see Heathcliff and undermines his masculinity by addressing him using a contemptuous tone and an animal metaphor to highlight his weakness: 'Your type is not a lamb, it's a sucking leveret.'</li> </ul>

Historical context	Why it's relevant
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Violence against women was commonplace. It was widely believed that it was a man's right to beat his wife if she refused to obey him.</li> <li>• The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 gave men the right to divorce their wives on the grounds of adultery, but stipulated that adultery on the husband's part had to be combined with a more serious charge such as desertion, cruelty or bigamy for a woman to be granted a divorce. A wife who left her husband had no rights of access to her children, who were considered his property.</li> <li>• Men had conjugal rights granting them control over their wife's body. It was believed that husbands could not be guilty of raping their wives, and refusal of sex was considered grounds for annulment. In 1888, the judge presiding over a court case regarding a husband who had infected his wife with venereal disease without her knowledge stated that 'The husband's connection with his wife is not only lawful, but it is in accordance with the ordinary condition of married life.'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heathcliff's abusive treatment of Isabella and the younger Cathy highlights the fact that nineteenth-century females were expected to submit to male authority and had little autonomy (although Isabella's escape from Wuthering Heights can be seen as a rebellion against patriarchal authority).</li> </ul>
<p>The Industrial Revolution facilitated greater social mobility by creating opportunities for people to make money and raise their social status.</p>	<p>Heathcliff exploits the newfound opportunities afforded by the Industrial Revolution in order to amass a fortune and return to Wuthering Heights as a 'gentleman'.</p>
<p>In the nineteenth century, life expectancy was low. While those in rural areas tended to live longer than those in the cities, average life expectancy was still only around 40 by the mid 1800s. Poor ventilation and sanitation contributed to the prevalence of diseases like tuberculosis, which claimed the lives of Brontë's sisters, Maria and Elizabeth.</p>	<p>The prevalence of disease in nineteenth-century England, and Brontë's own experiences of tuberculosis in particular, are reflected in her portrayal of illness and death in Wuthering Heights. Frances, Edgar and Linton all die of consumption, while Catherine Earnshaw dies of a 'brain fever' (which we would probably recognize today as meningitis).</p>
<p>The Church of England was the dominant faith in nineteenth-century England. However, non-conformist attitudes were common among the lower classes. According to Sir Llewellyn Woodward in 'The Age of Reform, 1815-1870' (1938), 'The poor... were largely pagan with a veneer of religious observance and much hidden superstition'.</p>	<p>A variety of religious beliefs are represented in the novel, from Joseph's sanctimonious evangelism to Nelly's orthodox Christianity and Catherine and Heathcliff's idiosyncratic beliefs. Brontë's portrayal of religion arguably reflects her disdain for religious hypocrisy and self-righteousness (i.e. those who pay lip service to Christianity but do not live by Christian values).</p>

Literary Context	Why it's relevant
<p>Characteristics of the <u>REALIST</u> novel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Believable characters and dialogue</li> <li>– Believable plot</li> <li>– Realistic settings</li> <li>– Focuses on the everyday and commonplace aspects of life</li> <li>– Realistically depicts social conditions of the time in which the novel is set</li> </ul>	<p>Wuthering Heights exhibits some of these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Its setting is realistic and described in vivid detail</li> <li>• The novels' characters have psychological depth and their dialogue is realistic</li> <li>• Plot developments are largely plausible and justified</li> <li>• The novel provides a faithful depiction of nineteenth-century social conditions</li> <li>• However, some aspects are fantastical and more akin to Romanticism/Gothic</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of <u>ROMANTIC</u> literature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Rejects rules and conventions; emphasises individual freedom as opposed to the rules of church or government</li> <li>– Emphasises emotion and intuition over rationality</li> <li>– Celebrates nature as a source of refuge and spirituality and disparages civilization and urban life in particular (i.e. humankind in nature is seen as being morally superior to civilized humanity)</li> <li>– Exotic or supernatural settings and events</li> <li>– Deals with themes and characters in a symbolic and unrealistic way</li> </ul>	<p>Wuthering Heights exhibits some of these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It takes place in an isolated rural setting, and the influence of Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Coleridge is evident in the way it represents nature as a powerful spiritual force (e.g. use of pathetic fallacy).