

Romeo and juliet vs wuthering heights

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



William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" and Emily Brontë's "Wuthering Heights" are widely considered to be two of the most influential and popular romances in English literature. The way setting is used to reflect the mood of the scene, using variations of light and dark as well as weather and nature, is very stimulating to the imaginations of the audience. This essay will discuss how Shakespeare and Brontë portray love through intelligent language and how the setting can deeply influence our perception of the characters.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines love as a warm affection or fondness. It can be shown in many different ways from many different perspectives, but never has it been so intensely portrayed as in "Romeo and Juliet" and "Wuthering Heights". In many ways, the storylines are remarkably similar, but at the same time complete contrasts to each other, much like the characters. In "Wuthering Heights" the plot is very complex, with twists and turns at each chapter, and is spread out over the course of forty six years.

It is told in a very fresh and unusual way, being from the perspective of different characters at different parts of the novel, though mainly told by Nelly the maid servant. "Romeo and Juliet" however is surprisingly simple, being told in both third person and soliloquy, but still by the same primary characters throughout the play. The entire storyline, though spoke of as being a long lasting feud between the Montagues and the Capulets, is in fact stretched out over a very short time period of a mere week.

Both novels, particularly "Wuthering Heights", show the semantic field of Gothicism. As an audience, our first impression of Wuthering Heights comes from the briefly appearing Mr Lockwood, who describes the terrain

surrounding the house as “...the north wind, blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few, stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun”. The thorns stretching away from the house and towards the light, almost as if they’re trying to escape, suggests to us that no good will come of this building, and that a lot of tragedy is about to take place there. The fact that everything is on the brink of death warns us that it is a very dark, gloomy lay out, and gives the subtlest of hints that a supernatural element is present. The trees which by Wuthering Heights are “ few” and “ stunted” are by great contrast to those surrounding Thrushcross Grange, which are large and flourishing, almost engulfing the house in a bright and colourful haze. It is this welcoming façade that infects Cathy later in the book, forcing her to bury her inner desires, making Thrushcross Grange an influential setting and ultimately the turning point in the novel. It has both a well-lit exterior and interior, but hides a suffocating social standard that pressures all characters inside into hiding parts of themselves. This writing technique shows off Brontë’s ability to use light and dark to give the buildings a personality of their own, and she has very cleverly used pathetic fallacy here to set the mood of her novel early on.

Possibly in the only similarity between Thrushcross Grange and Wuthering Heights, in both houses there is little change in its interior and exterior. Although it has lost the “ stormy weather” it remains dark and forbidding, the “ floor was of smooth, white stones; the chairs, high-backed, primitive structures, painted green: one or two heavy black ones lurking in the shade”. As Mr Lockwood proceeds through the house he observes “...dogs haunted

other recesses” and at a later point in the chapter, after being attacked by the dogs, exclaims, “ The herd of possessed swine could have had no worse spirits in them than those animals of yours, sir. You might as well leave a stranger with a brood of tigers!” This emphasises the supernatural aura surrounding Heathcliff and the moors where the novel is set, making it feel like a barren wasteland with lingering evil that foreshadows a dark story.

The gothic feel is less obvious in “ Romeo and Juliet”, but it can still be detected at times. Particularly when Juliet is given the sleeping draft or “ potion” to induce a death-like state. Similar to “ Wuthering Heights”, there is a suggestion of the afterlife, as when Romeo and Juliet die, their love remains strong, which is the same for Cathy and Heathcliff who are said to haunt the moors. In both stories the main characters meet a grim end, and many of the secondary characters suffer the same fate as a consequence.

The

dark events of both tales are relatively alike; each containing complicated family trees that live in a constant rivalry, backstabbing (quite literally in “ Romeo and Juliet”) and a tragic romance.

These themes may have been induced by the times in which the stories were written. Both when William Shakespeare and Emily Brontë were living in England there was a queen on the throne, which brought about much opposition and assassination attempts were not uncommon. These uncertain times certainly influenced their writing, and Brontë especially had reason to weave depressing matters into her novel. It becomes quickly apparent to the reader of “ Wuthering Heights” that very few mother figures appear in the plotline; this is probably because Emily’s mother died of cancer when she

was just a young girl, and so she was raised by her father and older sisters. Her brother became a drunk and may have been the inspiration for Hindley, and as for the style of her writing, that was most likely due to her father's unique way of up-bringing. They lived in a very different and equal environment, reading great literature including the works of Lord Byron. These were a collection of poems describing dangerous but passionate men, who more often than not loved destructively. These poems were definitely the basis of Heathcliff's character, and possibly even the harshness of Cathy's wild side.

The fact that Brontë originally published "Wuthering Heights" under the pseudonym Ellis Bell tells us that she was afraid to use her real name because of the public's opinion, believing that her novel may be shocking and unaccepted in society. Since Brontë grew up in Haworth, which is situated on the Yorkshire moors, the character Cathy may have been a reflection of her inner self, making the novel in some ways semi-autobiographical. The dominance that Cathy has over the men in her life must have been very challenging to the structure of society in Brontë's time, and almost certainly would have had an impact on women's status up until that point. The female characters in the novel are often described as being possessions; this is shown through her belief that Edgar is more suited to her worth and therefore the more practical choice of husband.

