

Wuthering heights: plot, characters, themes

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Time

Nelly's story begins in the 1770s; Lockwood leaves Yorkshire in 1802.

Place

Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange.

Plot

The novel opens with Lockwood, a tenant of Heathcliff's. A sequential visit to Wuthering Heights brings forth an accident and an unexpected supernatural encounter, which riles up Lockwood's inquiring mind. Back at Thrushcross Grange and recovering from his illness, Lockwood begs Nelly Dean, a servant who grew up in Wuthering Heights, to tell him the history of Heathcliff. Nelly narrates the main plot line of Wuthering Heights.

The owner of Wuthering Heights, Mr. Earnshaw, a Yorkshire Farmer, brings home an orphan from Liverpool. The boy is named Heathcliff and is raised with the Earnshaw children, Hindley and Catherine. Catherine is obsessed with Heathcliff and Hindley has nothing but hate for Heathcliff. After Mr. Earnshaw's death, Hindley does what he can to destroy Heathcliff, but Catherine and Heathcliff grow up playing wildly on the moors, oblivious of anything or anyone else — until they encounter the Lintons.

Edgar and Isabella Linton live at Thrushcross Grange and are extremely different than Heathcliff and Catherine. The Lintons welcome Catherine into their home but shun Heathcliff. As a result Heathcliff begins to think about revenge. Catherine, at first, splits her time between Heathcliff and Edgar, but

soon she spends more time with Edgar, which makes Heathcliff jealous. He leaves Wuthering Heights and is gone for three years.

During Heathcliff's absence, Catherine marries Edgar, even though their union only exists for social class and wealth. Their relationship had already started to wither, but Heathcliff's arrival strained it further. Heathcliff winds up living with his enemy, Hindley (and Hindley's son, Hareton), in Wuthering Heights and marries Isabella, Edgar's sister. Soon after Heathcliff's marriage, Catherine gives birth to Edgar's daughter, Cathy, and dies.

Heathcliff vows revenge and does not care who he hurts while executing it. He desires to gain control of Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange and to destroy everything Edgar Linton holds dear. In order to exact his revenge, Heathcliff must wait 17 years. Finally, he forces Cathy to marry his son, Linton. By this time he has control of the Heights and with Edgar's death, he has control of the Grange.

Through all of this, though, the ghost of Catherine haunts Heathcliff. What he truly desires more than anything else is to be reunited with his soul mate. At the end of the novel, Heathcliff and Catherine are united in death, and Hareton and Cathy are going to be united in marriage.

Heathcliff- The main character. Orphaned as a child, he is constantly on the outside, constantly losing people. Although he and Catherine Earnshaw profess that they complete each other, her decision to marry Edgar Linton almost destroys their relationship. He spends most of his life contemplating and acting out revenge. He is abusive, brutal, and cruel.

Catherine Earnshaw- The love of Heathcliff's life. Wild, impetuous, and arrogant as a child, she grows up getting everything she wants. When two men fall in love with her, she torments both of them. Ultimately, Catherine's selfishness ends up hurting everyone she loves, including herself.

Edgar Linton- Catherine's husband and Heathcliff's rival. Well-mannered and well-to-do, he falls in love with and marries Catherine. His love for her enables him to overlook their incompatible natures.

Catherine Linton- Daughter of Catherine and Edgar. A mild form of her mother, she serves as a reminder of her mother's strengths and weaknesses.

Linton Heathcliff- Son of Heathcliff and Isabella. Weak and whiny (both physically and emotionally), he serves as a pawn in Heathcliff's game of revenge. He marries Catherine (Linton).

Hareton Earnshaw – Catherine's nephew, son of Hindley. Although uneducated and unrefined, Hareton has a staunch sense of pride. He is attracted to Catherine but put off by her attitude. His generous heart enables the two of them to eventually fall in love and marry. Hareton is the only person to mourn Heathcliff's death.

Ellen (Nelly) Dean – The primary narrator and Catherine's servant. Although she is one person capable of relating the majority of the events that occurred, she is not without bias.

Lockwood – Heathcliff's tenant at Thrushcross Grange and the impetus for Nelly's narration. Although he serves primarily as the catalyst for the story,

Lockwood's role is an outsider who happens to gain inside information. His visit to Wuthering Heights and subsequent actions directly affect the plot.

Mr. Earnshaw – Catherine's father. He brings Heathcliff into his family and soon favors the orphan over his own son, Hindley.

Mrs. Earnshaw – Catherine's mother. Not much is known about her, except that she favors her own son to Heathcliff, whom she does not like.

Hindley Earnshaw – Catherine's brother. Jealous of Heathcliff, he takes a bit of revenge on Heathcliff after his father dies. He proves to be no match for Heathcliff, however, eventually losing his son and his family's home.

Frances Earnshaw – Hindley's wife. A sickly woman who dies soon after Hareton is born.

Mr. and Mrs. Linton- Edgar's parents. They welcome Catherine into her home, introducing her to the life in upper society. They die soon after nursing Catherine back to health.

Isabella- Edgar's sister. Her infatuation with Heathcliff causes her to destroy her relationship with her brother. She experiences Heathcliff's brutality first hand. She flees to London where she gives birth to Heathcliff's son, but her attempts to keep her son from his father fail.

Zillah- Heathcliff's housekeeper. She saves Lockwood from a pack of dogs and serves as Nelly's source of information at Wuthering Heights

Themes

Love— both romantic and brotherly but, oddly enough, not erotic — applies to the principal characters as well as the minor ones. Brontë's exploration of love is best discussed in the context of love versus hate. Although the polarities between love and hate are easily understood, the differences are not that easily applied to the characters and their actions.

Because of his hate, Heathcliff resorts to what is another major theme in Wuthering Heights — revenge. Hate and revenge intertwine with selfishness to reveal the conflicting emotions that drive people to do things that are not particularly nice or rationale. Some choices are regretted while others are relished.

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.