

Wuthering heights essay sample



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1. INTRODUCTION

First of all, I am going to start my essay with a brief talk on Brontë's life. The author of this world-known novel was born on 30 July 1818 in Thornton, near Bradford in Yorkshire. The particular style and technique of an author is usually mainly attributed to his/her personality and individual preferences. In the case of Emily Brontë, she was an extremely withdrawn and private person; and it is because of this, why she turned to books as a form of expression. She used her novels as a mean of transmitting her feelings. Brontë published her novel Wuthering Heights in 1847 and just one year later died of tuberculosis. Wuthering Heights is considered a classic of English literature. It tells the story of two people, Catherine and Heathcliff, who love each other and it shows how money and power come between this love making it almost impossible to triumph over. I am going to focus my work on the different main characters in the novel, the setting, themes, nature vs. culture, comparison between the two houses (Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange), Romantic traits in the novel, social classes and some other relevant points in the story.

2. CHARACTERS

Heathcliff: An orphan found in Liverpool and taken in by Mr. Earnshaw and raised with his family. Although he is quiet, he is wild, passionate, full of hate and rage to those who are against him and he is devoted to Catherine, his life wouldn't make sense with her. As the story goes on, Heathcliff breaks his inner barriers and starts showing his feelings. Catherine Earnshaw: She is the daughter of Mr. Earnshaw and the sister of Hindley. She marries Edgar Linton and has a daughter, also named Catherine. She tries to be a civilized and is

brought up in Thrushcross Grange but she is wild, ill-tempered and playful. She along with Heathcliff will be the protagonist of a dramatic and intense love story. Mr. Earnshaw: Catherine's father. He brings Heathcliff into his family beside his family's protests and soon favours the orphan over his own son, Hindley. He is a humble farmer and a stern father with a kind heart. Edgar Linton: Isabella's older brother. He marries Catherine and fathers Cathy Linton. He is educated, civilized, polite, patient and quiet. His defaults are a tendency to be cold, a certain reluctance towards problems and difficult situations (he hides from the problems in his room reading books) and rancorous. Ellen "Nelly" Dean: One of the main narrators of the novel. She has been a servant of the Earnshaws, at Wuthering Heights, and the Lintons, at Thrushcross Grange. She is a local of the area and has experienced life at both houses.

She is educated, high-spirited and has a great personality. She is an unbiased narrator and, therefore, she has an independent character and doesn't influence easily by anyone. Lockwood: The main narrator of the novel although he is replaced in the narration by Nelly in chapter 4. He is a gentleman from London who decides to rent Thrushcross Grange in order to escape from the city and carry out a more quiet, and lonely life. But he changes his mind when he gets to know Heathcliff and he returns to his old lifestyle to not ending up like Heathcliff. Cathy Linton: Daughter of Edgar and the older Catherine. She inherits all the good qualities of her parents. She has the strength and high spirits of her mother as well as the mildness and sensitivity of her father. Isabella Linton: Edgar's younger sister. She marries Heathcliff and gives birth in London to Linton Heathcliff. Before marrying

Heathcliff, she is an intelligent, well educated but a little naive and foolish. When she marries Heathcliff and starts living with him, her personality changes and she becomes ill-tempered with some traits of cruelty due to her unhappy marriage with Heathcliff and the abuse she received from him.

We can see this change in this quote: “ I surveyed the weapon inquisitively. A hideous notion struck me: how powerful I should be possessing such an instrument! I took it from his hand, and touched the blade. He looked astonished at the expression my face assumed during a brief second: it was not horror, it was covetousness.” (Chapter XIII). This character clearly shows the differences between both houses (Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange). Frances Earnshaw: Hindley’s wife. We don’t know too much about this character. She is amiable and fears death. She dies of tuberculosis shortly after giving birth to Hareton. Hindley Earnshaw: Catherine’s older brother. He marries Frances Earnshaw. After the death of her wife he becomes an alcoholic and an auto destructive person. He ruins the family. He hates Heathcliff because from the moment he was taken in by Mr. Earnshaw he gained all the attention leaving him lonely.

Hareton Earnshaw: The son of Hindley and Frances. He was firstly raised by Nelly and passed over to Joseph and Heathcliff after. He is trained by Heathcliff to be hard and tough. He has hard work principles and has some religious influences from Joseph. He is cheated out of his rightful heir position. Joseph: He is a household servant at Wuthering Heights who survives to all his masters. He speaks with a very thick Yorkshire accent and has a big religious devotion. Dr. Kenneth: He is a doctor who appears in the novel when someone is sick. Mr. and Mrs. Linton: Edgar and Isabella’s

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parents. They spoil their offspring and take Catherine in their house and turn her into a real lady. They don't like Heathcliff considering him a gipsy and a guy with no future. Linton Heathcliff: The son of Heathcliff and Isabella.