Heathcliff very much represents everything dark and dangerous about love, the way it can turn into an obsession and consume you entirely, and in my opinion he is the ultimate victim of the story. This is in complete contrast to Edgar who is a very kind and gentle figure, almost weak at times despite his

higher social rank. Everything about his appearance symbolises perfectly the delicacy of love, his “light hair and fair skin” creating a child-like image in the reader’s mind. He “seldom mustered courage to visit Wuthering Heights” which shows that he fears the rough and jagged exterior of both the house and Heathcliff. The way Cathy describes her love for him as being “like the foliage in the woods: time will change it” shows that she is quite a shallow character, professing to love Edgar for his looks and nurturing personality alone, whilst still remaining in the certain belief that she will not feel that way forever. Whereas her love for Heathcliff is bordering fixation as she says it “resembles the eternal rocks beneath” and later goes on to claim that if all things ended and he remained she would continue to be, but if he died and all else remained she would cease all existence. This is such an intense portrayal of love and the use of language here, although metaphorical, is incredibly powerful. Referring to nature in both examples, though very different forms of nature; Edgar as the weak foliage and Heathcliff as the tough rocks.

Younger Catherine however seems to incorporate both her mother’s wild streak and her father’s kindness, in a much more balanced and healthy combination. She shows this in her first marriage to Linton, caring for him on his deathbed when Heathcliff refuses to. He doesn’t see Linton as his true son, since he came from Heathcliff’s marriage to Isabella which he arranged out of pure jealousy and revenge. It is in this way that we get to see just how much love has changed Heathcliff, turning him into a very bitter and cold hearted person. Upon Cathy’s death he hopes that she may never find rest

whilst he still lives, which despite being a selfish thing to say, it can in some ways be justified after all the pain Cathy has put him through.

Throughout his entire life, Heathcliff was on the receiving end of both verbal and physical abuse, most of which coming from Hindley who hated him for being Mr Earnshaw's favourite son. This again changes Heathcliff from an adventurous man to a lonely recluse, taking to wandering the moors towards the end of the novel and eventually dying from nothing more than a broken heart. Unlike many of the other characters, who throughout the course of the novel die of illness at young age. This may also reflect the times in which it was written, when life expectancy was far lower than it is today. Nelly however is an exception to this phenomenon, as she is the only character who lives to see the unfolding of the entire tale, acting as a mother figure to many different people including Heathcliff.

In this way, Nelly is very similar to the nurse in "Romeo and Juliet" who in some ways is more like Juliet's mother than Lady Capulet. Since in those days it was improper for a woman of such high stature to breast feed, it is implied that the Nurse did this instead, as well as looking out for Juliet's interests more. Her father arranges a marriage for her, and when she refuses he threatens to disown her from then on. This reflects the times in which the play was set and written, because women had very little say in their own lives.

The setting of Verona very much reflects the mood of its inhabitants; it is an incredibly hot place, as are the hot headed characters. Violence is just as much a part of "Romeo and Juliet" as love. Perhaps the most blatant proof of this is in the quote "These violent delights have violent ends, and in their

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triumph die, like fire and powder, which, as they kiss, consume". Unlike in "Wuthering Heights", there is infact little contrast between the two opposing families. Members of both the Capulets and the Montagues think alike, some seeking peace whilst others wishing only to fight. It is a unique story, one of the most unusual features being the introduction, where Shakespeare makes the ending blatantly clear to the audience. Despite this being an automatic give away, it has become one of the basic templates for any romance, and traces of the original plot can be found in almost every love story since its telling.

Religious symbology is a common occurrence in the play, the most obvious example of this being upon Romeo and Juliet's first meeting, where Romeo refers to Juliet as a Saint, and one that he, a simple pilgrim, would kiss if only he wasn't afraid to dirty her purity. This style of language resurfaces at several key points in the story, as does the theme of light and darkness in one of the most iconic lines of the story " But, soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun". By describing Juliet as the sun he suggests that she brings all light into his life, and is the centre of his world. Shakespeare uses a lot of these metaphors and so paints his idea of love as something pure that should be cherished, but also easy to slip into obsession.

In " Romeo and Juliet" the portrayal of love is far less unrequited but just as destructive. Almost all the main characters die, much like in " Wuthering Heights", and both stories reach a relatively similar outcome: returning to peace once the lovers are dead. They have quite grim lessons, the turning point in each being down to miscommunication and possibly fate, since in

each story the “ star-crossed lovers” are far too different to ever be accepted in society as a couple. This might reflect society as a whole, both when the stories were written and present day, which in turn may be the reason for their huge success. On a personal note, I have found that “ Wuthering Heights” has a lot more depth to it than “ Romeo and Juliet”. A lot of the characters are far more complex and difficult to fully understand, but still equally relatable. However, it is my firm belief that both stories are works of genius, and that their creators have impacted English literature on a massive scale, inspiring generations of creative writers.

By Jessica Lines