

# Heathcliff – hero or villain



Emily Bronte also convey's aspects of the class system within Victorian society through the use of imagery. Bronte depicts two English households which both resemble slightly different classes but for which could not be further apart. The heights is described as " narrow windows being deeply set in the wall" and then Thrushcross Grange as " the large, half curtain windows allowing the sun to come in from the outside" - these two pictures painted by Bronte show the contrast between the two households. Thrushcross Grange is a place of pure sophistication, calmness and complete comfort and relaxation and the Heights is seen as a place of violence, despair and complete and utter chaos.

Because the Grange's occupants are of a higher class then of that of the Heights, Bronte suggests that higher classes lived in far more comfort and peace then the lower classes; this further suggesting that the idea of equal opportunities (especially that related to education) was complete rubbish and a false portrayal of what Victorian society actually was. The fact that the occupants of the Height's are of a lower social standing and the connotations related to them are of that of dirt, hard work and chaos suggests that the Lower classes compared to the higher classes were less comfortable and found it much harder to succeed within a completely class ridden society.

The fact that the two households are virtually parallel to each other further suggests that poverty and wealth lived so close beside one another, but the wealthy were reluctant (either out of ignorance or pure selfishness) to act and demand change, because it would have not been beneficial to them. This further suggests that the wealthy victorians who saw themselves as being religious, good human beings were actually people who lived off the

fear and vulnerability of the poor and therefore were everything they so claimed to despise.

When Catherine returns from the Grange she has this sense or aura of sophistication and therefore to impress his love, Heathcliff smarten's up and tidy's up his appearance in order to try to please Catherine. The fact that Heathcliff attempted this change suggests that the upper classes were barricaded by a wall which strongly objected change and therefore it was up to the rest to try and fit within the social "norm" – this action by Heathcliff suggests that the working classes viewed the upper classes as having that power/influence which an ordinary person would need to gain access to the education, health service, politics and even just to have fun in the average world. But in striving to achieve this they knew that they had to be willing to change, because there was no prospect of the upper classes changing due to them being very conservative and maintaining their traditional views regarding how society should be run.

We also see evidence of class as the central theme or focus in relation to the idea of marriage between Heathcliff and Catherine. Throughout the novel there is no doubt that Catherine and Heathcliff are unconditionally in love for one another and therefore are each other's soul mates; but when the topic of marriage or even the slightest sense of an official relationship pops up Catherine's response is one of which is blurred by false assumptions; which have been stated there by the class of which she was living in.

“ Would degrade me to marry it”

This quote basically sums up the snobbery which surrounded the upper classes during the Victorian era. By using the word “degrade”, Catherine suggests that just because of Heathcliff’s status or role in society he is not fit to marry a person who emulates beauty, elegance, wisdom, stardom and of whom is “superior” just because she is of a higher class. By marrying him it would lower her influence/status in society. This quote also suggests that the upper classes usually married with fellow upper classes to increase their influence in Victorian society and to sustain that of the “pure” race.

The use of the word “it”, again further reinforces that Heathcliff is still considered to be a monster, even though he has tried to change by trying to play to their game and to their rules but of which has sadly come to no avail. The fact that Heathcliff’s efforts were ignored/not considered in Catherine’s response suggests that the lower classes were willing to change to fit in to the ever ridiculing class system, but they were harshly rejected by the upper classes; the higher classes believed that even with that spirit to change, that average person would not contain that “pure” blood or that natural human instinct which was specifically given to them by God and of which would forever stay in their snobbish, hypocritical, ignorant and selfish, conservative palms.

Is the theme of Class the most important in the novel of WH?

Wuthering Heights as a novel captivates the reader and leaves them within the clutches of the characters; each character signifying or symbolizing a particular trait/theme or tone which in turn sets their own path in the novel. In the novel you have the themes of violence, passionate/synthetic love and

even the theme of pure Gothic horror of which lays an underlying baseline throughout the novel; but in my opinion the one true theme which inspires or creates these cascade of events within these different themes is that of class. Victorian society was a class - ridden society and depending on your status in society this determined the path of which you were able to lead in life: some people viewed the class system as an opportunity to marry into job or into a different culture, of which instantly brought you benefits. Others viewed the system as being completely ludicrous and a system of which based itself around false ideologies, hypocrisy and ignorance. Throughout the novel, I believe that Emily Bronte uses not only Heathcliff but a wide range of comparisons to convey the overall message of the disastrous outcome a class controlled society can have on a person's behavior, personality, family and the determination of the path which they will shepherd within their lifetime.

We first get introduced to the class system within the heights household with the reaction which Heathcliff meets, when Mr. Earnshaw brings him back from his trip to Liverpool.

" He was not as pale as the others" " He (Hindley) has been blaming our father for treating H. too liberally" " It" " imp of Satan" " Gibberish"

Within the Victorian society slaves played a vital role; slaves tended the farms, they worked on the sugar, tea, and coffee plantations. They were sold and brought, tortured and killed and ultimately treated more like animals rather than human beings. " he was not as pale as the others" suggests that Heathcliff, who was not regarded as " white british" was classed as a slave or

as someone inferior and therefore was seen to the Heights household as being indifferent or below compared to them.

The use of the words "it" and "gibberish" and "imp of Satan" suggests that Heathcliff was not even, for a moment considered to be even the slightest bit human due to him lacking the so called "necessary" traits of the archetypal Victorian. "imp" suggests that he is almost an animal and the fact that he is an "imp of Satan" suggests that the connotations to him being different, are of those which are vile, narcissistic and basically pure evil. Victorians portrayed themselves as being the "pure" humans who strived for equality and saw the best in every human - but this was far from the case. When Mr. Earnshaw first introduces Heathcliff to the household there is, already a sense of dismissal regarding what he says or what he even does just because he has no social standing.

But when Mr. Earnshaw increasingly starts to take a shine to Heathcliff this resentment for him grows and immediately Heathcliff has to face with violent outbursts from both Catherine and Hindley (physically and emotionally) and because of who he was there was nothing he could do. Hindley and Catherine had a more prominent status in society and therefore their word was law. They were God. "blaming our father for treating him too liberally" suggests that the higher classes (in this case the heights household) were mainly conservatives who strongly believed that their corrupt and ignorant society, which they were living in was actually beneficial for not only them but for the rest of the country; conservatives believed in the tradition and the constant maintenance of the "old" law and in doing so completely blocked out any ideas of having a new regime or a new, sometimes called "

radical" way of thinking. The fact that the word " liberal" is almost used as an insult, suggests that at that time new, free thinking liberal middle classes were starting to see the actual nature of Victorian society. The fact that Hindley believes that his father is treating Heathcliff too liberally, suggests that the upper classes were completely opposed to change and wanted the archetypal (ordained by God) society to stay where it had been for hundreds of years. In hypocrisy, ignorance and prejudice.

Overall, I believe that Class is the main theme within the essay because it allows Bronte to build of smaller branches of different themes from Class; from the difference in class the love triangle is formed. From the the difference in class violence and gothic horror is formed. Without the theme of class there is not underlying tone which holds the whole novel together and therefore I believe Bronte uses class as the center point within Wuthering heights. By making class her center point, Bronte ridicules the quintessential upper class or even middle class Victorian who believed that their society was the greatest and most fairest; where everyone was provided with the equal opportunities to strive and achieve in life. By the main theme being class, Bronte exposed the hypocrisy and ignorance which most people willingly/unwillingly suppressed and opened the average Victorian's eyes, into how the class system can produce monsters, create/break love or life and of which, can even determine whether a person lives or dies in heir lifetime!