Linton marries Cathy and dies soon after. He represents the worst qualities of people at Wuthering Heights and people at Thrushcross Grange.

3. CULTURE VS NATURE; WUTHERING HEIGHTS VS THRUSHCROSS GRANGE

In Wuthering Heights is clearly appreciated a big connection between the nature and the civilization, the weather affecting in the character's of the novel personality. This can be seen as a symbolism or a metaphor used by Brontë to create a particular fictional or fantastic atmosphere in the story but, not too far from reality, weather can really affect people's mood in real life. A very changing weather would be related to an unstable-like personality, this is the case of the Earnshaw family living at Wuthering Heights. On the other side, we would find a more stable kind of weather without great alterations. Obviously, this type of climate is related to a stable and well-balanced personality as we can appreciate in the family living at Thrushcross Grange, the Lintons. So, the two houses of the novel, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange, represent both the contrast between culture and nature which dominates the lives of its inhabitants. The problems arise in the story when members of one household interact or socialize with others from the other household. These are caused as a consequence of the many differences in character, class, culture, education, etc between the two families.

The best character that exemplifies these conflicts is Catherine Earnshaw. “ Her spirits were always at high-water mark, her tongue always going – singing, laughing, and plaguing everybody who would not do the same.” (Chapter V). Catherine spends five weeks at Thrushcross Grange in order to be well educated and civilized. “ The mistress visited her often in the interval, and commenced her plan of reform by trying to raise her self-respect with fine clothes and flattery, which she took readily; so that, instead of a wild, hatless little savage jumping into the house, and rushing to squeeze us all breathless, there ‘ lighted from a handsome black pony a very dignified person, with brown ringlets falling from the cover of a feathered beaver, and a long cloth habit, which she was obliged to hold up with both hands that she might sail in.” (Chapter VII) But, in a person like her, adapting to that civilized world goes against her nature. She behaves as a lady after being brought up in Thrushcross Grange for a certain time but she finds impossible to hide her inner nature and wildness and, at the end, her nature triumphs over her educated code. “ Oh, I’m burning! I wish I were out of doors!

I wish I were a girl again, half savage and hardy, and free; and laughing at injuries, not maddening under them! [...]I’m sure I should be myself were I once among the heather on those hills. Open the window again wide: fasten it open!” (Chapter XII). Catherine shows acceptance for the civilized education she has received but there is a moment when she can’t take it anymore and wants to be free and release herself. Brontë wants to show that people can’t hide or get rid of their own nature and essence. “ Cathy, catching a glimpse of her friend in his concealment, flew to embrace him;

she bestowed seven or eight kisses on his cheek within the second” (Chapter VII).

In the latter quotation, we can appreciate what I have commented before, her nature and essence taking over her educated and polished manners but, as we will see in the following quotation, she stops kissing and touching him and makes a kind of correction on her behavior towards him. “[...] and then stopped, and drawing back, burst into a laugh, exclaiming, ‘ Why, how very black and cross you look! and how – how funny and grim! But that’s because I’m used to Edgar and Isabella Linton.’” When the Catherine and Heathcliff reunion happened, Catherine was just back from her stay in Thrushcross Grange where she was taught good manners so that’s why she tries to correct her manners. This is important because it shows us the great confusion caused by the stay at the two houses and has lived with two different families with opposite doctrines.

Regarding the houses, Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange are two exact opposites separated by the neutral territory of the moors, a dreamlike place thought of as heaven by Heathcliff and Catherine. Although both families are wealthy, there is a definite difference in class between them and this causes big conflicts on the characters from both households when they socialize with each other.

The two different buildings have their own strengths and weaknesses and the characters reflect their features. On the one hand we find Wuthering Heights with its stark, sad, ghostly and intimidating appearance but with a strong magnetism and attraction representing savagery, wildness and

freedom. On the other hand, we find Thrushcross Grange with its refinement, pleasant, peaceful and homelike appearance representing civility and a high-class status.

Wuthering Heights has the characteristics of being a very strong, fixed and prominent structure and is described by Mr. Lockwood at the very beginning of the novel as “ A perfect misanthropist’s heaven”. But, it is a very desolate and lonely place up on a hill exposed to a stormy, windy and rainy weather with no real beauty and can be seen as an uncivilized place to live at.