</li> <li>• Its characters transgress boundaries and challenge social conventions.</li> <li>• It contains frequent displays of passion and emotional intensity.</li> <li>• Its plot centres around the tension between nature and civilization.</li> <li>• Heathcliff can be viewed as a Byronic hero.</li> <li>• It contains symbolic elements.</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of the <u>GOTHIC</u> novel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Atmosphere of mystery, suspense and horror</li> <li>– Supernatural occurrences as well as omens, nightmares or premonitions</li> <li>– Gloomy, mysterious settings, e.g. haunted houses</li> <li>– Characters transgress moral and social boundaries</li> <li>– Use of melodrama and an emphasis on intense emotion</li> <li>– Use of pathetic fallacy whereby weather symbolizes strong emotions</li> <li>– Centres around theme of revenge and a villain who is driven by passion</li> </ul>	<p>Wuthering Heights exhibits some of these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptions of the bleak, isolated setting create an ominous atmosphere.</li> <li>• A number of supernatural occurrences take place.</li> <li>• Pathetic fallacy is used to reflect characters' emotional turmoil.</li> <li>• There are numerous examples of its characters transgressing boundaries and challenging social conventions.</li> <li>• Its action is marked by frequent displays of passion and madness.</li> <li>• Heathcliff can be seen as a villain who is driven by his thirst for revenge.</li> </ul>

Literary Context	Why it's relevant
<p>Characteristics of <u>POPULAR ROMANTIC FICTION</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Has a central love story: documents a couple's struggle to make their relationship work in the face of challenges posed by the outside world (e.g. family conflict, social division, etc.)</li> <li>– Provides an emotionally satisfying and optimistic ending (i.e. obstacles are overcome and conflict is resolved)</li> <li>– Supports traditional values and tends to idealize male/female relationships</li> </ul>	<p>Wuthering Heights exhibits some of these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The first half centres around the love story between Catherine and Heathcliff, and charts their struggle to overcome the class divide that separates them.</li> <li>• Although Catherine and Heathcliff's love ends in tragedy, the novel ends happily, with the union of their counterparts, Cathy Linton and Hareton.</li> <li>• That being said, traditional values are challenged at various points, and Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship is destructive and far from ideal.</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of a <u>TRAGIC</u> novel (according to Aristotle's rules):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The tragic protagonist, who is usually of noble birth, instigates (often unwittingly) a chain of unfortunate events and suffering which culminates in disaster</li> <li>– Characters are partly victims of forces beyond their control and partly responsible for their own fate</li> <li>– Unhappy ending, which is intended to produce pity and fear in the reader</li> </ul>	<p>Wuthering Heights exhibits some of these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The novel's tragic nature is evidenced by its portrayal of intense suffering.</li> <li>• The tragic events stem in part from Hindley's abuse of Heathcliff and partly from Heathcliff's quest for revenge. Mr Earnshaw's favouritism towards Heathcliff might be viewed as the catalyst that sets these events into motion.</li> <li>• Catherine and Heathcliff's relationship ends in tragedy, with her death. However, the novel concludes happily with Cathy and Hareton's union.</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of the <u>CONVENTIONAL HERO/HEROINE</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Displays admirable qualities, e.g. courage, tenacity, resourcefulness</li> <li>– Accomplishes great or noble deeds</li> <li>– Prepared to fight and die for principles and convictions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heathcliff's lack of virtuous qualities makes it impossible to accept him as a conventional hero. However, we may perceive something heroic in his loyalty to Catherine and his commitment to his own code of living.</li> <li>• Hareton is arguably a better candidate for the role of hero, since he embodies the empathy and compassion needed to break the novel's cycle of revenge.</li> <li>• Catherine Earnshaw's spirited rebellion against nineteenth-century conventions of femininity can be considered heroic. However, she also displays unlikeable qualities, and her status as a woman ultimately constrains her and bars her from accomplishing any great or noble deeds.</li> <li>• Catherine Linton is similarly bound by gender roles (e.g. she is forced to marry Linton and kept at Wuthering Heights against her will) but displays heroic qualities including independence and compassion.</li> </ul>

Literary Context	Why it's relevant
<p>Characteristics of the <u>ANTI-HERO/HEROINE</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Displays some admirable qualities but also has a number of flaws, e.g.:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ misplaced values or dubious morality</li> <li>○ selfish and self-interested</li> <li>○ disillusioned or cynical</li> <li>○ excessive adherence to social expectations</li> <li>○ does not acquire self-knowledge</li> </ul> </li> <li>– May demonstrate qualities of rebelliousness</li> <li>– Commonly found in Gothic literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heathcliff displays flaws associated with the anti-hero: he is malicious, self-interested, immoral, flouts social conventions and does not grow in self-knowledge; yet at the same time he arguably possesses some kind of charisma and he remains committed to Catherine and his mission to avenge Hindley's cruelty. However, we might ask whether Heathcliff has enough positive qualities to allow us to see him as anything more than a villain.</li> <li>• Catherine can be considered an anti-heroine since she combines good and bad qualities: her rebelliousness and her loyalty to Heathcliff are admirable, yet she is also self-centered, manipulative and chooses social status over love.</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of the <u>BYRONIC HERO</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Associated with the protagonist of Lord Byron's semi-autobiographical epic poem, 'Childe Harold's Pilgrimage' (1812)</li> <li>– Passionate, highly sensitive yet flawed character of mysterious origins</li> <li>– Has a troubled past and a brooding and self-destructive nature</li> <li>– Rebellious; shows disdain for society's norms and conventions</li> <li>– Is mentally tortured; a loner who rejects or has been rejected by the world</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heathcliff exhibits some of these characteristics: he dwells obsessively on injustices perpetrated against him, shuns society, exhibits an intense drive and determination to live according to his own philosophy (albeit one that is characterized by cruelty), and feels with passionate intensity.</li> <li>• However, he is arguably too devoid of any virtuous qualities to be seen as a Byronic hero, and he explicitly rejects this role when he declares that Isabella acted under 'false impressions' in 'picturing in me a hero of romance'.</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of the <u>TRAGIC HERO</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Normally a noble character of high social status</li> <li>– Possesses some admirable qualities, but has a fatal flaw in their character</li> <li>– The character's flaw causes their downfall</li> <li>– Undergoes a process of tragic enlightenment, where they realize the role they have played in the novel's events and in their own downfall</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heathcliff fulfills some of these characteristics: his fatal flaw can be considered his desire for revenge, and the novel's tragic events come about through a combination of his own actions and events beyond his control, i.e. he is abused by Hindley, but then goes on to become an abuser himself.</li> <li>• However, his social status is not that of the typical tragic hero and he does not grow in self-knowledge or express any remorse for his misdeeds.</li> </ul>
<p>Characteristics of a <u>LITERARY VILLAIN</u>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Cruel, immoral and self-interested</li> <li>– May have physical characteristics symbolizing their defective character</li> <li>– Has a human side which enables us to understand their motivations</li> <li>– Commonly found in the Gothic novel</li> </ul>	<p>Heathcliff exhibits some of these characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He is driven by malice and self-interest, and treats others cruelly.</li> <li>• His dark complexion and 'deep black eyes' can arguably be seen as a projection of his malevolent nature.</li> <li>• His mistreatment by Hindley helps us to understand his desire for revenge.</li> </ul>