On the contrary, Thrushcross Grange is a very elegant, stylish and civilized house. The fact of living in a place like this would bring a lot of status with it. That is why Catherine was sent there, in order to get a better education and become a lady. It is quite a sheltered place down in the valley and this is something that is common with its children, they tend to be sheltered and spoilt and, therefore, very naive and almost useless in defending themselves in the outer world. This would clearly be the case of Edgar Linton.

Thrushcross Grange is comfortable and decorative on the inside whereas Wuthering Heights has barely any decoration and it is down to earth. Whilst Wuthering Heights has great power in its commanding position up on the hill, it will never be in the same class as the Grange.

As I have commented before, the features of the houses have a strong association with the people who live in them in terms of mood, emotion and appearance and depending where a person lives his/her character suffers a great alteration.

4. ROMANTIC TRAITS IN WUTHERING HEIGHTS

Taking into account the Romantic spirit of her time, Emily Brontë conceives a literature in which she seems to find herself, to find her essence. Thus, we could identify the author in the character of Catherine Earnshaw and appreciate part of her personality from Catherine Earnshaw. This identification with the characters the creation of them to find oneself essence is a very typical feature of the romantic writer.

Wuthering Heights breaks the previously established rules. As some critics of his time said, the novel is too passionate and turbulent, and the characters do not respect the order and hierarchy of society at the time. A society that, as consequence of the big change that Emily Brontë novel means, does not take too much time to dispraise it and doesn't value her seek from freedom and the real essence of everything.

Another connection between the characters in Wuthering Heights with the romantic philosophy is the rebellion against inheritance world order, and the awareness of existence of different inner forces in the human being, sometimes contradictory, that can lead to self-destruction. The romantic believes the reason and feeling don't have to be separated. Thus, Catherine knows that his fate is definitely tied to Heathcliff but, nonetheless, marries Linton, challenging nature and creating mixed feelings that will drag her to death where she will be released forever.

Catherine and Heathcliff, who in my opinion are the most representatives characters of romanticism in the work, as the other characters follow a rather traditional and customary line, rebel against the Thrushcross Grange

inhabitants who do not accept this seek for freedom and want them to surrender and obey their rules. Catherine and Heathcliff believe in true love and associate it with death. Both believe that after death they will be found and that the dead souls may return and disrupt the lives of the mortals. Without a feeling of pure love for someone or something and without the belief that death can be the beginning of a new life, the existence of a romantic person would not make sense. It is also the case of Heathcliff and Catherine, and surely, the daughter of Catherine too.

For romantics, God is the inner feeling by which people act with motivation and enthusiasm. Catherine and Heathcliff do not seem to believe in the Gospel but their spirits are filled with something almighty that guides their souls and that communicates them with the All.

The other inhabitants of the heights incarnate the traditionalist world that Brontë surely had to put up with in some of the schools where she studied and the people around her except from her family. Emily Brontë loves freedom and seeks for it in a world where her family is different. She is clearly connected with Catherine Earnshaw because she also looks for it despite the obstacles and contradictions that she may find on the road.

5. CLASS CONFLICTS

Class struggle is an important element in Brontë's novel. Many of the conflicts in the story come from classes division. The division of classes is based on cultural, economic and social differences and it affects the behaviours and actions of the characters in the story. The setting of the story at Wuthering Heights and Thrushcross Grange provides us a clear example

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of social contrast. While Wuthering Heights is described as a simply typical and domestic house, Thrushcross Grange is more like the contrary, a very elegant, stylish and well-decorated building for only people of a high-social status. Each house is associated with behavior fitting the description. For example, when Catherine is taken into the Grange, she experiences drastic changes, thus going from a “ savage” to a “ lady”.

While at this house, she rises in status, learns manners, and receives great privileges such as not having to work. Heathcliff, on the other hand, learns to classify himself as a member of the lower class, as he does not possess the qualities of those at Thrushcross Grange. An important point in the story regarding social classes is when Catherine marries Edgar Linton rather than Heathcliff. As we know, Edgar Linton is a rich man of a high social status and Heathcliff a “ savage” who is poor and has no properties. So, Catherine does not consider personal feelings and she focuses on the outward side of society. “ Nelly, I see now you think me a selfish wretch; but did it never strike you that if Heathcliff and I married, we should be beggars? whereas, if I marry Linton I can aid Heathcliff to rise” (Chapter IX)

The story concludes in “ resolution and reconciliation”. After Heathcliff’s death, the classes seem to converge and accept one another. Catherine and Heathcliff represent Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights as they have differences that eventually disappear.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, nature is a very important element in the story. As I commented at the beginning, the real essence of a person can’t be hidden

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forever. We all have a wild or dark side inside us and we have to accept it and not try to resemble someone else. At the end, our nature and essence triumph over the established rules and the education.